

**ELIZABETH BISHOP AND THE BAROQUE:  
A STUDY IN SPATIAL CONSTRUCTS**

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**DEDICATIONS**

**Above in Heavens**

**Dedicated to the One & Only**

*‘When He decrees a matter, He only says to it:  
‘Kun Faya Kun’  
‘Be, and it is.’*

**Below on Earth**

**Dedicated to its most humble Dreamers – *Abbee & Ammee***

**&**

**Its animators – Umer, Shrahbeel & Erbaz**

**&**

**Its silent contributors – Ayesha, Jawad & Fawad**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores Elizabeth Bishop's ways of seeing things, spaces and other art forms as ever-changing spatial patterns in seventeenth-century Baroque art. This Baroque optic gives her poetry the illusion of movement through non-linear perspectives of liminality and depth in her visual field. Keeping this style of perception in view, this study demonstrates how Bishop's creative process and self-representation are informed by her consciousness of seventeenth-century spatiality in conjunction with its renewal in the twentieth-century discussions on the Baroque as a style of modernity.

In literary studies, the connection of Bishop's visual poetics to early-modern and modern artists and art forms has often been understood as ways to sensuously perceive geography and history. This study synthesises Bishop's dispersed visual interests with her fondness for the spatial constructs perceivable in seventeenth-century Baroque art. Bishop's affinity with varied spatial patterns of the Baroque art derives from her consciousness of Counter-Reformation art, seventeenth-century mathematics and cosmic designs, as well as her fondness for George Herbert's and John Donne's awareness of the plurality of universe in which they expand and contract the scales of their spiritual and secular love. This can be seen in Bishop's representation of her poetic space structured like a *rhizome*, as a universe of infinite *folds*, as a *painterly* landscape, and a geometrical *ellipse* and its rhetorical *ellipsis*, and in her fascination for the denotative meaning of the term *Baroque* - an *imperfect pearl*. This thesis argues that Bishop's consistent engagement with the Baroque - as a recurrent style of art, and not just a fixed period in history - defines the expanse of her modest form of contemporary baroque poetry.

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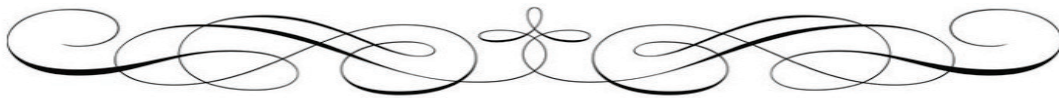
### List of Abbreviations

<i>CPr</i>	<i>Prose: Centenary Edition</i> (Farrar, Giroux & Straus, 2011)
<i>Conversations</i>	<i>Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop</i>
<i>D</i>	Gilles Deleuze, <i>The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque</i> (trans. by Tom Conley, 1993)
<i>Donne</i>	<i>John Donne: The Major Works</i> (ed. by John Carey, 2000)
<i>DG</i>	Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Introduction: Rhizome', in <i>A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia</i> (trans. by Brian Massumi, 1987)
<i>Herbert</i>	<i>The Works of George Herbert</i> (ed. by F. E. Hutchinson, 1978)
<i>LOC</i>	<i>Elizabeth Bishop: Lines of Connection</i>
<i>OA</i>	<i>One Art: The Selected Letters</i>
<i>PPL</i>	<i>Elizabeth Bishop: Poetry, Prose and Letters</i> (The Library of America, 2008)
<i>PAH</i>	Henriech Wofflin, <i>Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development of Style in Later Art</i> (trans. Hotinger, 1932)
<i>Sarduy</i>	Severo Sarduy, 'Baroque Cosmology: Kepler' and 'Baroque and Neobaroque' in <i>Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Trnasculturation, Counterconquest</i> (trans. by Christopher Winks)
<i>WIA</i>	<i>Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell</i>



***‘I find it alternatively inspirational and depressing -- to think that I should come so far and try so hard and achieve nothing but approximations.’***

(Elizabeth Bishop’s letter to Marianne Moore, February 1940)



## Introduction

An early reading of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry made me question why an unassuming poet like Bishop would acknowledge herself to be 'more visual than most poets.'<sup>1</sup> This drew my attention to her interest in 'see[ing] things afresh' (*Conversations*, p.100) and culminated in this study, which takes into account, for the first time, Bishop's ways of seeing things in vast spaces as spatial dimensions interwoven with the temporal – akin to the seventeenth-century Baroque art that was in vogue in discussions on the style of modernity in twentieth-century art and literature in many parts of Europe and America. This research demonstrates that Bishop's poems exhibit Baroque spatiality in being neither static nor fixed in space and time, but existing as three-dimensional motions building relationships between contrary dimensions of things, spaces and art forms by merging, converging, submerging, overlapping, blurring and obstructing the contours of each other within Bishop's field of vision.

Since Bishop is 'more interested in the visual' (*Conversations*, p.12), many critics, including Thomas Travisano, Bonnie Costello, Zachariah Pickard, Peggy Samuels and, more recently, Linda Anderson and Eleanor Cook, have shed light on Bishop's acquaintance with pre-modern and modern artists and art forms. These critics perceive Bishop's more visual poetry through her expansive scope of knowledge of and relationships with artists and artworks – including those by Johannes Vermeer, Pieter Breughel the Elder, Max Ernst, Joseph Cornell, Alexander Calder, Paul Klee, Kurtz Schwitters and others – as well as the philosophies of John Dewey, Andre Breton, Blaise Pascal and Charles Darwin. The poet's relationships with these artists and philosophers is traditionally seen in isolation. Concentrating on Bishop's workings of the mind in specific poems critics have determined her variable modes of perception in relation to a given individual artist or art form.

Moreover, these studies have not been able to extend Bishop's scope of visual poetics to her filtering of spatial patterns in paintings, drawings and other art objects. The range of things that Bishop adapted included architectural designs, sculpture, geometry, music, semi-precious stones and small ordinary objects she

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley Brown, 'An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop', in *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by George Monteiro (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), pp.18 - 29 (p. 24). All subsequent quotations from Bishop's interviews, in this and other chapters, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this book. The book appears in abbreviation in bracketed notations within the text.

came across during her travels, or through acquaintance with the people collecting them.

Among recent publications on Bishop, Peggy Samuels' book-length study *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art* identifies the poet's affinities with a few modern artists. Samuels focuses on the spatial qualities of her verse, where surface and depth in her poems are maintained through various forms of motion modulating and absorbing textures. However, Samuels limits her discussion on these verse qualities to Bishop's expression of the fluid surface of the mind. A topic which has consistently not been dealt with in scholarship is the relationship between Bishop's spatial poetics – the spatial dimensions of her poems in relation to the perceptual dimensions they hold – and her choice of visual art forms, both past and present.

As Bishop describes her poetic stance as being 'an observer' rather than 'a verbal person' (*Conversations*, p. 77), her visual poetry is more than simply charting a mind full of interpretations of varied art forms. It is about the spatiality of art, which sees art forms in a range of spatial dimensions, and which suggests her ways of motioning her observations as spatial coordinates constructing and measuring the distances and proximity of varied dimensions of objects or natural features in a field of vision. It is for these reasons that I see there is much more to Bishop's assertion about her visual poetics than meets the eye, so to speak. Therefore, I seek to evaluate the visual in terms of the spatial in her poetics in order to complement her own statement of being 'more visual than most poets' (*Conversations*, p. 24). In this way, my work will go further than any past critic evaluating Bishop's visuality.

Bonnie Costello notes Bishop's interest in the spatial dimensions of experience in conjunction with America's growing interest in its regions and developing a complex sense of 'American culture' that would be spatial rather than developmental.<sup>2</sup> This is why she observes that Bishop's 'words become visible in odd angles of vision, the play with scale.'<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Jonathan Ellis observes that Bishop is a 'poet of space and time, geography and people' through her spatial and temporal consciousness of landscape and memory in her shoreline poems 'The Map' and 'The Monument'.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Adele Haft's article 'The Poet As Map-Maker:

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<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Costello, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Ethnographic Eye', in *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World* (London: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 79-106 (p. 88).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Ellis, 'From Maps and Monuments: Elizabeth Bishop's Shoreline Poems' *Mosaic*, 36 (2003), 103-19 (p.111) < [www.jstor.org/stable/44029998](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029998) > [accessed 20 August 2016].

The Cartographic Inspiration and Influence of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map" points at the revival of the early-modern interests in maps and modern poets writing poems about geographic boundaries including Bishop's writing of 'The Map'.<sup>5</sup> Considering critics' views, I see Bishop's interest in spatial geometry in her changing dimensions of perception, her approach to places and her cartographic interests.

Living the life of a sojourner in an environment of spatial expansions and receding boundaries Bishop spatialises the journey of her life in her correspondence with her friend and poet, Robert Lowell. She writes, 'all my life I have lived and behaved very much like that sandpiper – just running along the edges of different countries and continents, "looking for something".'<sup>6</sup> Bishop's comparison of herself with a sandpiper reflects her posture in her poems. Like the sandpiper in her poem 'Sandpiper', Bishop's search for 'something' is spatial as it encompasses her humble observations of the details of objects and dimensions of spaces in a non-homogenous world, which surprise her with uncertain perspectives that exist in varied relationships to other things and spaces and widen her expanse of observations. Such perspectives make her poems indeterminate and flexible spaces, which delight in improvisations and sudden changes in the dimensions of colours, textures, shapes and sizes of the vision they inhabit. Likewise, they show the waywardness of her poems in building connections between contrary patterns of motion developing into one thing and another.

Recently, Eleanor Cook, in her book *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* has highlighted Bishop's spatial bent of mind in poetry through her observation of the 'compass rose' on the jacket cover of her first collection, *North & South*. Cook identifies it as 'something more than a collection of northerly and southerly poems. It suggests voyaging, sailing, and above all navigating.'<sup>7</sup> These qualities highlight the progressive nature of her poems, which develop from the variable dimensions of her experiences. Cook further builds Bishop's spatial connections with the 'compass rose' painted on the floor at Vassar College Library, which indicates the 'kind of poem, focusing on one place, or one area and quietly, slowly, indirectly showing us an entire world as surely as Vermeer shows us an entire world in some of his

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<sup>5</sup> Adele Haft, 'The Poet As Map-Maker: The Cartographic Inspiration and Influence of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map"', *Cartographic Perspectives*, 38 (2001), 37- 65 (pp. 37-38). <<http://dx.doi.org/10.14714/CP38.794>>

<sup>6</sup> Brett Millier, 'ON THE WAY BACK: 1973 - 976', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 480-526 (p. 517).

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Cook, 'Land, Water, Fire, Air: Two Poems', in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 11-35 (p. 13)

paintings.’<sup>8</sup> Cook’s identification of Bishop’s poems as small worlds encompassing multi-directional observations that echo the paintings of seventeenth-century Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer supports the purpose of this research to study the spatial aspects of Bishop’s poetry in relation to the seventeenth-century Baroque. However, in addition to *North & South*, I see Bishop’s non-linear ways of observing the far and beyond in her other poetic collections. Like the compass needle, Bishop’s poems point at many different, oblique dimensions of spaces, beyond just north, south, east and west, mapping varied spatial coordinates in relation to Bishop’s position.

Bishop’s consciousness of spatiality extends observations, prolongs meanings and manoeuvres angles of vision to present her poems as an expansive space of arranging and rearranging lived realities. This spatial awareness pervades the titles of her published collections and introduces them as preludes to her poetry. Her chosen titles – *North & South* (1946), *A Cold Spring* (1955), *Questions of Travel* (1965) and *Geography III* (1976) – are spatial coordinates and show her interest in recreating in her modern poems the early-modern writers’, poets’ and artists’ consciousness of the spatial expanse.

Before analysing Bishop’s spatial closeness to the seventeenth-century Baroque style, it is necessary to introduce this period and the characteristic spatial features of its style. Amidst the plethora of material available on the Baroque, I limit this to certain early-modern and post-modern approaches that can be closely related, identifying certain themes of the Baroque style that can be used to study Bishop’s contemporary poetics.

### **The Baroque in Art**

The term ‘Baroque’ and its associated style has neither a single definition nor definite meanings. The Baroque can be construed as a spatial construct of contrary themes associated with seventeenth-century art, literature and science. One definition is by the German art-historian Erwin Panofsky, who describes the Baroque style in art as a ‘lordly racket’ of ‘unbridled movement, overwhelming richness in color and composition’ in seventeenth-century paintings and sculpture. It breaks down the perfection of composition and blurs the contours of art and life.<sup>9</sup> In seventeenth-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>9</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ‘What is Baroque,’ in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 19-88 (pp. 20-23).

century prose, the American critic Morris W. Croll describes the Baroque as an ““exploded”” style causing disruption of symmetry of ideas in a sentence through the contrasting arrangement of perspectives.<sup>10</sup> Such an irregular manner of arrangement contrasts with the classical ‘round composition’, which demonstrates equilibrium between the various parts of a sentence.<sup>11</sup>

The Baroque style is popularly associated with the late sixteenth and seventeenth century Counter-Reformation art in Catholic Europe, which refreshed religious imagery in ecclesiastical art to counter Protestant reforms. This art attracted worshippers through new expansive forms that expressed both visual sensuousness and an intensity of experience, dramatically engaging with the space of the onlooker. For example, Andrea Pozzo’s fresco ceiling (Figure 1) in the Church of St Ignatius of Loyola in Rome has no boundary between the miraculous space of heaven and the terrestrial. Angels advance beside St Ignatius, twisting and turning, rising and descending amidst the motion of clouds and the forces of the wind towards the worshipping viewers.

Similarly dynamic is Lorenzo Bernini’s larger-than-life figure of the Spanish nun, and advocate of Catholic reforms, Teresa of Avila in *The Ecstasy of St Teresa* (Figure 2) in the Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria delta Vittoria, in Rome. This, and his *David* (Figure 3), show the subjects in action, defying a linear picture plane and showing a diagonal intensity of emotions and energy that thrusts their religious passions and personalities into the real space of the viewer. Where St Teresa is draped in heavy folds, David’s body is contorted in motion to defy a Renaissance symmetry. Thus, the sculptures violate any sense of having definite boundaries between the religious experience and secular life of worshippers, involving them in their space of action.

Interestingly, an affective Catholic Baroque was associated with absolutism in France. The painting of *Louis XIV* (Figure 4) at Versailles shows the monumental figure of the king motioning amidst rich folded draperies. It expresses his affluence and an attitude of ‘unbounded cosmic strength.’<sup>12</sup> Whereas in certain Protestant parts of Europe, such as the Netherlands, artists like Vermeer expressed a Baroque style of

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<sup>10</sup> Morris. W. Croll, ‘The Baroque Style in Prose’, in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p. 429).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>12</sup> Murray Roston, ‘The Baroque Vision’, in *Milton and the Baroque* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1980), pp.1- 49 (p.12).

the ordinary. Genre art exhibited meticulous attention to detail in its ‘diminutive size’.<sup>13</sup> The small-scale paintings excite the onlooker with their sense of expanse, created through the motion of light and colour, which defy a linear picture plane and exhibit depth and plurality of perspectives in works such as Vermeer’s *The Lacemaker* (Figure 5), *The Geographer* (Figure 6), and *The Little Street* (Figure 7).

Such contrary and non-linear construction of space in the Baroque can be found also in literature and other art forms. Artists, poets and writers from different schools of thought, cultural spaces and times repeat Baroque spatiality: Rene Wellek’s essay ‘The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship’ traces this dynamism and sheds light on some of its contrary meanings in the succeeding centuries, where it is understood as an “extravagant”, “bizarre”, ‘decorative’ or ‘emphatic’ style of expression in art, which expands the characteristic features of a given style in contrary dimensions.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, Wellek informs his readers that there is no single dimension to the Baroque style. Therefore, he sees it as more than a period term; instead it is a spatially expansive form of art which has always held contrary directions of experience. Due to the plurality of the style, Wellek finds it to be a suitable expression for the heterogeneity of modern art forms and for studying literature as a ‘fine art’.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, Wellek’s understanding of Baroque as a style of multiplicity enables the study of literature as an aesthetic object. It allows the perception of poetry as spatialised object of beauty, like painting, sculpture, architecture, or other art objects. Consequently, it makes literature a linguistic and spatial form of art, as one thing and another, or one art form and another; as a space of opposing art forms, which can be an equally historical and modern expression of contemporaneity. Such an openness of the Baroque style can be used as a response to the modern compartmentalisation of art forms in varied schools of thought and philosophical notions.

Although he discusses a substantial amount of the opposing meanings of Baroque, Wellek acknowledges in particular the German art-historian Heinrich Wölfflin’s contribution in renewing the discussion of Baroque art in the twentieth

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Rothman, ‘Little Things’, in *Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dali and the Aesthetics of the Small* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), pp.18-51 (p. 45).

<sup>14</sup> Rene Wellek, ‘The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship’, *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (pp. 77-79) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797>> [accessed 26 March 2014].

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.



century. In demonstrating Baroque as a totally different way of apprehending beauty, Wölfflin identifies the Baroque – both as a period in art and as an aesthetic concept – through an asymmetrical geometry of lines which can be studied in relation to other art forms in other periods. His *Renaissance and Baroque* initiated discussion on the Baroque style which culminated in his later *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. The latter identifies five spatial characteristics in seventeenth-century Baroque painting, sculpture, drawing and architecture, which distinguishes them from Renaissance art. These are, respectively referring to the Renaissance and to the Baroque: ‘Linear and Painterly’, ‘Plane and Recession’, ‘Closed and Open Form’, ‘Multiplicity and Unity’ and ‘Clearness and Unclearness’.

Contrary to the sixteenth-century linear style, which finds beauty in definite dimensions and contours, Wölfflin argues that Baroque art flaunts non-linear motion in all directions, through its ‘painterly’ ways of seeing beauty in the ‘depreciation’ of lines.<sup>16</sup> Wölfflin’s ‘painterly’ style features broken, fragmented contours of spaces and objects, allowing the apprehension of movement in space, and the incomplete comprehension of a work of art through its relationship with the other four principles of Baroque art. Through a ‘painterly’ way of looking at reality, Wölfflin’s Baroque art presents an indeterminate and receding perception of life that emphasises diagonal motions in a three-dimensional space. In exhibiting a consciousness of flux, the ‘painterly’ lines ensure that the art exists in a constant process of becoming. In doing so, the ‘painterly’ perception defies all definitiveness of meanings in the art and any possibility of judgment. Instead, it allows the Baroque artist to give space to his restlessness, which questions, discovers and is surprised by drawing on a reality of appearances and not static facts. Moreover, the ‘painterly’ draws attention to the limitations of the Baroque artist in not being able to fully conceive his field of vision. His reality is a transforming construct of varied relationships between things and spaces, which relates to his own self. Wölfflin’s ‘painterly’ Baroque offers non-linear geometry of perception, which delights in seeing the incomplete and irregular beauty of art forms open to indeterminate meanings and fresh associations with the present.

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<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Introduction’, in *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. by Hotinger (NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1932), pp. 1-17 (p.14). All subsequent quotations from Wölfflin, in succeeding chapters, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this book. The book appears in abbreviation in bracketed notations within the text.

In his essay on ‘What is Baroque?’ the German art-historian Erwin Panofsky does not agree with Wölfflin’s division of Renaissance and Baroque. For Panofsky, it is the spatial diversity of the latter which revolts against the overstated mannerist style of the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> However, like Wölfflin, he emphasises the imperfect perspectives and proportions in Baroque art, which ‘abolish’ the ‘borderline [...] between art and nature’, through a constant ‘conflict between plastic and spatial tendencies.’<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the solidity of mannerist compositions, Panofsky describes Baroque as ‘a tension between the two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space’, where there is a fluid relationship between different planes and spaces, creating seamless bonds between art and reality.<sup>19</sup> Panofsky’s emphasis on the non-plasticity of Baroque art presents it as a geometry of conflicting realities and points of views spatialised through engaging and disengaging the dimensions of art and reality in space.

I see Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s post-modern concept of the ‘rhizome’ as another spatial manifestation of the Baroque ways of seeing, given the role played by a diversity of spatial constructs in the style. In their joint venture, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari present an intriguing concept of the structure of thought through the ‘rhizome’, a horizontal stem that sends off shoots under the ground or above it. Similar to the Baroque forms of motion, the French philosophers describe this ‘rhizome’ as ‘a map, and not a tracing’, which exhibits a play of lines with no definite origin or end.<sup>20</sup> Due to its quality of non-signification, Deleuze and Guattari see writing structured like a ‘rhizome’, whose purpose is ‘surveying, mapping [...] to celebrate multiplicity and non-linearity of thought.’<sup>21</sup> Such a perpetual structure of motion breaks down any superiority of a given perspective in writing, instead focusing on exhausting innumerable connections through the contrary dimensions of experiences.<sup>22</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizome’ shares both the Baroque heterogeneity of

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<sup>17</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ‘What is Baroque?’, in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irvin Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 19-88 (p. 36).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ‘Introduction: Rhizome’, in *A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 24-46 (p. 33) <[http://composingdigitalmedia.org/digitaliteracy/docs/Deleuze\\_guat\\_Rhizome.PDF](http://composingdigitalmedia.org/digitaliteracy/docs/Deleuze_guat_Rhizome.PDF)> [accessed 15 May 2016]. All subsequent references to the ‘rhizome’, in succeeding chapters, are taken from this book chapter. In all bracketed notations following quotations from this book chapter the book appears in abbreviation.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

spatial connections and the sense of becoming as found in Wölfflin and Panofsky. As a form of writing, the ‘rhizome’ spatialises literature in its present state of becoming, not limited to a definite space or time, or a literary or artistic movement. In this way, the ‘rhizome’ contributes to perceiving Baroque, not as an art movement always in opposition to other forms, but rather as a comprehensive motif in art and literature which can be studied from a number of perspectives, simultaneously throughout historical and modern spaces and times. In this way, the ‘rhizome’ enables us to see Baroque in its present, its immediacy pressing in culturally diverse artists and art forms.

Deleuze echoes this rhizomatic plurality of Baroque space in another way through the post-modern baroque concept of the ‘fold’ in *The Fold: Leibniz and Baroque*. Deleuze’s ‘fold’ is inspired by the seventeenth-century mathematician Leibniz, whose mathematics of curvaceous forms defied a Cartesian world-view and saw matter in perpetual curvaceous motions that related all things in the universe. Deleuze describes the universe as a set of continuous folds.<sup>23</sup> Existing between everything – soul and body, inner and outer materials, or metaphysical and real materials – is what he terms ‘contraction-dilation’.<sup>24</sup> Deleuze’s expanding and contracting geometry of curves keeps the divisions between varied aesthetic forms and experiences of life vague and ever-changing. This post-modern approach draws upon the preoccupation with folds in seventeenth-century dress and draperies in ecclesiastical art, landscape paintings, portraits, twisted sculptures and geometry. Deleuze’s fold refolds this seventeenth-century pattern with contemporary relationships between the inner soul and outer matter, as inner and outer folds. In this way it reinforces the Baroque consciousness of a non-uniform universe and its curvaceous motions, which relish in building relationships among different spatial and temporal objects and create, in a Wölfflinian sense, a unified whole to this multiplicity.

The ‘rhizome’ and ‘fold’ spatialise ways to expand and contract infinite motion in post-modern baroque space. M. W. Croll’s essay ‘The Baroque Style in Prose’ presents how seventeenth-century spatial patterns contract and expand ideas

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<sup>23</sup> Gilles Deleuze, ‘The Pleats of Matter’, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 3-13 (p. 3). All subsequent references to the ‘fold’, in this and succeeding chapters, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this book. The book appears in abbreviation in bracketed notations within the text.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

in motion, through two different styles of Baroque prose identified as – ‘curt’ and a ‘loose’ style. According to Croll, the ‘curt’ style exhibits short sentences exhausting an idea from varied angles of vision like the asymmetrical angles of a ‘jewel or a prism.’<sup>25</sup> The ‘loose’ style shows the expansive motioning of contrary ideas in irregular lengths of sentences, which continue like the meandering of a ‘river’, such as in the works of Robert Browne.<sup>26</sup> In this way, Croll spatialises a relationship between Baroque art and literature.

There is a connection between such Baroque patterns and Severo Sarduy’s study of seventeenth-century ideas of the spatial design of the universe. In his book chapter ‘Baroque Cosmology: Kepler’ from *Barroco*, Sarduy presents a post-modern baroque understanding of seventeenth-century mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler’s elliptical motion of planets around more than one centre of the universe,<sup>27</sup> where the corresponding rhetorical structure – ‘ellipsis’ – emphasises the post-modern awareness of a decentred expanse expressed in equally decentred language. Since the ‘ellips(e/is)’ is an imperfect circle, capable of transforming into hyperbola/e and parabola,<sup>28</sup> Sarduy finds its manifestations in seventeenth-century art and literature. He identifies its characteristics in the serpentine lines, spirals and semi-circles in the works of Caravaggio, El Greco, Rubens and Borromini. Within language, Sarduy identifies ‘ellipsis’ in Gongora’s poetry as a representation of hidden or suppressed signifiers, which do not directly mark the signified, and remain distant from it. Thus, Sarduy observes the decentring of post-modern space as a geometric and linguistic ‘ellips(e/is)’. Through the dispersal of denotative meanings, Sarduy makes modern language imperfect, as the imperfect circle of the ellipse.<sup>29</sup> Sarduy’s engagement with Kepler’s asymmetrical geometry is a spatial response to the destabilisation of modern urban space and the gap between language and signification, akin to T. S. Eliot’s ideas about the gap between thought and feeling in modern sensibility.

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<sup>25</sup> Morris. W. Croll, ‘The Baroque Style in Prose’, in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p. 433).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>27</sup> Severo Sarduy, ‘Baroque Cosmology: Kepler’, in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. by Christopher Winks, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 292-315. All subsequent references from Sarduy’s book chapter ‘Baroque Cosmology’ and his essay ‘Baroque and Neobaroque’, in succeeding chapters, are taken from this book. The essays are abbreviated in bracketed notations within the text.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘Notes: 2&3’, p. 313.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ‘Baroque Cosmology: Kepler’, p. 302.

### Why Study Bishop as a Baroque poet?

In the previous section, I referred to studies of some of the spatial concepts exhibited in the space of Baroque art. In Bishop scholarship, however, Baroque has not so far been the focus of attention for critics. It has been generally studied as part of a discussion on her poetics, but not substantially identified as a term which itself describes her spatial poetics.

Thomas Travisano, Anne Stevenson, Zachariah Pickard, Peggy Samuels and Linda Anderson concentrate on the 1930s as Bishop's Baroque phase expressed in her poetics of this period which, according to Anne Stevenson, Bishop had abandoned by 1946.<sup>30</sup> However, I argue that her relationship to the Baroque can be explored throughout Bishop's poetic corpus, where her spatial affinity is both with the Baroque style and its improvisations in the twentieth century. This is evident even in 1963, when Bishop told Anne Stevenson that 'I was very much wrapped in 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> century lyrics for years (still am, in a way).' <sup>31</sup>

Explicitly and implicitly, the Baroque exists in Bishop's choices throughout her life. From a young age she found company in Herbert's and Donne's metaphysical poetry and remained fond of the Counter-Reformation teachings of St Teresa and St Ignatius Loyola. In her correspondence with the co-editor of *The Southern Review*, Donald E. Stanford, she discussed her ideas of adopting a Baroque form of motion as described by M. W. Croll's essay 'The Baroque Style in Poetry', which she contrasted with her perception of contemporary poetry as 'at rest.'<sup>32</sup> This reappears in Bishop's appraisal of the nineteenth-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins as a 'baroque poet' because he spatialised the motion of his mind in his verse like 'Van Gogh's cedar trees' (*PPL*, p. 667), showing the non-linear and asymmetrical pattern of Baroque art. The Baroque is realised also when she sees her form of novel as motion of events like 'waves' pursuing each other and making 'bramble bushes' (*PPL*, p. 675). Bishop's relationship to Baroque is found also in

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Stevenson, 'The Geographical Mirror', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poet of the Periphery*, ed. by Linda Anderson and Jo Shapcott (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, 2002), pp. 30-42 (pp. 33-34).

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'Selected Letters: To Anne Stevenson', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poems, Prose and Letters* (NY: The Library of America, 2008), pp. 863-64. Throughout this and succeeding chapters, all quotations from Bishop's published, unpublished and uncollected poetry, and prose works, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this text. For the convenience of the reader, like prose works and occasionally letters quoted from this text, I give page references to all the poems in bracketed notations within the text.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, '1928-1936: School, Vassar, New York, Europe', in *One Art: The Selected Letters*, ed. by Robert Giroux (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp.3-49 (pp.11-12). Throughout this and other chapters, all references to Bishop's letters, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this collection. The collection appears in abbreviation in bracketed notations within the text.

her interest in concepts of infinity and geometry, as well as her taking lessons in playing the clavichord from Ralph Kirkpatrick, who was ‘an important figure in the reevaluation of baroque performance practices that began in the 1930s and 1940s.’<sup>33</sup>

In her prose work ‘The Sea and Its Shore’, Bishop recalls Baroque art when she compares Rembrandt’s play of light and dark to Edwin Boomer’s dramatic moment of holding the lantern in the dark (*PPL*, p. 575). In her account of the Key West painter Gregorio Valdes she describes his countenance like the ‘*Self Portrait* of El Greco’ (*PPL*, p. 327). She observes ‘the appearance of baroque abandon’ in the curlicues of plants in Key West in conjunction with the wavy hair of her maid, Ms. Almayda (*OA*, p. 85), showing unrestrained motion and improvisation of Baroque form. When she drives into Vigia, Bishop thinks about the geometry of the ‘too “baroque” churches which had added ‘more belfries and a slightly wilder wave of carved stone’ (*PPL*, p. 461).

Very early in her writing career, Bishop describes poetry as a spatial construct. In her prose work ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins: Notes on Timing in His Poetry’, she compares poetry to the ‘physical motions’ of ‘race horses [and] runners’. In this way, she sees poetry as a spatial form of ‘motion too’ (*PPL*, p. 660). Moreover, this motion is neither linear nor meant for confined spaces. This can be deduced from Bishop’s ideas about the form of a novel in her prose work ‘Dimensions for a Novel’. Bishop mentions that works of art, which include novel, poetry, music and other literary forms, acquire form from the ‘motion between two things’, which she describes as the ‘cross-hatchings’ of ideas and events (*PPL*, p. 679). Since the perception of a work of art is built through the convergence of varied dimensions of ideas, perceptions, things and spaces, Bishop’s idea of form is thus three-dimensional. Bishop envisions a literary form as a spatial coordination between different physical motions, which progress in relation to each other, in a non-linear and non-chronological fashion, in different spaces and times.

It is because of the three-dimensional spatiality of art that Bishop considers the growth of a novel as similar to the development of living things, such as a ‘lobster’ or a ‘crayfish’ (*PPL*, pp. 671-672). Relevant for understanding other forms of her writing, Bishop is of the view that a work of art can grow in varied dimensions and sizes, where ‘the protoplasmic make-up of the writing’ (*PPL*, p. 672)

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<sup>33</sup> Ralph Kirkpatrick, ‘Introduction’, in *Ralph Kirkpatrick: Letters from the American Harpsichordist and Scholar*, ed. by Meredith Kirkpatrick (NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), pp.1-6 (p.1).

determines its form. In this way, she visualises writing as a spatial growth, which cannot be contained in definite two-dimensional forms imported from outside. Bishop did not approve of theories or preconceived forms determining a work of art. She doubted that theories can be ‘in one’s mind at the moment of writing a poem’ (*PPL*, p. 687). Like living organisms, the novel, poem and other aesthetic works have variable and ever-changing forms, contingent upon changes in the dimensions and motions of their materials. Like Baroque production, Bishop sees literature as an exercise in becoming. In this way, it is not a classically perfect form, nor the self-sufficient object of the modern objectivist poetry of William Carlos Williams.

For Bishop, ‘no ideas as to the thing itself’ (*PPL*, p. 672). However, ideas are shaped in forms, which are not fixed in space and time but evolve out of relationships between contraries. Bishop appreciated Wallace Stevens’ poetic collection, *Owl’s Clover*, for ‘such a display of ideas at work – making poetry, the poetry making them, etc.’ (*OA*, p. 48). For Bishop and Stevens poetry is about discovering and creating connections between varied kinds of motion in things. In poems, such as ‘Of Modern Poetry’, Stevens expresses his ‘mind in the act of finding’ relationships between ‘a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman | combing’.<sup>34</sup> In Bishop’s poetry, such relationships keep on altering because of being in perpetual motion in relation to the changing perceptions of the poet. She remains reluctant in knowing whether the relationship between land and sea is of ‘shadows’ or ‘shallows’ (*PPL*, p. 3). In the ‘Large Bad Picture’ she is hardly able to find what brought the ships to the Strait of Belle Isle ‘commerce or contemplation’ (*PPL*, p. 9). In ‘Love Lies Sleeping’, the poet is unsure about the vision of the city which is ‘inverted and distorted’ or ‘distorted and revealed’ (*PPL*, p. 14). Therefore, Bishop’s poetry shows reticence at describing her experience as finite.

Contrary to social and confessional poets, Bishop liked T. S. Eliot for his emphasis on form rather than self-projection. It is because of his indirect poetics and his use of figurative language, which indirectly makes connections between past and present, and the classical and modern period, that Bishop found ‘Eliot much easier to understand’ (*Conversations*, p. 23). This is why she seeks guidance from his essay ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’, while expressing her ideas about the relationship between past and present dimensions of experiences, which give form to a work of

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<sup>34</sup> Wallace Stevens, ‘Of Modern Poetry’, in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* (NY: The Library of America, 1997), pp. 218-19.

art. Eliot's experimentation with forms of expression, such as the masque performances in poetry, shows a Baroque plurality in his use of form. Like Eliot, Bishop was keen on writing masques and wanted to write like Ben Jonson's *Masques* (*OA*, p. 36) in order to practise a poetics of free associations and mediation between different forms of expression. Bishop's friend and poet, Octavio Paz reinforces this connection between the Baroque style and modern experimental poetry with the view that 'the Baroque poet attempts to discover the secret relationship among things, exactly affirmed and practised by Eliot and Wallace Stevens. [...] Baroque and avant-garde are both formalisms.'<sup>35</sup> In the light of Paz's comment, it can be said that Bishop's interest in the Baroque poetics of relationships brought her close to Eliot's and Stevens's poetry.

Bishop's ideas of a similar heterogeneous form of art are vividly described in her prose work 'In Prison' as 'unconventional, rebellious perhaps, but in shades and shadows' (*PPL*, p. 589). Her interest in 'shades and shadows' shows her preference for such contrasting spaces, which evolve out of the convergence of other spatial boundaries. The liminality of 'shades and shadows' also illustrate her keenness to study the relationship between varied spaces, arts and things. This is evident from her advice to her students to 'read a lot of poetry – all the time – and not 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetry. Read *Campion*, *Herbert*, *Pope*, *Tennyson*, *Coleridge* – anything at all most that's any good from the past' (*OA*, p. 596). Bishop read and understood poetry beyond any particularities of space and time. She saw it as an expansive space of creative engagements, which can stimulate new connections between varied poems and inspire new forms of writing.

In this way, Bishop was looking for a style of writing poetry which did not conflict with the existing styles of her time but deviated from them on account of its oblique perspectives:

I shall read very carefully [...] the "inscriptions" already there. Then I shall adapt my own compositions, in order that they may not conflict with those written by the prisoner before me. I shall write them diagonally, across a corner, or at the base of a wall and half on the floor [...] my own legacy of thought.

(*PPL*, p. 588)

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<sup>35</sup> Octavio Paz, 'A Transplanted literature', in *Sor Juana: Her Life and Her World*, trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1988), pp. 44-59 (p. 53).



The writing ‘diagonally, across a corner, or at the base of a wall and half on the floor’ spatialises the indirect and asymmetrical dimensions of her style. It spaces itself between the self-projection and stasis of the confessional poetry, which like Bishop’s idea of primitive writing, ‘reveals a great deal about the writer without furthering the matter in hand at all’ (*PPL*, p. 458), and the surrealistic ‘mind being “broken down”.’<sup>36</sup> Keeping her poems neither absolute, nor completely unbridled in motion, she evades compartmentalising her poetic form as just a modernist mould, or from churning it out as a commodity.

In establishing connections between varied dimensions of spaces, objects and art forms Bishop merges and converges their boundaries to study their distance and proximity, liminality and depth, as well as their intimacy and estrangement to herself. This type of poetics forges a connection between Bishop and the Baroque, offering vast space for the interplay of varied proportions of merging and converging spatial patterns. Like Baroque artists, Bishop preferred the aesthetics of polarities mediating between opposites. It provided her with ways to expand her poetry beyond socio-political boundaries and maintain a liminal position distant from being a mere ‘local-color poet.’<sup>37</sup>

### **What have Scholars said so far on Bishop and the Baroque?**

A growing interest in Bishop’s life and works ensures that a great many articles and books are published regularly on her; this creates a challenge for scholars to introduce new approaches to further study the poet and her works. However, reference to the Baroque occurs only in passing in varied writings on Bishop. Occasional mentions of poets and artists of the early-modern period, or brief inclusions of the phase in Bishop’s writing career when she recalled her reading of M. W. Croll’s essay ‘The Baroque Style of Prose’, enticed me to explore how deeply the Baroque might have informed Bishop’s spatial thinking. This concerned understanding the Baroque as both the early-modern period and an aesthetic form of art that spatially coordinated Bishop’s dispersed interests in the visual forms. In studying both, these can indeed be synthesised under the one word, Baroque.

Critics such as Thomas Travisano, Penelope Laurans, Anne Stevenson,

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<sup>36</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, ‘Whispering Galleries’, in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), pp. 165-91 (p.173).

<sup>37</sup> Joelle Biele, ed., *Elizabeth Bishop and the New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011), p. 233.

Barbara Page and Zachariah Pickard have analysed Bishop-Baroque relationships in the light of Bishop's reading of M. W. Croll. He described Baroque art and literature as 'portray[ing] not a thought, but the mind thinking',<sup>38</sup> or, as Bishop puts it, 'to dramatize the mind in action rather than in repose' (*Conversations*, p.14). This focus on the Baroque workings of the poet's mind has been studied in relation to the metaphysical poetry of George Herbert, Richard Crashaw and John Donne, as well as Gerard Manley Hopkins and Edgar Allen Poe. However, critics' appreciation of these relationships with the early-modern and modern poets has mostly overshadowed the spatial characteristics of Bishop's Baroque engagements.

For instance, in an early study, *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development*, Thomas Travisano is of the view that Bishop remained fond of George Herbert, John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins for their Baroque minds in motion, which allows 'surprise and unlooked for discovery' in their 'twists and turns of perception', which 'Bishop most prized in Baroque art'.<sup>39</sup> Travisano's focus remains on Bishop's fascination for the Baroque 'mind thinking',<sup>40</sup> which exhibits her sense of delay in the process of discovering emotions and arriving at meanings, contrary to the romantic notion of 'emotions recollected in tranquillity.'<sup>41</sup> In doing so, Travisano overlooks Bishop's Baroque interests in the spatiality of Herbert, Donne and Hopkins' poetry.

Barbara Page notes Bishop's reading of Croll's motion of the mind 'as Key to Bishop's method'.<sup>42</sup> In her essay 'Off-Beat Claves, Oblique Realities: The Key West Notebooks of Elizabeth Bishop', Page explores Bishop's reading of Croll in relation to the *Pensées* of the seventeenth-century mathematician and writer Blaise Pascal. Among Bishop's various notebook entries on Pascal, Page quotes: 'Nature has made all her truths independent of one another. Our art makes one dependent on the other.' This is compared to Croll's Baroque method of joining and disjoining independent and contrary ideas with the use of conjunctions 'and, or, or nor'. In

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<sup>38</sup> Morris W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style in Prose', in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p. 432).

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Travisano, 'Introduction', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 3-14 (p. 11-12).

<sup>40</sup> Morris W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style in Prose', in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p.432).

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Travisano, 'Fables of Enclosure: North & South I', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 17- 51 (p. 50).

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Page, 'Off-Beat Claves, Oblique Realities: The Key West Notebooks of Elizabeth Bishop', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender*, ed. by Marilyn May Lombardi (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), pp. 196 - 211 (p. 205).

doing so, Page shows Bishop's use of conjunctions in her poem 'Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' as a Baroque method of composition, where she arranges and rearranges contrary motions of ideas in her mind.<sup>43</sup>

The piecing together of ideas in motion catches Anne Stevenson's attention in 'The Geographical Mirror'. She finds Bishop's early experimentation with the Baroque mind reflecting on perceptions seen through her mirror images in her early poems such as 'The Gentleman of Shalott', 'From the Country to the City', 'Love Lies Sleeping', 'The Weed' and others. Stevenson discerns Bishop's Baroque mind seeing and reflecting the world, at the same time, in her 'distorted' and inverted perspectives.<sup>44</sup> However, Stevenson, too, does not go far in discussing these images as contributing to the spatial development of these poems.

Amidst the above-mentioned critical bent, an earlier article by Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop', takes a step forward to move the Bishop-Baroque relationship beyond Bishop's association with Croll. Post highlights the Baroque as a 'field of maximal reference' to a variety of poetry and prose of the early-modern period in Bishop's poems.<sup>45</sup> Other than the metaphysical poets, Post expands the constellation of Bishop's Baroque connections in her early and late poems to Robert Herrick, John Milton, the Counter-Reformation teachings of St Ignatius Loyola's *The Spiritual Exercises*. In doing so, Post merely touches upon some characteristics of Baroque spatiality, which connect her to the seventeenth-century Baroque period. For instance, he finds Bishop closer to Donne, rather than Herbert, for their common affinity with maps and compasses.<sup>46</sup> Bishop's sensuous apprehension of places and things is connected to her reading of St. Loyola's exercises.<sup>47</sup> In this way, Post's expansive scope of the Baroque in Bishop's poetry identifies an aesthetic style that associates Bishop with the spatial forms of the period and draws out their connection with modernity.

In recent scholarship, other scholars have begun to consider Bishop's poems within the context of specific spatial characteristics. The choice of this approach and the need to investigate it as a consistent attitude in Bishop's work has been

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-07.

<sup>44</sup> Anne Stevenson, 'The Geographical Mirror', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poet of the Periphery*, ed. by Linda Anderson and Jo Shapcott (Newcastle: University of Newcastle, 2002). pp. 30-42 (p. 32).

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p.106).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

reinforced by more recent, but brief, discussions on the subject. My research was stimulated by Fiona Green's recent article, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the *New Yorker*', as well as being deeply informed by Linda Anderson's discussion under 'Travels in Baroque' in *Elizabeth Bishop: Lines of Connection*.

Like Post, Fiona Green's article 'Elizabeth Bishop and the *New Yorker*' emphasises on the 'range of reference'<sup>48</sup> of a Bishop poem, which is a characteristic of Baroque plurality. In her discussion on Bishop's 1950s poems published in the *New Yorker*, Green finds an affinity between the American architect and cartoonist Saul Steinberg's non-linear improvisations of Baroque designs and Bishop's poem 'Song for the Rainy Season'. Published opposite each other, Green finds the 'design and poem' as 'mutually legible' works of art presenting 'a dialogue between [...] the rectilinear and the curvaceous, the functional and the aesthetic.'<sup>49</sup> Green's reading of Bishop's poem is explicitly Baroque. She sees the verse as a construct of lines coupled with curves. Her reading agrees with the seventeenth-century mathematician, Leibniz's Baroque geometry, which establishes that a line is never 'without curves' (*D*, p.14).

According to Green, since the 'Song for the Rainy Season' keeps its Brazilian locale elusive by not referring to it directly in the title or within the poem, and takes a position in the *New Yorker* magazine, like Steinberg's 'baroque extravagance' of 'curlicues', it is 'neither wholly referential nor merely decorative'.<sup>50</sup> Green's comment points at the spatial diversity of Bishop's poem, with its elusive origin that takes on allusive ground in the magazine to maintain a plural position open to multiple and contrary meanings and spatial connections. This is why, Green sees Bishop's poem as an exercise in 'flourishing the doodle'<sup>51</sup> like Steinberg's baroque play of lines on the page of the magazine. Green's elusive and allusive approach of Bishop's verse 'lines' (my emphasis) makes the poem an expansive space of Baroque improvisations.

In the light of Green's argument, it can be deduced that Bishop spatialises 'Song for the Rainy Season' in different locales. She keeps its boundaries liminal between her home and her belongings, between its function as a verse form and its

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<sup>48</sup> Fiona Green, 'Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and the *New Yorker*,' *Journal of American Studies*, 46 (2012), 803-29 (p. 822) < <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875812001235> >

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 822

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 824

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 822

spatiality as an aesthetic object of art. This shows that Bishop's poems can be read in non-linear and plural ways, similar to the asymmetrical designs of Baroque painting and architecture. By evading any directness of meaning or fixity of perspectives in 'Song for the Rainy Season', Bishop is interested in a form of art which coalesces different times and contrasting media of spaces and perceptions. Green's analysis of Bishop's poetic style suggests a broader refreshing of Bishop's visual poetics through Bishop's proximity to the heterogeneity of Baroque space, in poems beyond just the period of her stated Baroque interest. More so, the Baroque style is hinted at being an aesthetic term – namely, a spatial motif of motion that reoccurs through improvisations in modern times.

Linda Anderson's book chapter 'A Window into Europe' introduces a section titled 'Travels in the Baroque', which explicitly furthers Green's baroque reading of Bishop's poem. Anderson spatialises Bishop's connection to the period through her reading of T. S. Eliot's 'The Metaphysical Poets' and his experimental poetry alongside Heinrich Wölfflin. Exploring the heterogeneity of space in art, Anderson briefly relates Bishop's use of tear imagery to her experimentation with the metaphysical conceits for showing perspectives of near and far 'The Map'.<sup>52</sup> It is because of Bishop's fascination with perspectival changes that Anderson sees Bishop's 1930s journey to Europe as the spatialisation of her reading of Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. Anderson demonstrates Bishop's consciousness of Wölfflin's 'baroque spatiality, or the conjunction of different planes and points of view' in her poem 'The Map' (*LOC*, p. 42).

Anderson validates all these Baroque connections through 1930s debates about the non-periodisation of artistic styles which pointed at the Baroque for its plurality that could encompass contemporaneous art forms - cubism, surrealism, and the avant-garde poetry of Eliot. In this way, Anderson makes conducive an analysis of Bishop's drawing upon the Baroque as both a past period and a modern art form to celebrate spatial ways of exhibiting relationships between past and present, as in Eliot's experimental poetry.

Considering Bishop in the light of this scholarship, it is justifiable to see her

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<sup>52</sup> Linda Anderson, 'A Window into Europe', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Lines of Connection* (Newcastle: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 32-88 (p. 40). This book, in this and succeeding chapters, appears in abbreviation in bracketed notations within the text.

tilt toward an early-modern Baroque style through the spatial characteristics of her contemporary poetry. I agree with Thomas Travisano's statement that 'If there is one artistic movement to which she [Bishop] felt closest, it is an older one – baroque.'<sup>53</sup>

Advancing on Travisano's assertion, I see Baroque as that 'one artistic' "movement" (my emphasis), which spatialises Bishop's non-linear ideas in poetry.

Although critics have identified a Bishop-Baroque connection, so far they have not been able to explore Baroque as a link which can encompass her association with the early-modern period and her multi-dimensional interests in seeing things in her own times. David Kalstone is convincing when he says that Bishop 'to her credit, has always been hard to place.'<sup>54</sup> One reason for this difficulty is the lack of attention to the spatial dynamism of her poems, which reflect Bishop's 'natural posture' of 'agnosticism and straddling the fence on everything'.<sup>55</sup>

Moving beyond simply Bishop's relationship to the literary tradition of the Baroque period, this thesis expands on Jonathan Post, Fiona Green and Linda Anderson's spatial encounters with Bishop's baroque poetry in order to show Bishop's poetry as a field of maximal spatial designs in Baroque art. Such an inquiry will help me map her poetry as stylistically conjoining with a past that lives up to the present times – both the seventeenth-century Baroque period and its manifestations in twentieth-century art and literature.

### **Baroque: Use of Term and Style**

The term Baroque and its associative style is therefore not just limited to its seventeenth-century period, but describes many other manifestations of this style in modern times. Throughout this research, I use 'Baroque' (in upper case) and 'seventeenth-century Baroque' to refer to the seventeenth-century style of art. When describing modern art forms, I use the expression 'modern baroque'; for post-modern manifestations of style in twentieth-century art and literature, I use 'post-modern baroque'.

In order to distinguish Bishop's use and adaptation of the style in her modern

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Travisano, 'Introduction', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 3-14 (p. 11).

<sup>54</sup> David Kalstone, 'Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Memory, Questions of Travel', in *Five Temperaments: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 12-41 (p.12).

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, eds., *Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p. 161.

poetry, I use ‘baroque’ (in lower case), ‘contemporary baroque’, or ‘modern baroque’ (in lower case). As my last chapter focuses on the term itself, I have highlighted it as ‘*Baroque*’ (in italics). Where I have referred to Bishop’s use of the term as a form of her poetics, I have written it as ‘*baroque*’ (italics with lower case). Moreover, in ‘A note on the Structure’ of my research and in my chapter discussions, I have italicised the following Baroque constructs: ‘rhizome’, ‘fold’, ‘painterly’, ‘ellipse/is’ and ‘imperfect pearl’.

It is relevant to mention here that I do not use the adjective ‘post-modern’ to describe Bishop’s baroque. This is because I do not wish to compartmentalise Bishop’s use of Baroque in ‘modern’ and ‘post-modern’ divisions. The purpose is to avoid a dispersal of the meanings of Baroque and to use varied spatial concepts synthesised as a key to describe Bishop’s verse as the appearance of movement in space. However, ‘Baroque’ and ‘baroque’, or ‘*Baroque*’ and ‘*baroque*’ are fluid terms, which tend to overlap at many occasions in this research.

### **Materials Used**

The primary source of this research has been Bishop’s published poetry collections and prose works taken from the text *Elizabeth Bishop: Poems, Prose, and Letters* published by the Library of America in 2008. Alongside the published poems, I have read Bishop’s unpublished poems and drafts in the same edition and referred to them wherever they elucidate my ideas about Bishop’s spatial comprehension of poetry. Alice Quinn’s compilation in *Edgar Allen Poe and the Juke-Box* also introduced me to several drafts of Bishop’s unpublished and uncollected poems, her notebook drawings and her reflective notes, which complement her writing process.

My reading on the Baroque has been extensive in nature, involving a wide array of analysis through varied art forms. Most significant, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup’s compilation of essays in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* has contributed to enriching my understanding of modern and post-modern baroque in varied cultural spaces across the world.

For in-depth analysis of Bishop’s baroque poems, I have selected some of her celebrated poems from her four published collections. The aim was to make Bishop’s readers ‘see’ (my emphasis) her famous poems differently following her spirit of offering a ‘new method for doing something old’ (*PPL*, p. 671), i.e. reading her poems. Bishop’s valuable correspondences with modern poets, such as Marianne

Moore, Robert Lowell and Anne Stevenson, have been an expansive source of material. Bishop's notebook observations and interviews have supported my research and the development of different arguments in chapters. Critical articles and books exclusively on her works have also contributed to my ideas. For example, William Benton's collection of Bishop's paintings in *Exchanging Hats* was helpful, as it allowed me to examine them in a contrary perspective to existing criticism on them, and present them in contrast to her spatial poems. This contributes to my analysis of Bishop's choice of Baroque style by contextualising it within her poetic concerns.

With Megan Marshall's recent biographical endeavour *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast*, I think much has been exposed about the poet's troubled intimacies, her personal preoccupations and her anxieties. In response, this research makes an effort to abide by Bishop's choice of curtailing any biographical exposure, to draw assiduous attention to her unassuming poetry; as Bishop says, 'you can't make people read it. If someone wants to read poetry he'll find it' (*Conversations*, p.37). In this spirit, I want her poetry to be sought after by all those who delight in the semblance of movement in art.

### **A Note on the Structure**

The seventeenth-century Baroque style is read as a construct of different spatial approaches within art, literature, cosmology and mathematics. It is used as a key to study Bishop's baroque attitude that exists in her work throughout her life, more than as an attachment to the period. The aim is to use Baroque as a multi-faceted approach within Bishop's poetics and not to disintegrate her poems by simply compartmentalising various manifestations of Baroque. These spatial motifs do not define Bishop's poetry, but show another way of experiencing its form. Baroque is taken as a rich style, historically fixed in time, but constantly in dialogue with contemporary cultures and arts. The purpose is not to see the Baroque in contemporary art itself, but through Bishop's eyes.

Through varied Baroque themes, Bishop addresses her modern concerns. These include space and motion in poetry; self-consciousness and falsity in art; the decentred world and disassociation of sensibility as the gap between thought and feeling, or word and image; as well as the compartmentalisation and monumentality of art in the destabilised world around her.



This thesis comprises five chapters, which are divided into three sections. This division is not based on the chronology of Bishop's poems discussed here. The pattern which exists between the chapters moves from Bishop's consciousness of an infinite space and motion, to her asymmetrical ways of surveying the cartography of the world and the topography of places through the constructs of *rhizome* and *fold*. It makes way for a deeper exploration of her geographical interests in the imperfect dimensions of a Baroque geometry of *painterly* lines, geometrical *ellipse* and linguistic *ellipsis*, which shape her poetic material into the irregular dimensions of a Baroque gem – an *imperfect pearl*.

The Baroque style is not discussed with the consciousness of its historical progression from the seventeenth century through successive changes to the twentieth century. Historical Baroque style recurs in each chapter alongside its modern manifestations when discussing Bishop's contemporary baroque style. Each chapter begins by developing her relationship with an aspect of Baroque style and contextualising it through Bishop's perceptions of her art in relation to contemporaneous trends in writing, and her observations about life reflected in an in-depth analysis of select poems.

This research emphasises the non-linear spatial progression of Bishop's baroque poetry as an open form of art. More than simply influence, the seventeenth-century style of art offers Bishop an open space in which she sets the spatial coordinates of her poems and delights in constructing ever-changing patterns of liminality and depth. Such mobile and transformational poetry does not abide within any bounds, including its equal engagement with pre-modern and modern art forms of paintings, architecture, sculpture, mathematical geometry and others. The purpose of demonstrating the spatial expanse of Bishop's poetry is to celebrate the dynamism of her art form, and to highlight Bishop's belief, for her, 'art is art and to separate writings, paintings, musical compositions, etc., into two sexes is to emphasise values in them that are not art.'<sup>56</sup>

The first section, 'Bishop's Baroque Inheritance' establishes a connection between Bishop and the seventeenth-century Baroque space in art and literature. Bishop was introduced to Baroque spatiality through the dynamism of the metaphysical poetry of George Herbert and John Donne. They spatialised the

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<sup>56</sup> Eleanor Cook, 'Introduction', in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).

miracles of religious and secular love in poetry through their early-modern consciousness of the infinite expanse of the universe, seventeenth-century spatial changes in Counter-Reformation art, as well as the role played by giving more proximity to religious experiences as suggested in the teachings of St Ignatius Loyola and St Teresa of Avila. In addition, through the cosmological finds of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler, and the development of scientific knowledge of optical instruments, Herbert and Donne expanded and contracted the dimensions of unreal or miraculous experiences in real spaces.

Bishop's engagement with the metaphysical poets establishes Baroque not just as a historically fixed period, but as a style of spatialising wonders by giving dimensions to the invisible and intangible perspectives in the real space of the poem. In this sense, she understands Baroque as a miraculous space, which gives expanse to the plurality of her ideas, which can be arranged and rearranged in varied spatial dimensions. Due to the Baroque consciousness of an infinite cosmic space, Bishop found ways to expand and contract reality in a variety of asymmetrical dimensions that can be understood through constructs, such as the *rhizome* and the *fold*.

The second section 'Geometry of Space' narrows down Bishop's fondness for surveying and mapping the geography of her poems. It focusses on a Baroque geometry of imperfect *painterly* lines, geometrical *ellipse* and linguistic *ellipsis*. Bishop's reality is a construct of incomplete lines, which deviate from the picture-plane and offer oblique perspectives of the spaces and objects within the field of vision and beyond it. Bishop's consciousness is of a decentred world, where places and things are determined by their irregular dimensions, which spatialise as indeterminate lines and *ellipse* defying linearity of perspectives and plasticity of art. The elliptical space does not give a complete knowledge of the visual field. Rather, the plurality of space shows the imperfection of Bishop's perceptions and the modern gap between language and signification. In order to deal with the problem of signification, Bishop breaks down her visual field into various small parts of vision, and her language into a number of signifiers, to negotiate a consolidated understanding of how reality appears to her.

Bishop's relationship with the world is not a poet's objective description of life around her. Rather, it is an intimate relationship between her fragile self and the changing and contrary perspectives of other expansive spaces and things, which come close to her or recede from her environment and determine her position in

relation to them. So, neither her position nor her perception of reality remains the same. Her perceptions belie her understanding each moment and she constantly adjusts and brings together opposite points of view to avoid judgments and finality of vision. In this way, Bishop's poetic language remains in the process of becoming, surprising the reader with her improvisations of perceptual dimensions and abundance of signifiers, making her knowledge of places and objects more immediate as a continuous present.

The third section, 'Bishop and the Baroque Etymology: *Imperfect pearl* vs. Monument', focusses on the etymology of the term *Baroque* and its denotative meaning – *imperfect pearl*. Although Rene Wellek<sup>57</sup> and Erwin Panofsky<sup>58</sup> discredited this etymological meaning and suggest that it should be discarded, I see this meaning as close to Bishop's self-effacing nature as a poet and her modest approach to her own poetry. The term offers itself as a non-period term, which allows us to see what Bishop's poems look like from the outside through Bishop's envisioning of her poetry as a small and irregular object of art – an *imperfect pearl*.

In terms of the etymology, the term *Baroque* presents a liminal object of art, which is simultaneously rooted in more than one cultural, spatial and linguistic space. The various cultural spaces contribute to the *Baroque* being an ambiguous and flawed shape, where none of the cultural influences suggest a singular complete origin of the term *Baroque*. In this sense, *Baroque* sheds light on Bishop's approach to her translations as transcultural spaces, which engage with two or more cultures and through this process undergo transformations of meanings. In line with Seamus Heaney's observation that Bishop 'does not go for the epic panorama',<sup>59</sup> Bishop's connection to the term becomes evident in her fondness for small and irregular objects, architectural stones and sculptures, short forms of music and her humble representation of poetry. These speak of the spontaneity and improvisation that ensures that art remains alive and fresh.

In contrast to Bishop's perception of monumental artworks – big in size, loud in expression, large-scale in production and popularity – *Baroque* fulfils the requirements of an unassuming art form that champions imperfection rather than

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<sup>57</sup> Rene Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship', *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (pp.77) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797>> [accessed 26 March 2014].

<sup>58</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'What is Baroque,' in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp.19-88 (p.19).

<sup>59</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'from Counting to a Hundred: Elizabeth Bishop', in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2002), pp.332-46 (p.338).

claiming fame through a geometrically perfect construction.

This reconsideration of the Baroque style makes an interesting study of Bishop's inheritance of seventeenth-century spatiality as a means of understanding her contemporaneity. Since Baroque is open to new relationships among contrasting materials, things, spaces, cultures and languages, this study builds another new connection with Bishop's poetry. The Bishop-Baroque relationship has no hierarchy of perspectives but celebrates instead spatial designs in motion.



Figure 1: Andrea Pozzo, Fresco Ceiling, *Church of St Ignatius Loyola*, Rome.



Figure 2: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*, Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.



Figure 3: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *David*, marble, 170 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome.



Figure 4: Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV*, oil on canvas, 9.2 x 6.3cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.





Figure 5: Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 21 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

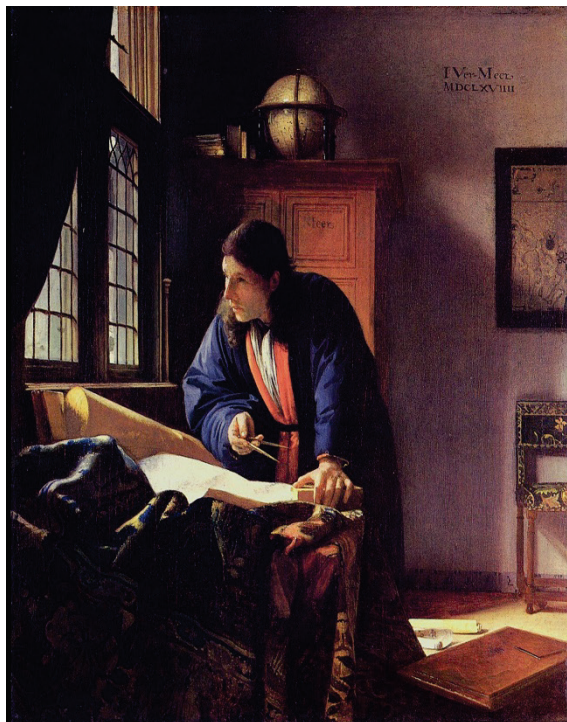


Figure 6: Johannes Vermeer, *The Geographer*, oil on canvas, 51.6 x 45.4cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt



Figure 7: Johannes Vermeer, *The Little Street*, oil on canvas, 54.3 x 44cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



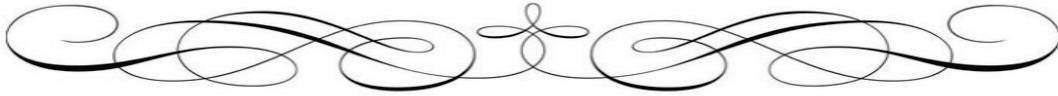
**Section One**  
**Bishop's Baroque Inheritance**

*In this first section, comprising two chapters, I introduce the seventeenth-century Baroque space by examining Bishop's relationship with the metaphysical poetry of George Herbert and John Donne. Chapter One, 'The Seventeenth-century Poetry and the Baroque Space: George Herbert, John Donne and Bishop' demonstrates the Baroque consciousness of spatial expanse in George Herbert and John Donne. This consciousness is found in Counter-Reformation artworks and popular reforming texts such as St Ignatius Loyola's *The Spiritual Exercises*, in conjunction with the seventeenth century's cosmological findings of the plurality of the universe. Herbert and Donne do not establish any school of thought or mythic system; rather, they register their metaphysical responses to the infinitude of the cosmos by spatialising the motions of their intense spiritual and secular emotions in concordance with the ever-changing dimensions of the heavenly or cosmic motions. In responding to these poets' works, this chapter introduces some of Bishop's poems that exemplify the Baroque style of poetry as a spatial form, exhibiting a plural expanse which can spatialise innumerable secular ideas in the manner of infinite heavenly or cosmic dimensions of motion. Bishop shares Herbert's and Donne's familiarity with St Ignatius, demonstrating her reading of *The Spiritual Exercises* through her poem 'The Weed'. She creates her own miraculous space for poetry, encapsulating spontaneity and surprise through the sensuous apprehension of the unreal and the invisible experiences of the real space of the poem and the onlooker.*

*Chapter Two, 'Expansion and Contraction in the Baroque Space: Donne and Bishop', shows that the consciousness of the diminutive self and limited vision of artists, poets and men of science that came in the wake of awareness of the manifold universe led to the realisation that knowledge of the universe could be approached through sensuous imagination and the use of optical instruments, including telescopes and microscopes. Since plurality of the cosmos cannot be fully conceived, Herbert and Donne hint at its heterogeneity*

*by using metaphysical conceits like tears, compasses and maps, which expand and contract the cartography of their love for God and their beloveds. Comparing Donne's love poems with Bishop's approach to love, this chapter demonstrates their Baroque way of stretching and condensing their cartographic relationships between contrary ideas of love, spatialised as visible and invisible, near and far, and as large and small dimensions of the universe. Moreover, the chapter connects Donne's and Bishop's interest in maps and compasses as spatialisations of their selves and poetry among spaces in the world.*

*By identifying this inheritance of the Baroque spatiality of Herbert and Donne, these chapters show that Bishop's poetry metaphorically brings together two discrete cultures, seventeenth-century Baroque and twentieth-century modernity.*



**Chapter One**  
**The Seventeenth-Century Poetry and the Baroque Space: George Herbert, John Donne and Bishop**

Elizabeth Bishop's relationship with seventeenth-century poets has been explored in terms of her intimate knowledge of John Donne, Richard Crashaw and George Herbert, with their vitality of emotions and their expression of metaphysical conceits in simple language. Moreover, in the context of the Baroque period, Bishop's Baroque 'mind thinking'<sup>60</sup> is also accredited to metaphysical poetry. This Baroque 'mind thinking' consisting of 'a moving, changing idea or a series of ideas' (*PPL*, p. 665) that realises the Baroque 'motion of souls, not their state of rest'.<sup>61</sup> In this way, these metaphysical experiences activate real spaces, which is the hallmark of Baroque art.

When comparing the metaphysical poets to Bishop's poetics, critics have overlooked the spatial characteristics of the Baroque 'motion of souls' in their poetry. Shedding light on the metaphysical poets' spatial connection with the Baroque, this chapter argues that the metaphysical poets, specifically George Herbert and John Donne, are Baroque poets in order to draw attention to Bishop's interest in their Baroque spatiality – that is, their secular and religious experiences of the infinite expanse of the universe. Considering that Herbert's and Donne's poetry spatialises their spiritual and secular temperament towards the changing and expanding heavens, I further argue that Bishop's reading of these poets conditioned her secular understanding of space in the universe and in her art. It led to her thinking of spaciousness in art holding a plurality of perspectives about real and unreal experiences.

Although 'not a slightest bit religious',<sup>62</sup> Bishop valued the spiritual intensity in the metaphysical poetry as she believed that the poetic material should express 'something [...] spiritual'. By understanding 'genuine religious poetry to be about as far as poetry can go – and as good as it can be',<sup>63</sup> Bishop agrees with Eliot's description of the 'metaphysical' poetry as the 'elaboration' of thought 'to the

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<sup>60</sup> M. W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style in Prose,' in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 422-456 (448).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>62</sup> Brett Millier, 'The U.S.A School of Writing: 1934-1935,' in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 65).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it',<sup>64</sup> characteristic of the extravagance of the spatial patterns in the Baroque space. Although Eliot does not discuss Herbert with the other metaphysical poets, Herbert 'is more like Donne' as 'his world is the same as that of Donne, and exhibits [...], the same correspondences.'<sup>65</sup> Like Herbert and Donne, Bishop wishes to demonstrate the spiritual, not through devout faith, but by describing her poetry as a miraculous space, which discovers surprising relationships between the material and metaphysical, visible and invisible, as well as the real and imaginative dimensions of non-homogenous experiences of an ever-expanding universe. In order to demonstrate the marvellous space of her poetry, like Herbert and Donne, Bishop becomes an exercitant of St Ignatius Loyola's *The Spiritual Exercises*, which I will discuss in relation to Bishop's 'The Weed' in the last section of this chapter.

The term Baroque was not preferred for the metaphysical poets until the twentieth century.<sup>66</sup> T. S. Eliot did not use the term until his Clark lectures in 1926, but his essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' is credited for the renewal of discussion on the metaphysical poets and as a revival of discussion on the Baroque.<sup>67</sup> Considering this renewed interest in the metaphysical poetry as Baroque, I argue that Herbert's and Donne's poetry expresses a seventeenth-century Baroque spatiality in its consciousness of a vast universe of infinite motions in infinite spaces. It demonstrates the multiplicity of spiritual expanse seen in Counter-Reformation art as well as the enlarged secular imagination of the plurality of cosmos. These metaphysical poets demonstrate dynamic relationships between earthly and metaphysical realms by spatialising their emotions of love in relation to earth and the divine cosmos.

Bishop's earliest encounter with the metaphysical poetry of Herbert and Donne began in her 'early adolescence and lasted all her life.'<sup>68</sup> She came across Herbert when she was just fourteen years old and 'liked' his poetry 'so much' that

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<sup>64</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951) pp. 281-291(p. 282).

<sup>65</sup> George Williamson, "'George Herbert, 1593-1633'", in *Six Metaphysical Poets: A Reader's Guide* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1967), pp. 94 -118 (p.118).

<sup>66</sup> Rene Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 97) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797> > [accessed 26 March 2014].

<sup>67</sup> Mario Praz, 'Baroque in England', *Modern Philology*, 61 (1964) 169-172 (p.173) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/434669>> [accessed 25 June 2015].

<sup>68</sup> Laurel Snow Corelle, 'Sacraments and Relics in Bishop's "Spiritual" Poetics', in *A Poet's High Argument: Elizabeth Bishop and Christianity* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2008), pp.39- 62 (p.39).

she ‘bought the book’ and regarded him as ‘one’ of her ‘favourite poets’.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in her college days, Bishop meditated upon Donne’s poetry of ‘motion’ and the ‘directness’ of his thought and feeling in her 1930s correspondences with Donald Stanford, co-editor of *The Southern Review* (*OA*, p. 10).

Bishop mentions that ‘I was isolated as a child and perhaps poetry was my way to familiarize what I saw around me’ (*Conversations*, p. 98). Her readings of Herbert and Donne are perceivably her early encounter with spatial poetry. In this sense, the metaphysical poetry of motion in vast spaces showed Bishop new ways to see herself in relation to the spaces she came across or that she lived in. Her appropriation of their methods enables Bishop to have intimate relationships with things both far and beyond, and to make metaphysical and invisible things visible to the human eye by spatialising her perception of the universe in manifold ways.

The meditative poetry of Herbert arranges and rearranges his alternating state of sinfulness and piety through the magnitude of God’s bounties as well as his cosmically-scaled wrath. Herbert’s desire to encompass the vast domain of God’s love is evident in his intensely emotional desire to preserve it in steel in ‘The Temper I’: ‘How should I praise Thee, Lord! | How should my rhymes | gladly engrave Thy love in steel.’<sup>70</sup> In comparison, Donne expresses his sinful state through the receding expanse of God’s domain in ‘Holy Sonnet 15’: ‘you which beyond that heaven which was most high | have found new spheres, and of new lands can write’. To gain proximity to God, Donne wishes he would ‘pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might | drown my world with my weeping earnestly’.<sup>71</sup>

Both Herbert and Donne express a Baroque understanding of the multiplicity of cosmic space in their expression of distance from and proximity to God and their lovers. To study this Baroque consciousness of space in their poetry, it is necessary to contextualise Herbert and Donne within the Baroque period in which they were writing.

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<sup>69</sup> Jeredith Merrin, ‘Worlds of Strife: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and George Herbert,’ in *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Uses of Tradition* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 39-65 (p. 40).

<sup>70</sup> F. E. Hutchinson, ed., *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 55. All subsequent references to Herbert’s works, in this chapter and the next, are taken from this text. For consistency in the thesis, I give page references to all the poems in bracketed notations within the text.

<sup>71</sup> John Carey, ed., *John Donne: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 179. All subsequent references to Donne’s works, in this chapter and the next, except as noted otherwise, are taken from this text. For consistency in the thesis, I give page references to all the poems in bracketed notations within the text.

The Baroque is a style label often applied to art during the Counter-Reformation period. The term often celebrates an extravagant expanse of spiritual drama that exhibits as intensity of emotions, which transcend this world to re-orientate religious belief within real spaces of the Church. Texts that were influential for the Counter-Reformation – St Ignatius Loyola’s *The Spiritual Exercises* and St Teresa of Avila’s *The Way of Perfection* – advocated the sensory worshipping of God by visualising the multitudinous heavens through the mind’s imaginative eye. The relationship between man and God was spatialised through elaborate motions that followed varied directions, opening up ways to proximate real and unreal or spiritual spaces. This spiritual expanse was to encourage spontaneity of emotions and the improvisation of perspectives, being not only a reflection of attempts to restore faith, but arguably also of contemporary astronomical beliefs.

The late sixteenth and seventeenth-century cosmological theories of Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei and later Johannes Kepler presented new world views, affecting spatiality in Baroque art and science. Copernicus spatialised the fixed position of the earth through its circular path around the sun, cementing motion into the definite pattern of the Ptolemaic design. Galileo’s telescopic vision of other heavenly bodies revolving around the planet Jupiter doubted the finitude of the Copernican universe by increasing the number of celestial bodies. Galileo’s discovery added asymmetrical characteristics to the spatiality of the universe with the possibility that there were many more heavenly spheres with their own spatial paths than previously known. Moreover, Kepler’s understanding of non-circular or elliptical orbits of planets further established the plurality of a non-homogenous universe exhibiting variable motion of multitude of planets around more than one centre of the universe. In these theories, as Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno writes:

Thus is the excellence of God magnified and the greatness of his Kingdom made manifest; he is glorified not in one, but in countless suns; not in a single earth, a single world, but in a thousand thousand, I say in an infinity of worlds.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Giordano Bruno, ‘On the Infinite Universe and Worlds’, in *Giordano Bruno: His Life and Thought with Annotated Translation of His Work On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, trans. by Dorothea Waley Singer (NY: Greenwood Press, 1950), pp. 229-378, (p. 246).



Arguably, this unstable, multifaceted expanse of a universe without any single focal point lent to seventeenth-century poets and artists a consciousness of their unstable position on earth in relation to the multiplicity of indeterminate cosmic spaces. According to Murray Roston, this improved knowledge of universe ‘proved congenial to the beliefs and interests of the church itself.’ Churches appropriated the ‘proportions of the expanded firmament’ as their decorations ‘became exclusively celestial’<sup>73</sup> by realising the spatial diversity of the heavenly spheres and their infinite dimensions of religious drama in earthly spaces.

The Baroque paintings of Caravaggio and Rubens, and the architectural and sculptural works of Bernini and Borromini, demonstrate the expansive scope of human emotions by imparting to viewers religious and secular experiences of the magnitude of God and his infinite universe. Similarly, the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets exhibited their enlarged imagination in the physical stretching of their perception of the spaciousness of cosmos.

It is through her Baroque awareness of the extravagance of space that Bishop comes close to the metaphysical poetry of Herbert and Donne. Bishop’s 1934-1936 journal records her dream about envisioning Herbert as a Baroque poet exhibiting the characteristics of cosmic abundance:

Dreamed I had a long conversation on meter with George Herbert: we discussed the differences between his and Donne’s and touched upon Miss Moore’s, which was felt, in the dream, to beat Donne’s but not his. This may have been subconscious politeness on my part. He had curls and was wearing a beautiful dark red satin coat. He said he would be “useful” to me ... Praise God.<sup>74</sup>

In the dream, Herbert discusses metre, and has curvaceous hair and vibrant looks. I propose that Bishop valued metaphysical poetry for not just its metrical arrangement of lines of verse, but also for its Baroque spatiality. Stylistically, Bishop’s physical description of Herbert introduces him as a Baroque poet vitalising his poetry with his fashionably seventeenth-century curls and boisterous attire. As mentioned in the introduction, the curvaceous motions contribute to the extravagance of Baroque space in art. In this respect, Herbert’s vivacious curls and rich garment suggests

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<sup>73</sup> Murray Roston, ‘The Baroque Vision’, in *Milton and the Baroque* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1980), pp. 1- 49 (pp.18-19).

<sup>74</sup> Jeredith Merrin, ‘Worlds of Strife: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and George Herbert,’ in *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Uses of Tradition* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 39-65 (p. 39).

Baroque spontaneity, improvisation and abundance of the plural and asymmetrical spatial motions of the universe. Therefore, it can be said that Bishop thought of metaphysical poetry as a spatial art form, which offered her senses innumerable ways of apprehending the motion of varied ideas in the poetic space.

Although Bishop does not herself use the term ‘Baroque’ for the metaphysical poets, this does not mean that she compartmentalised them solely within a ‘metaphysical’ school of thought. Bishop was not interested in the segregation of arts.<sup>75</sup> Bishop’s description of Herbert in relation to Donne and Moore shows that she understood Baroque not as an art movement pertaining to a few poets, prose writers or artists, but as an aesthetic form that encapsulated varied seventeenth-century poets’ and artists’ consciousness, as well as their followers in the twentieth century.

Bishop sees Herbert’s and Donne’s poetry as containing an early-modern consciousness of the universe’s expanse and the infinite celestial motions. By considering her relationship with Herbert and Donne, this chapter shows that Bishop’s Baroque awareness of cosmic scale allows her to give expanse to her contrary ideas and build a poetics of relationships between real and unreal dimensions of experience. Moreover, it allows her to place her poetry outside the compartmentalisation of a style label, or the limitations of meaning usually given to an art form.

### **Herbert’s, Donne’s and Bishop’s Spatialised Perception of the Cosmos**

To demonstrate Bishop’s ideas about expansiveness in poetry, I compare Herbert’s, Donne’s and Bishop’s response to the immensity of the universe. Concerned with ways of seeing the world and beyond in an infinite number of ways, Herbert, Donne and Bishop spatialise the changing cosmologies that developed during the seventeenth century. For instance, Donne’s poem, ‘An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary’, expresses the challenges to human perception and its embodied vision of outer space:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,  
[...]  
The Sun is lost and th’ earth, and no man’s wit

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<sup>75</sup> Megan Marshall, ‘Elizabeth and Alice’ < <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/elizabeth-bishop-and-alice-methfessel-one-art> > [accessed 18 August 2017].

Can well direct him where to look for it.  
 And freely men confess that this world's spent,  
 When in the planets and the firmament  
 They seek so many new; [...]  
 [...]  
 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone

(*Donne*, p. 212).

The poem is a Baroque response to Galileo's and Kepler's cosmic designs. The shift in the grand position of the sun and earth from being the centre of the universe to being dislocated in the multiplicity of the celestial bodies suggests that this is indeed a Baroque artwork, conjuring infinite space with a multitude of centres of thought and spheres of ideas in varied motions. Donne informs his reader that the space is decentralised; therefore, it has lost its 'coherence' (*Donne*, p. 212). The abundance of space makes it immeasurable for man to see and grasp the position of sun and earth in totality. Since the universe has 'so many new' spheres and worlds, it is plural, infinite and stretches beyond man's imagination. As men confess that 'this world's spent' (*Donne*, p. 212), Donne delights in the multiplicity of the universe and indicates a Baroque desire to look forward to seeing 'so many new' spaces in the 'firmament' and beyond human knowledge. Donne further takes interest in telling the specific Baroque characteristics of this multiplied space by describing its infinite motions as 'serpentine':

For this course is not round; nor can the sun  
 Perfect a Circle, or maintain his way  
 one inch direct; but where he rose today  
 he comes no more, but with a cozening line,  
 steals by that point, and so is serpentine

(*Donne*, p. 213)

Donne introduces the asymmetrical space formed because of the non-circular and 'cozening' motion of the sun. He describes the sun's motion as curvaceous and undulating in nature and therefore calls it 'serpentine'. The Italian painter Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538-72) describes the serpentine line where 'each movement must be represented in such a way that the body resembles a serpent, to which nature easily lends itself.'<sup>76</sup> In this respect, through the sun's meandering pattern Donne

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<sup>76</sup> Lomazzo quoted in: Severo Sarduy, 'Baroque cosmology: Kepler', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. Christopher Winks, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 292-315 (p. 297).

draws himself to infinity. This recalls various early-modern Baroque artists, including Caravaggio, and El Greco, whose curvaceous lines formed the expression of their fascination for the unstable and non-homogenous motion in space. This serpentine movement (*Donne*, p. 213) of the sun transforms the finite circle of the Ptolemaic and Copernican thought into a deviating path, reflecting ‘the Baroque restlessness in the absence of a centre.’<sup>77</sup> Donne’s ‘Elegie XVII: Variety’ reiterates this restlessness of the sun through its shifting position in the universe:

The sun that, sitting in the chaire of light,  
Sheds flame into what else so ever doth seem bright,  
Is not contented at one Signe to Inne,  
But end his year, and with a new beginnes.<sup>78</sup>

As the sun rotates, its motion brings variation in its position, lending new gradients to how it sheds light on everything around it. Its variable motion offers multiple ways of looking at celestial centres and other heavenly bodies. Thus, its unstable position and twisting motion entices Donne to indirectly and obliquely see space and spatialise his ideas in poetic space.

In ‘The Starre’, Herbert expresses a Baroque delight in new cosmologies, spatialising the relationship of a worshipper and the worshipped within the heavenly realms. As seeking the higher realms symbolises the desire to obtain benevolence from God, Herbert worships God through meditation of spaces far and beyond. This recalls the boundless space of God’s magnificence and energies seen in Baroque ecclesiastical art:

Bright spark, shot from a brighter place  
Whose beams surrounding Saviours face,  
[...]  
Get me a standing there, and place  
Among the beams, which crown thy face  
[...]  
That so among the rest I may  
Glitter, and curle, and winde as they:  
That winding is their fashion  
of adoration

(*Herbert*, p. 74)

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<sup>77</sup> Christine Buci-Gluksmann, ‘The Work of the Gaze,’ in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 140-156 (p. 149).

<sup>78</sup> John Donne, ‘Elegie XVII: Variety’, in *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 101-03 (p. 101).

Herbert is attracted to the starry world above him for he catches a glimpse of Christ shining like a star. The starry place of Christ is the space of illumination and salvation for a Christian. Therefore, the poet wishes to reach out to that space of light, which exhibits a Baroque ‘adoration’ of God through its miraculous space of energy, embellished with ‘glitter’ (*Herbert*, p. 74) and magnified through its variable and curvaceous motion like Herbert’s curly hair that Bishop perceived in her dream. The extravagance of the winding pattern of beams reflects the influence of contemporary cosmological thinking on religious expression, including Galileo’s plurality of celestial motions and Kepler’s elliptical spheres. Baroque church art presented scenes which activated the space of Christ by illuminating his face with a miraculous light and surrounding him with a coterie of soaring angels in a non-circular sphere, itself associated with the infinite expanse of the heavens. In this manner, Herbert’s observation of Christ is an emotional prayer to God, which exhibits his anxieties and restlessness to reach heaven through the asymmetrical motion of celestial light above him.

Bishop celebrates Donne’s and Herbert’s fascination for cosmic multiplicity in one of her early, uncollected poems, ‘The Ballad of the Subway Train’. Instead of acting as a cosmographer or a staunch worshipper like Donne or Herbert, Bishop marvels at the seventeenth-century cosmic realm by narrating it as a story about infinite distances, which can only be conceived of through the imagination, as its large proportions cannot be seen by the naked eye. Bishop shows a child-like awe for the gigantic and asymmetrical space, which appears like dragons hurtling around:

Long, long ago when God was young,  
 Earth had’nt found its place.  
 Great Dragons lived among the moons  
 And crawled and crept through space

(*PPL*, p.183)

Within the first stanza, Bishop encapsulates a cosmology which culminated in the seventeenth century through Galileo and Kepler’s findings. In this, the universe is a plural space where the earth does not have a fixed position, but exists as a celestial body among innumerable planets, suns and moons that undergo twisting, winding motion which she imagines through the crawling and creeping of the giant dragons. The continuous meandering motion of the dragons shows Bishop’s childhood fondness for curves in the ‘number eight’ (*PPL*, p. 403), which in its flattened form

is a sign of infinity ( $\infty$ ). Like the planets, the dragons wind around vast spaces and witness ‘unseen worlds dropped by’ (*PPL*, p.183). Other than spaces multiplied, these ‘unseen worlds’ can also be seen as invisible and infinite celestial centres, which attract planets, other than their suns, and habitually make them deviate from their spatial paths and uniform motions. The dragons draw their non-linear and undulating path through their ‘their eyes as the whizzing suns’ (*PPL*, p.183), surveying the ‘infinite space’ by motioning up the hills, scratching their backs against the ‘ridges of the sky’ and pushing ‘meteors’ amidst a ‘swarm of stars new-made’ (*PPL*, p. 183). The manner of the dragons’ observation of the multitudinous cosmos draws attention to Bishop’s interest in a ‘wonderful book by Dr. Kasner [...] Mathematics and Imagination’. Like the dragons, Bishop seems to be interested in measuring spaces through imaginary geometry and found Kasner’s ideas about ‘infinity [and] riddles [...] awfully good’ (*OA*, p. 101). In this sense, the dragons in ‘The Ballad of the Subway Train’ enable Bishop to spatialise her innumerable ideas through the winding and expansive dimensions of the cosmos, which then surprises Bishop’s perception through its indefinite geometry and meanings.

The dragons search the space in an indirect way, improvising their twists and turns to survey the expanse and see all that it holds in its space. The fact that Bishop observes the spatiality of universe through the meandering motion of her imaginative dragons shows her baroque way of drifting her ideas in space by manoeuvring her dimensions of perception within it. In addition to rhyming alternate lines in her stanzas, Bishop repeats words and phrases, such as ‘swarm of stars’, ‘came and went and came’, ‘long, long’, ‘thousand, thousand’, and uses alliteration in phrases like ‘crawled and crept’, ‘swarm of stars’, and in the compound verb ‘blind-burrowing’ (*PPL*, p. 183). These reflect the changing directions of Bishop’s perception, which complement the continuity of the variable motion of the dragon.

Bishop’s method of stretching her ideas through repetition and alliteration anticipate her interest in Thomas Browne’s ‘loose’ style of Baroque prose. In the 1930s, Bishop read M. W. Croll’s essay ‘The Baroque Style of Prose’, which describes Browne’s ‘loose’ framing of the Baroque as the asymmetrical motion of contrary ideas in varying lengths of sentences, which drift ‘similar to the course of a

“river”<sup>79</sup> and give ‘a hint of infinity’.<sup>80</sup> Bishop liked reading Browne’s works and in one of her letters to Donald E. Stanford in 1934, Bishop expressed her excitement at copying Browne’s sentences, which demonstrated the use of alliteration, repetition and similar sounding patterns (*OA*, p. 16). These literary devices exercise the ‘loose’ style of Baroque by building relationship between a plurality of ideas to maintain the continuity of the motion of thought in the non-linear dimensions of Browne’s writing.

Such a waywardness of ideas amidst expanding spaces is later touched upon in the flight of the birds in Bishop’s ‘Seascape’. In the ‘celestial seascape’, the ‘white herons’ ‘fly as high as they want and as far as they want sidewise’ | in tiers and tiers of immaculate reflections’ (*PPL*, p. 31). The herons’ ‘sidewise’ ‘tiers’ illustrate the non-linear and deviating path of planets and revisit Bishop’s Baroque ideas about surveying an expanse, as she says that ‘it does look like heaven’ (*PPL*, p. 31). It is in these irregular and oblique motions of birds and winding paths of the cosmic dragons that Bishop explores the Baroque ways of seeing and spatialising her verse in poetic space.

Like the giant dragons that reside among moons and scrutinise the cosmic space in ‘The Ballad of the Subway Train’, Bishop’s ‘Man-Moth’ wishes to ‘investigate’ (*PPL*, p.11) the moon at close quarters. In contrast to the modern man who has ‘no such illusions’ about cosmic distances, the Man-Moth, like the early-modern astronomer and the Baroque artist, is anxious to seek facts by transcending her imagination to encounter the moon. From the surface of the earth, the Man-Moth finds the moon to be a ‘small hole’ (*PPL*, p.11) against the towering buildings on earth. However, the Man-Moth wants to look at this hole closely to validate his imagination about it. Bishop admired this quality of the Baroque ‘mind discovering truth’<sup>81</sup>, which she found best expressed in Croll’s essay: ‘there is a progress of imaginative apprehension, a revolving and upward motion of the mind as it rises in energy, and views the same points from new levels; and this spiral movement is characteristic of baroque prose.’<sup>82</sup> The ‘black scrolls’ on the moon point at the spiralling motion of the Man-Moth’s mind spatialising his non-linear perceptual

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<sup>79</sup> M. W. Croll, ‘The Baroque Style in Prose,’ in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 422-56 (448).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>81</sup> M. W. Croll, ‘The Baroque Style in Prose,’ in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 422-56 (442).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

dimensions while observing the celestial body from one vantage point to another and from varied physical heights. The Man-Moth looks at the moon from the surface of the earth, and then from above the man-made buildings. The Man-Moth's physical determination expresses his mental labour in giving accuracy to his ideas. Although he realises his shortcomings as he 'trembles', he remains determined to 'climb' 'as high as he can' towards the 'black scrolls on the light' (*PPL*, p.11). In doing so, he witnesses the contrary realities of the moon: the moon that appears to be a 'small hole' is later unreachable because it is too far and too big to be encompassed. With this improved knowledge, the Man-Moth 'fails, of course, and falls back scared' (*PPL*, p.11).

The Man-Moth's observation of the scrolls on the moon, the fabled universe of winding dragons, describes Bishop's excitement and awe for the dynamism and complexity of outer space. Reality is complex like the twisting and turning celestial space, appearing in a roundabout fashion. Bishop's astronomical observations of the universe allow her to see her poetry as an expansive and mobile space, where ideas can be motioned in different directions and given fluid shape through awareness of the unstable perception of things that inhabit a universe of infinite dimensions of experience.

Herbert's and Donne's writing of the infinite expanse of the cosmos is complemented by their spatialisation of spiritual and secular love in the multitudinous space. In contrast, Bishop gives space to her loneliness in her relationship to cosmos. Herbert refers to vastness of space in relation to his understanding of God's bounties stretched out in the multiplicity of his heavenly abodes. In 'The Glance', Herbert rejoices in a sensorially overwhelming glance of God, which 'opened and seal'd up again' (*Herbert*, p. 172) a small space of God's love to rejuvenate Herbert's spirituality. The magnitude of the divine love is hinted at through the plurality of celestial spheres in the multitudinous suns:

And one aspect of thine spend in delight  
More than a thousand sunnes disburse in light  
In heav'n above

(*Herbert*, p. 172).

The Herbert's reference to over 'thousand sunnes' in this poem relates to the finitely infinite space of heavens. In this way, Herbert realises his small space in relation to



the magnitude of God as expressed in his poem 'Artillerie': 'I am but finite, yet thine infinitely' (*Herbert*, p. 139).

Herbert is full of awe for this cosmic stretch of God's love, which is just a small part of his 'full-eyed love!' (*Herbert*, p.172) In his celebration of the infinite glory of God, Herbert realises the length and breadth of God's vision, which is expansive in its knowledge of infinite worlds. However, such a vision cannot be perceived with a sinful eye, only with the eye of faith, which dilates the faithful vision to transcend it to see God in manifold solar systems expressing his love through multiple dimensions in space.

Unlike Herbert's spiritual bonding with the miraculous space of heaven, which promises to illuminate his soul through its spatial diversity, Bishop exhibits a modern disillusionment with religion and God in her poem 'Insomnia'. Due to the absence of any emotional vigour for the divine, Bishop is unable to transcend her vision and reach out to the abundance of cosmic realms. Rather, the poem spatialises her relationship of distance and abandonment with the cosmic realm as 'the Moon in the bureau mirror, looks out a million miles' (*PPL*, p. 83). The alliteration 'million miles' emphasises the great space of the universe, where the celestial bodies exist at great distance from others and experience isolation. The moon 'by the Universe is deserted' and, therefore, 'she'd tell it to go to hell' (*PPL*, p. 53). The moon exhibits Bishop's distance from the heavenly bliss and the limitations of her vision in the absence of God and hope for divine miracles.

The moon, like Bishop, is unable to reciprocate with other ethereal bodies or spaces beyond itself. It lacks Herbert's emotional intensity to establish a relationship with the expanse. Rather, the moon gives space to Bishop's loneliness and feeling of desertion by the universe. The fact that Bishop told her friend and poet, Robert Lowell, 'when you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived' (*WIA*, p. 225) shows that distances are more than skin deep in Bishop's poetics.

Bishop's loneliness may explain why her poetry shows a desire to establish relationships with the ever-expanding universe. Here too, Bishop gives space to her secular imagination, which transforms her feelings of abandonment into familiarity with the far and beyond. By dwelling on 'a body of water, | or a mirror' (*PPL*, p. 53), the moon inverts the dimensions of the distant heavens to bring them in sight as 'shallow as the sea' (*PPL*, p. 54).

As Bishop changes her perceptual dimensions to see the invisible expanse, Donne charts his space of love in the plurality of the planets to realise its magnitude. With his cosmographic vision in 'The Good Morrow', Donne delights in the countless number of cosmic spheres by equating the discovery of many new celestial bodies in the universe to the interest in the exploration of new lands in our own world of existence:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,  
let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one

(*Donne*, p. 90)

By referring to the plurality of new land discoveries and cosmic abodes, Donne navigates the cartography of his love as a plural space, which brings two lovers together by spatialising them as two worlds, overlapping each other's boundaries to become 'one' in the heterogeneity of cosmic spheres. Donne does not wish to be transported to distant and expansive spaces beyond the sphere of the earth. Rather, Donne creates his space of love within the contours of the earth, itself part of the larger universe, to express the extent of his love to his beloved. He conceives of the immensity and multiplicity of love within the plurality of the motion of the earthly spheres. In poems, such as 'Elegy 2: To his Mistress Going to Bed', he calls his beloved 'O my America, my new found land' (*Donne*, p. 13). Donne spatialises his love in cartographic dimensions of the earth, which I have discussed in Chapter Two.

However, unlike Donne's promising love, which preserves its expansive boundaries through the contours of the planetary bodies, Bishop prefers to marvel at the infinite boundaries of cosmos. Unseen, they intrigue her and leave her with uncertainty at the indeterminate expanse and its variable perceptions. Bishop's sense of doubt leads her imagination into building oblique relationships with the cosmic spheres. Bishop expresses her displaced self in an indeterminate cosmos in an unpublished poem, 'I am neither here nor there.' There is a feeling of restlessness at being disoriented by a vast space for she is 'neither here nor there'. The cosmic space stretching in multiple directions makes her uncertain about the cartography of her own space, and she concludes that 'never can I be at home' (*PPL*, p. 207).

The cosmos gives a sense of direction to the wandering Herbert as part of the heavenly bliss. Donne draws on cosmic space to identify the contours of the space of

his love and tries to achieve stability for his self and his beloved using the cartographic boundaries of the universe. However, Bishop neither finds direction nor stability of personal space. Rather, she finds herself suspended somewhere among these vast spaces. Bishop describes her deserted self between earth and space as ‘water claims me not, nor air’ (*PPL*, p. 207). This liminal point between two vast elements, water and air, ensures that Bishop’s origin is elusive and her belonging allusive. An ‘adopted’ child, who perhaps ‘adapted’ (*LOC*, p. 1) herself to the places she lived in, in the poem Bishop shows the complexity of her relationship to spaces. The indeterminate space exhibits her restlessness and uncertainty about her place in the scheme of things. Therefore, Bishop’s interest in spatiality is not just about her sensory experiences of vast spaces, but also her study of her relational distance and proximity to them. It seems that Bishop is either being deserted by the places or she is being driven by them. Interestingly, this middle ground of never being completely at home always attracted Bishop: ‘I’ve never felt particularly homeless, I never felt particularly at home’ (*Conversations*, p. 102). This sense of being dislocated in space gives Bishop an oblique position for her art and self, which places her poetry in-between defined schools of thoughts and socially conscious writing.

This is why Bishop ‘never studied “Imagism” or “Transcendentalism” or any isms consciously’ (*PPL*, p. 858). She believed art should create a space for itself rather than compartmentalising it with theories and personal meanings. In an interview with Wesley Wehr, Bishop shared her advice to students writing poetry who were ‘already interested in Shakespeare or Dylan Thomas, to think about the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth century poets’ (*Conversations*, p. 39). Bishop believed that poetry should be read and experienced beyond philosophical notions and dominating spheres of meanings to open dialogues with varied perspectives and undefined territories of meanings. In this way, Bishop’s intention is to keep her identity outside any social and aesthetic boundaries, used to define a personal idiom.

Like Bishop, Herbert shows the asymmetrical patterns of space and, through his unstable position in ‘The Temper I’, Herbert demonstrates variable dimensions of perceiving space through the changing intensity of his devoutness:

Although there were some fourtie heav’ns, or more,  
Sometimes I peere above them all;

Sometimes I hardly reach a score;  
 Sometimes to hell I fall

(*Herbert*, p. 55).

Herbert sees the multitudes of heavens from the cosmic space by looking ‘above them all’. His view from below, on earth, allows him a limited access to heavens, and that from the depths of hell solely marks his fall and deprivation from God’s glory. Sometimes the purity of the soul enables the poet to soar high like an angel and see the heterogeneity of space marked by ‘some forty heav’ns or more’. Unlike Bishop, Herbert is not doubtful or lost in the unknown distances of cosmos. In ‘Vantie I’ he becomes a curious astronomer who familiarises himself with the cosmic spheres by viewing their ‘stations’ in the cosmos. The astronomer’s religious perseverance enables him to look closely at ‘their dances’ and ‘secret glances’ from varied positions as he ‘walks from doore to doore’ (*Herbert*, p. 85) in order to actualise the unreal in real spaces.

However, at other times his sinfulness does not allow him to reach heights and keeps him below, probably earth-bound and declining into the depths of hell. Here Herbert spatialises his devotion to God through his transcendence to the vertical heights of the heavens. In contrast his guilt-ridden self restricts his perceptual expanse and ultimately confines his vision to the depths of hell.

For Herbert, heaven and hell are embodied spaces among many more ungraspable cosmic spaces, which do not have definite contours visible in the universe. Herbert’s fall into hell can be read both as a religiously moral and secular realisation of a decentred self. As a devout Christian, he realises his weaknesses in worldly life, which entice him towards disobedience of God and therefore limit the boundaries of envisioning unreal and miraculous experiences. His fall makes him unable to realise God’s grandeur in countless worlds and expresses his unstable self in an asymmetrical universe, which makes him stumble from his position every now and then. According to Herbert, heaven has no fixed place or perspective. Since it can be perceived in many different ways and from variable positions, therefore there is no single vision or position of perception.

Where Herbert’s proximity and distance to faith changes the dimensions of the heavens, Bishop’s sense of doubt and her non-linear perspective is conditioned by the asymmetrical and infinite cosmic space. In ‘Once I met a man on a hill’, Bishop’s journey ‘upwards’ to the universe does not give her the bliss of eternity, but

makes her restless about her ‘tiny’ space with ‘indefinite’ ‘four walls’ (*PPL*, p. 205). The walls mark the multidimensional and unfathomable space around her. There is a sense of loneliness because of the distances and lack of vision in all directions. She finds the universe ‘just grey and nothing and aloof’ (*PPL*, p. 205). The indifference of the receding space denies her a sense of centre to determine her own position in space. Nevertheless, she defines her space to be a ‘tiny room’ in the scheme of things, but it is indeterminate and does not describe Bishop’s distance and proximity to other spaces. In her uncertainty of position, however, she discovers the plurality of perspectives. The world in sight below is not the same as seen from above. The cosmic space gives an acute sense of the non-uniform motions of celestial spheres, whose non-linear perspectives transform the reality of things. Bishop’s drifting imagination enables her to see the universe from different vantage points. From each position the facts undergo change and suggest an ever-changing reality, which results from the unstable positions and perceptions of the poet.

From Bishop’s standpoint above ‘The world ships off some other way’, as it is nowhere in linear dimensions of her vision. She comes to understand her disorientation of vision as the world below is estranged to her: ‘as if it had been told to hide’ (*PPL*, p. 205) by steer off in some other direction. Receded from her sight, the world appears to be unreal as she ‘never gets a look at’ and ‘its face is never turned’ (*PPL*, p. 206) to her. Bishop hints at the fact that reality cannot be encompassed, as it is never fully visible to the human eye. Bishop does not possess the ‘full-eyed love!’ (*Herbert*, p. 172) of Herbert’s God; she can only ‘sometimes catch a glimpse | of snowy hill or lonely sea’ (*PPL*, p. 206). Bishop’s humble perception comprehends the reality of the universe in the repetition of several perspectives from different vantage points, which construct space as a dynamic reality of variable dimensions of experience.

Bishop’s uncertainty about the knowledge of space surprises her perceptual dimensions in the repeated acts of looking at it from varied spaces and changed positions. Similarly, Bishop’s writing process brings innovation and abundance to her poetic ideas through her physical motion, which keeps on altering the perceptual dimensions of her poems through her habit of self-correction and revision. She agrees that:

it seems to me I've rarely written any-thing of any value at the desk or in the room where I was supposed to be doing it – it's always in someone else's house, or in a bar, or standing in the Kitchen in the middle of the night.'<sup>83</sup>

As the perception of earth from another cosmic station alters its spatiality, Bishop's poetry is a similar spatial act, which cannot be given shape in one space and time. Bishop sees it as a construct of contrary positions and places of perception, which gives a sense of scale to its meanings and make her poems spatially diverse.

Donne gives reason for Bishop's Baroque restlessness in terms of her changing position and indeterminate perception of her spatial field in 'Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward'. The poem shows how a contrariness of perspectives is inherent in the Baroque soul due to inhabiting 'foreign motions' of the spheres:

Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this,  
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,  
And as the other spheres, by being grown  
Subject to foreign motions, lose their own  
And being hurried by others everyday,  
Scarce in a year their natural form obey:  
Pleasure or business, so, our souls admit  
For their first mover, and are whirled by it.

(*Donne*, pp. 241-242)

Donne spatialises the human soul as a sphere, Baroquely comparing its waywardness as attributes of the cosmic multiplicities. Donne informs that with the increase in these ethereal bodies, the universe is no more subject to fixed positions and circular motions. Rather, the plurality of cosmic bodies has revealed their asymmetrical motions, which change their positions and nature of motion in relation to 'being hurried by others everyday', to other cosmic bodies such as many more suns and moons. Similarly, in being 'whirled' by such motions, which do not retain their 'natural form', Donne finds the human body exhibiting a similar multiplicity of motions whereby contrariness becomes characteristic of human thought. This allows the mind to think in variable directions and construct reality from variable perspectives. Since 'the intelligence that moves' is 'subject to foreign motions' (*Donne*, p. 242), Donne sees human perception to be plural and mobile like the spheres. Due to this similarity between man and his worlds, Donne celebrates the

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<sup>83</sup> Brett Millier, 'NORTH HAVEN: 1977-1979', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 527-50 (p. 544).

variety of motions in heavens and in his own spatiality in his ‘Elegie XVII: Variety’: ‘The heavens rejoice in motion: Why should I Abjure my so much loved variety’.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the multi-dimensional motions of cosmos and Donne’s spatialised perceptions converge in the varied motions and perspectives of their spatiality.

Therefore, in the Baroque poetry of Herbert and Donne, human perception is as varied as the cosmic bodies in seventeenth-century perception. Similarly, Bishop’s world in ‘Gypsophilia’ is a construct of multiple dimensions of vision. Living ‘aslant’, Bishop is aware of her decentred position in the cosmic scheme of things, leading to doubts about the fixity of perspectives and meanings:

We live aslant  
 here on our iron mountain. Venus already’s set.  
 Something I’m never sure of, even yet –  
 Do we shine, too? Is this world luminous?  
 I try to recollect but can’t.

(*PPL*, p. 246)

Bishop takes an oblique position on the world, looking angularly at other worlds outside it. Like ‘Once I met a man on a hill’, in ‘Gypsophilia’ Bishop shows her curiosity for these unknown dimensions of the planetary spheres beyond, which give her different and unreal perspectives of her world. The space of the world appears different from below and above, from inside and outside, according to the varied positions of its onlooker. Sometimes the world is illuminated to us and sometimes it remains enigmatic. Bishop’s variable perspective defies a fixity of views, instead giving surprising ways of perceiving spatiality. This is why she joined the *Con Spirito* magazine in college, which was published anonymously to distance itself from gendered meanings or philosophical schools and focus on the immediacy of ‘fresh’ perspectives: ‘anything that is spontaneous, that is lively’.<sup>85</sup>

In conclusion, as Herbert and Donne spatialise their religious and secular love in the dynamism of the universe, Bishop spatialises her modern perception about poetic space through emulation of seventeenth-century ways of imagining the magnitude and multiplicity of the cosmic designs. In doing so, Bishop sees poetry as a Baroque space, which is about ‘contriving and inventing’ and ‘making things [...]

<sup>84</sup>John Donne, ‘Elegie XVII: Variety’, *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Herbert Grierson (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp.101-03 (p. 101).

<sup>85</sup> ‘Con Spirito’, < <http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/student-organizations/student-publications/con-spirito.html> > [accessed 4 January 2018].

in unthought of ways.’<sup>86</sup> In sharing Herbert’s and Donne’s curiosity for the expanse of the universe, Bishop felt for their intense realisation of the wonders of these unknown regions.

### **‘The Weed’: Composition of Baroque place through St Ignatius Loyola’s *The Spiritual Exercises***

Other than cosmological findings, the seventeenth-century Baroque art and literature adopted spatial sensitivity in response to the Counter-Reformation movement. Artists and craftsmen following the Counter-Reformation consciously dramatised physical space in churches, ensuring Catholic beliefs could be seen and felt. Influential among the Catholic reformers was St Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuit founder, whose teachings in *The Spiritual Exercises* were widely familiar. The meditative exercises emphasised sight and the other senses to apprehend a spiritual setting or location, through ‘visible meditation’<sup>87</sup> of the ‘composition of place’,<sup>88</sup> which ‘[...] will be to see with the eyes of imagination the corporal place where there is the object which I wish to contemplate.’<sup>89</sup>

According to Frederic Conrod, ‘the *Spiritual Exercises* had ‘immediate and direct influence on devotional poetry’.<sup>90</sup> In this respect, Herbert’s and Donne’s meditative poetry not only marvelled at the cosmic expanse in its varied designs, but also sensuously recreated the experiences of spiritual rejuvenation through their dramatic use of earthly settings. Herbert’s ‘The Agonie’ and ‘Confession’ exemplify St Ignatius’s ‘composition of place’ giving tangible space to concepts of love, sin and grief. Moreover, in poems such as ‘The Crosse’ and ‘The Sacrifice’ Herbert shifts the method of his exercise to introduce the object of contemplation first, such as the cross associated with Christ’s crucifixion, and then the place it occupies. According to Louis Martz, Donne’s ‘Anniversaries’ and ‘many of the Holy Sonnets’ demonstrate the meditative exercises.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, I argue that both Herbert and

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<sup>86</sup>Brett C. Millier, ‘The U.S.A SCHOOL OF WRITING: 1934-1935’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 62).

<sup>87</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, ‘First Week: The First Exercise’, in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 23).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., ‘The Second Exercise’, p. 33.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>90</sup> Frederic Conrod, ‘The Spiritual Exercises: From Ignatian Imagination to Secular Literature’, in *A companion to Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence*, ed. by Robert Aleksander Maryks (Leiden: BRILL, 2014), pp. 266-81 (p. 267).

<sup>91</sup> Louis Martz, ‘John Donne in Meditation: the Anniversaries’, in *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 211- 48, (p. 219).



Donne follow St Ignatius's method of 'composition of place'<sup>92</sup> of religious miracles within the dimensions of real. Their meditative exercises are an expression of their spiritual and secular experiences of love and devotion.

Bishop's fascination for Herbert's and Donne's spatial meditation was perhaps her stimulation for reading St Ignatius's divine exercises. Having a keenness for details and sensuality, Bishop made notes of St Ignatius's exercises which categorically direct attention toward the sensory perception of religious stories. For instance, she notes 'it is not abundance of knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the inward sense and taste of things.'<sup>93</sup> Bishop demonstrated this sensorially Baroque approach in 'The Prodigal' which she acknowledged to have been written under the influence of 'that spiritual exercise of the Jesuits – when they try to think in detail how the thing must have happened' (*WIA*, p. 171) 'The Prodigal' demonstrates this 'inward' 'taste of things' through its embodied experience of the guilt-ridden setting of the biblical story. Bishop has the place filled with 'brown enormous odor', a 'rotten' 'floor' and 'glass-smooth dung' (*PPL*, p. 54) to complement the prodigal son's sinful state without hinting at a moral judgement or putting the character under scrutiny. This details how a religious event must rely on the imaginative and sensory faculties for extracting the truth of experience in the material, lived world.

I agree with Jonathan Post that Bishop's 'eye of imagination is not the eye of faith'.<sup>94</sup> However, she practises these saintly exercises in order to spatialise her meditation of the unknown realms of creativity, in a manner most truthful to its state of occurrence and setting. In her editorial in 'The Blue Pencil', she writes:

All the ancient hermits, lost in visions we can neither see nor guess,  
have gone forever into their deserts and wilderness [...] futile would be  
a search even for hints of all those older mysteries and raptures [...].  
For all their dreams and all their valiant prayers, we have nothing left  
but interest and wonder.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, 'First Week: The First Exercise', in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 33).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 'Annotations', p. 4

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p. 122).

<sup>95</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Love and Longing', in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 61-78 (p. 76).

Observing the saints' affinity to God, Bishop felt 'interest and wonder' for their sensorial imagination connecting the heavenly spaces, distant and unreal, to the corporeal world they inhabited. Bishop identified the spiritual fervour of these mystics in Herbert's and Donne's meditative poetry, since her readings of these poets made her realise that 'the spiritual must be felt'<sup>96</sup> in her secular poems as marvel at the human imagination. Utilising the techniques of the spiritual writers and meditative poets who realised their dramatic inspiration terrestrially, Bishop's 'The Weed' spatialises her creative space of composition by realising it in real surroundings. She applies her senses to the secular imagination of her poem and presents her poetic space like many miraculous spaces far and beyond in this universe. In 'The Weed' Bishop practises St Ignatius Loyola's application of senses by expressing that poetry is not about 'interpreting the world, but the very process of sensing it' (*Conversations*, p. 51). Bishop shows that an invisible poetic meditation enables poetic creativity to arrive at a destination with surprising patterns of revelation within a poem.

'The Weed' makes Bishop an exercitant, like Herbert and Donne, by passionately recreating a spiritual space like Baroque church art in a non-spiritual way. 'The Weed' is a characteristic example of how Bishop is inspired by Herbert's spiritual meditation in 'Love Unknown' and Donne's meditation of love in 'The Ecstasy', while other poems, like 'The Bight', 'Florida' and 'Varick Street', also practise St Ignatius of Loyola's exercises by creating a sense of place.

Bishop described Herbert's 'Love Unknown' as 'a sort of Goya painting'.<sup>97</sup> Herbert meditates his divided self between goodness and sin like the incarnation of good and evil forces in the Romantic artist Francisco Goya's works. Goya is not a Baroque painter; however, his work exemplifies dramatic enactment of contrary and ethereal forces in the real space of his paintings, similar to Baroque church art. Both 'Love Unknown' and 'The Weed' exercise St Ignatius's meditation in their composition of the place and object of contemplation. Both poems exhibit the divided selves of the poets, the suffering and agony of tormented hearts. However, unlike Herbert, Bishop does not seek any moral redemption.

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<sup>96</sup> Brett Millier, 'The U.S.A SCHOOL OF WRITING: 1934-1935', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 65).

<sup>97</sup> Jeffrey Power-Beck, "'Time to Plant Tears': Elizabeth Bishop's Seminary of Tears", *South Atlantic Review*, 60 (1995), 69-87 (p.75). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3201237>> [accessed 7 March 2016].

Whereas Herbert begins his poem with the object of contemplation, his heart, Bishop prefers to construct the place first, as Donne does in ‘The Ecstasy’. Herbert’s ‘Love Unknown’, Donne’s ‘The Ecstasy’ and Bishop’s ‘The Weed’ are devotional exercises in love: Herbert seeks the love of God, Donne desires his beloved, and Bishop dwells in the love of her creative abilities. Herbert attempts to achieve spiritual gratification, Donne aims at corporeal union, and Bishop’s faithless self embraces her defiant creative muse.

Unlike Herbert’s and Donne’s recreation of heavenly and secular places of love and reunion with God and beloved, Bishop’s ‘The Weed’ first intends to describe the physical space of non-devotional poetry. Secondly, it describes the space of hell, experienced similarly to heaven, within and without us, thriving on the non-believers and sinful souls on earth.

‘The Weed’ as a spiritual exercise creates the unreal space of creative meditation, which like spiritual contemplation, cannot be seen with the ordinary eye but felt through the mind’s eye. Moreover, this imaginative space is more in line with St Ignatius Loyola’s meditation of hell.

St. Ignatius’s heightened sense of these ethereal places coincides with Bishop’s idea of actuality of places, which when seen in actuality appear as ‘being built now, rising up, taking on colour & dimension & perspective’ (*LOC*, p. 44). Bishop spatialises her dream through its physical dimensions, as it appears to take shape at the time of its imaginative perception:

I dreamed that dead, and meditating,  
I lay upon a grave, or bed,  
(at least, some cold and close-built bower).

(*PPL*, p. 15)

In Herbert’s matter-of-fact tone in ‘love Unknown’, Bishop begins her fantastic story with a simple narration, telling us about her dreamy abode as a worldly setting. With this acute sense of place Bishop follows the first exercise of St Ignatius’s meditation, which states the ‘composition [as] seeing the place’.<sup>98</sup> This involves seeing the ‘length, breadth and depth’<sup>99</sup> of the place to see how large, how small, how low and how high it is. Bishop’s dream of lying in a ‘grave, or bed’ indicates a resting place

<sup>98</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, ‘First Week: The First Exercise’, in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 23).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, ‘The Fifth Exercise’, p. 41.

on earth, which has the length and breadth of a bed and the depth of a grave. Further, the conjunction ‘or’ between ‘grave and ‘bed’ reinforces that these two places carry each other’s properties. In this case, ‘grave’ and ‘bed’ are synonymous to each other and indicate one retiring place. The plurality of the place complements the ‘dead and meditating’ (*PPL*, p. 15) state of the poet, which converge in her sleepy state of mind.

The exposition of ‘The Weed’ is in line with Donne’s ‘The Ecstasy’, where he exercises physical love through the construction of place:

Where, like a pillow on a bed  
A pregnant bank swell’d up to rest  
The violet’s reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another’s best.

(*Donne*, p. 121)

The ‘pillow on the bed’ draws connections between Donne’s and Bishop’s bed. Both poems describe a confined resting place with surface and depth occupied by each figure. In Donne’s case, it is the two lovers, and in Bishop’s poem, her physically dead body and contemplative mind, that reside together.

Bishop further heightens the sense of a resting place by indicating her bed’s chilling sensation for being a shady place, ‘cold, and a close-built bower’ (*PPL*, p.15), which brings to mind a low space with emphasis on depth rather than height. Coupled with ‘grave, or bed’, the ‘cold, and close-built bower’ evokes the image of a bed-burial, since the poem consistently maintains its coldness and darkness because of being deprived of warmth and light, as neither ‘sun nor moon’ (*PPL*, p. 16) attend to this place. Bishop’s construction of ‘grave, or bed’ coincides with the poet’s passive body in deep meditation. The inner and outer state of her body is externalised in outer space to be seen and heard outside herself. This state is spatialised, where the senses see the poet’s immobile body as a static place holding still the object of meditation, namely the ‘frozen’ heart and its ‘thought’ (*PPL*, p. 15).

Many critics have found Bishop’s dual position and sense of place – dead/waking, grave/bed – to be abstract and unclear. Zachariah Pickard, for instance, is of the view that ‘the portrait painted here is of complete abstraction, of being entirely removed from any contact with physical existence, and without even a clear

sense of her [Bishop's] own mental state.'<sup>100</sup> However, in 'The Weed' the dimensions of the place are grounded in reality and do not exhibit any disassociation from familiar surroundings.

The poem draws details of a place of rest, which can be seen both from surface and deep inside, spatialising her inner meditation in the outer space at the same time. Bishop copies a passage from the exercises, which describes a similar quiet place for meditation in her prose work 'The Sea and Its shore':

The Exercitant will benefit all the more, the more he secludes himself from all friends and acquaintances and from all earthly solicitude, for example by moving from the house in which he dwelt, and taking another house or room, that there he may abide in all possible privacy; [...] he comes to use his natural faculties more freely in diligently searching for that he so much desires.<sup>101</sup>

Using St Ignatius's exercises, Bishop has found 'another house' her 'grave, or bed' within a 'close-built bower' (*PPL*, p. 15) to meditate in 'all possible privacy' (*PPL*, p. 577) her imaginative faculties and realise their unreal and visionary spaces. The 'grave, or bed' fulfils Bishop's desire of seeing her invisible and taxing process of creation through earthly materials and settings a reader knows and to which he can relate. In this sense, the 'grave, or bed' is a miraculous space of imagination, which invents poetry through actualising its spontaneity in real space. In this way, Bishop's space of meditation exhibits surprise by making real poetry out of an unreal, incorporeal or sublime experience.

Moving from the shady surface of the body, bed and their boundaries, Bishop draws attention to the deep space inside the body. We are led inside the grave where the heart resides:

In the cold heart, its final thought  
 Stood frozen, drawn immense and clear,  
 Stiff and idle as I was there;  
 And we remained unchanged together for a year, a minute, an hour.  
(*PPL*, p. 15)

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<sup>100</sup> Zachariah Pickard, 'Water', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Description* (London: Mc-Gill Queen's Press, 2009) pp. 73-97 (p. 76).

<sup>101</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, 'Annotations', in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 3-16 (pp. 13-14).

A grave aptly describes the ‘cold’ and dead heart of a non-believer who is devoid of the warmth of God’s love and blessings. Such stone-heartedness is a sin, which Herbert fears in ‘Love Unknown’ and other poems such as ‘The Sepulchral’ or ‘The Sinne,’ whereas, Donne in ‘A Litany’ fears a sinful heart, which has ‘growne ruinous’ and ‘by dejection, clay’ (*Donne*, p. 161). Here he seeks the Lord to ‘purge away | all vicious tinctures’ (*Donne*, p. 161) that cause his spiritual death.

Conversely, Bishop’s tormented heart, experiencing physical and creative stasis, neither evokes any compassion in her for God nor does she hint at Herbert’s ‘fear’ of a God whose ‘love’ has grown ‘cold’ in ‘Love Unknown’ (*Herbert*, p. 129). However, she shows emotional restraint for her ‘frozen’ thought (*PPL*, p. 15) by relating to it in a matter-of-fact way.

As Richard Mullen explains, the poem does present the ‘interplay between conscious perception and dream’, where the unconscious does not have control over the poet’s experience.<sup>102</sup> In the light of Mullen’s views, the poem is not wholly irrational or a work of automatic writing. Even in the state of dreaminess, Bishop is fully conscious of her meditative exercise in her ‘frozen’ heart and ‘thought’ through her focus on the place, which remains apparently ‘unchanged’ (*PPL*, p. 15) with the passage of time. Her contemplative position and act remains in one-to-one correspondence with her changing sense of time. Bishop’s dream indeed becomes what she consciously saw and felt in the world around her.

On the contrary, in ‘Love Unknown’ Herbert spatialises the motion of his sinful heart in more than one place of affliction to show the height and depth of his tormented body and soul. The ‘font’ ‘wherein did fall, a stream of bloud’ from a height, and in its shallow depths Herbert’s heart is ‘dipt’ and dy’d’. Later, the heart is thrown in the depths of a ‘large and spacious furnace flaming’, and even the surface of Herbert’s bed is ‘stuff’d with thoughts’ which are ‘thorns’ (*Herbert*, pp. 129-130).

Bishop’s heart takes on the sinful qualities of Herbert’s afflicted heart in ‘Love Unknown’. It is ‘too hard and ‘too dull’ (*Herbert*, p. 130) for being icy and passive. As a non-believer, her poetic thoughts are not ignited by a spiritual muse. Nor does Bishop show passion for moralising her situation or seeking repentance. In a letter to Anne Stevenson, she wrote that:

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Mullen, ‘Elizabeth Bishop’s Surrealistic Inheritance’, *American Literature*, 54 (1982), 63-80 (p. 63) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2925721>> [accessed 15 June 2015].

I do not like heaviness...I think we are still barbarians, barbarians who commit a hundred indecencies and cruelties every day of our lives, as just possibly future ages may be able to see. But I think we should be gay in spite of it [...] and to keep ourselves 'new, tender, quick.'<sup>103</sup>

Bishop concludes her thoughts with Herbert's desire to make his heart 'new, tender, quick' (*Herbert*, p. 131), which does show her belief in the redemption of the essential sinfulness of man through the stimulation of secular imagination. In doing this, one can renew a defiant heart with a fresh vigour for motivating ideas and making poetry, without giving in to God necessarily. Bishop's interest in Herbert's feelings of being spiritually afresh shows how contrary states such as goodness/sin, reality/imagination, and earthly/ethereal, can bring new perspectives of motion in her poetry.

The 'final thought' in her 'cold heart' (*PPL*, p. 15) reminds us of Bishop's 'idea of Knowledge', which comes from the 'rocky breasts' (*PPL*, p. 52) in 'At the Fishhouses'. This earthly knowledge of the world is 'dark' and icy' (*PPL*, p. 52) indifferently harsh like the 'cold heart' and the setting in 'The Weed'. In this sense, the thought in 'The Weed' carries worldly knowledge, whose acquisition requires the pain and anguish of the poet. Describing contemplation, St Ignatius instructs the exercitant to seek the interior knowledge of the 'Creator', by 'imagining Christ our Lord' who 'has come to make Himself human', so that we follow him more intensely.<sup>104</sup> Bishop does not desire Christ or God here, but intends to seek an interior knowledge of this world. Seeking the interior of earth's natural elements can inspire her imagination and stir physical action in her frozen poetic space, by giving it fluid dimensions and wings to rise above its materiality.

However, despite this desire, Bishop's thought is heavy like 'the heavy surface of the sea' in 'At the Fishhouses'. The 'stiff and idle' (*PPL*, p. 15) body of the poet contributes to its unprogressive thought and its lack of connection with appropriate feelings. Creativity is held in waiting. The unity of time and space indicated by the lapse of 'a year, a minute, an hour' (*PPL*, p. 15) points at the exhaustion of her thoughts, which have remained 'unchanged' through time's

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<sup>103</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'The Fall', in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 43- 60 (p. 57).

<sup>104</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, 'First Week: The First Exercise', in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915). pp. 23-76 (p. 26).

change. The non-believing body and soul of the poet have stayed together in perpetual agony of an active but immobile ‘final’ thought (*PPL*, p. 15), which is the absence of a spiritual muse that lies heavy with its creative inhibition. Similar to the continuous waiting of Bishop’s body and soul, Donne’s ‘The Ecstasy’, shows the perseverance of the two lovers: ‘[...] like sepulchral statues lay; | all day, the same our postures were (*Donne*, p. 122).

Interestingly from among St Ignatius’s varied composition of places on subjects of suffering, heaven, hell, and God, Bishop utilises the whole of the fifth exercise on the meditation of hell. In this, ‘the first point will be to see with the eye of the imagination those great fires, and those souls as it were in bodies of fire.’<sup>105</sup> Since her cold thinking likens to the worldly knowledge of sea in ‘At the Fishhouses’, it shares its burning properties of being a ‘transmutation of fire.’ (*PPL*, p. 52). Through this connection, the coldness of the heart suggests Bishop’s burning sensation for her stranded imagination, which restricts the spatiality of her ideas, similar to the experience of confinement felt by sinful souls burning in hell. Moreover, the cold and confined atmosphere and the downward movement of the poem into the recesses of the ‘cold heart’ evokes the ‘sense of smell’ of the burning and suffocating experience of the poet, demonstrating St Ignatius’s third point on hell.<sup>106</sup> However, the poem does not convey such feelings outright, rather showing a saintly poise and restraint on emotional outburst.

Like saints, Bishop shows perseverance in silently bearing the weight of her heavy thoughts in her private hell. Yet, she is unable to maintain this status quo any further as her thought becomes thorns, as in Herbert’s ‘Love Unknown’, and prick her bed of physical and mental repose, ‘prodding’ her ‘from desperate sleep’ (*PPL*, p. 15). In St Ignatius’s meditation on Hell, his second step is ‘to hear with the ears lamentations, howlings, cries, blasphemies against Christ, our Lord and against His saints’.<sup>107</sup> In Bishop’s anguished ‘region of the heart’, there is a sense of awe on hearing the ‘startling’ motion and ‘explosion’ (*PPL*, p. 15), which like Herbert’s heart, intends to ‘quicken, what was grown too dull’ (*Herbert*, p. 130). Bishop’s wonder for these unexpected sounds familiarise her with her inner protest for change and force her to bring feelings to her static thought.

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<sup>105</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, ‘First Week: The Fifth Exercise’, in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby, S. J. (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 40).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



I raised my head. A slight young weed  
 Had pushed up through the heart and its  
 Green head was nodding on the breast.  
 (All this was in the dark.)  
 It grew an inch like a blade of grass;  
 Next, one leaf shot out of its side  
 A twisting, waving flag, and then  
 Two leaves moved like a semaphore.  
 The stem grew thick. The nervous roots  
 Reached to each side; the graceful head  
 Changed its position mysteriously,  
 Since there was neither sun nor moon  
 To catch its young attention.

(*PPL*, p. 16)

The thought becomes a thorn when the heart grows a weed from within, which ‘nods’ on Bishop’s breast as if acknowledging her suffering and perseverance during her mental labour of intense meditation of her creative faculties. In Herbert’s ‘Love Unknown’ the Lord inflicts the poet with thorns to motion his ‘dull’ (*Herbert*, p. 130) heart toward him. In Bishop’s case, her poetic thought itself becomes a thorn, a ‘green’ weed (*PPL*, 16) that breaks up the silence and coldness of the place, which hindered Bishop’s creativity.

The weed does appear to be a miraculous figure, which unfolds itself like an unwanted affliction, a tempting thorn and a sinful waywardness to steer her passive creative abilities. The weed nods on Bishop’s breast as if to acknowledge her inner poetic inhibitions, the sense of delay and restraint of thought, and invokes her defiant muse to come to her rescue. However, the place is all ‘black’ (*PPL*, p.16), making the region of the heart or grave and the poetic space a mysterious and sinister place, as the weed takes its shape quickly. Unlike the saintly figures in Baroque art or in St Ignatius’s meditations, the weed’s shady presence and its inability to illumine its place around makes it a non-spiritual entity. Its surprising growth upon Bishop’s heart ‘like a blade of grass’ where ‘one leaf shot out’ like ‘a twisting, waving flag’, and subsequently ‘two leaves moved like a semaphore’ (*PPL*, p. 16) anticipates a non-devotional miracle, which suddenly motions Bishop’s ‘final thought’ in her surroundings.

The weed is not just a plant, but also a potent symbol generating coded meanings for Bishop. In generating a visual message, the weed acts as a metaphor for creativity, a messenger lending inspirational language to dive through her poetic

challenges. However, the weed is a creative muse that is the diametrically opposite of a religious saint.

The weed shows Bishop's progression in her meditative exercises. According to the fifth point in the meditation on hell, the exercitant should 'feel with the sense of touch how those fires do touch and burn souls.'<sup>108</sup> Bishop undergoes this painful sensory experience of being ignited by her non-believing creative muse as she records the thickness of the weed's 'stem', the nervousness of its 'roots' (*PPL*, p.16) and lack of warmth as it pushes up from her heart.

Bishop's weed appears in many of her poems such as 'Exercises', 'The Fish', 'Songs for a Colored Singer'. Her weed is productive but in a clever and wily way. In 'Songs for a Colored Singer' the weed takes root in 'black seeds' and grows 'faster' from the 'conspiring root' like a 'conspiring flower or fruit', which is a 'face in 'a dark and dreary place' (*PPL*, p. 39). Such a weed corresponds to the weed in 'The Weed', which grows in the dark place and its 'twisting, waving' (*PPL*, p. 16) body brings to mind the serpent and its hellish abode. Bishop seems to be inclined toward the serpent's temptations to transform her earthly thought and space into a marvellous space of dream and reality, or into earthly and ethereal wonders. 'In Prison', Bishop describes her perception of hell as a 'low place of marsh-grass a crude artificial green', where she suffered from 'extreme dizziness' (*PPL*, p. 588). 'The Weed' describes a similar low-lying place where the poet remains in a dormant state until her creative muse – the 'green' weed (*PPL*, p.15) – comes as a saviour to mark out her sinful creativity in hell.

Interestingly, Bishop's perception of hell is appealing to her because its green satanic host stimulates her imagination through its wily demeanour. This is why the weed keeps on appearing in Bishop's poetry. In 'The Riverman' there is 'a tall, beautiful serpent | with big eyes green' (*PPL*, p. 86). In 'Brazil, January 1502' the sinful moss resembles the green weed as 'still in the foreground there is Sin, threatened from 'underneath by moss | in lovely hell-green flames' (*PPL*, p. 73). Bishop's concept of hell is intermingled with heaven. For her, both are one and the same place where sinful souls reside. This is visible in Bishop's memoir 'In the Village', where she describes the 'green books' of biblical stories as 'unlovely'

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<sup>108</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, 'First Week: The Fifth Exercise', in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 41).

(*PPL*, p. 99). Further, in her story ‘Baptism’, Lucy sees God as sitting on the Kitchen stove with his ‘feet’ ‘in hell’ (*PPL*, p. 571). Therefore, heaven and hell are interchangeable places – they can be equally inflammable and cold.

Bishop’s approach to heaven and hell makes them contrary states, which coexist with fragile boundaries, exhibiting an enlarged sinfulness inimical to human nature. In this respect, Bishop’s weed contrasts to Donne’s and Herbert’s image of the weed. In their poetry, weed is a symbol of spiritual and creative barrenness due to worldly desires and sinfulness. In Donne’s ‘Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary’ a connection is drawn between sin and the wily weed:

so many weedless paradises be,  
which of themselves produce no venomous sins  
except some foreign serpent bring it in.

(*Donne*, p. 209)

The weed, like the serpent, becomes an intruder and cultivates agnosticism and immorality in Donne. In ‘To Mr. Rowland Woodward’ Donne laments his poetic barrenness due to the growing of the thorny weeds in his fertile space of creativity:

so affects my Muse, now a chaste fallowness  
How love-song weeds, and satiric thorns are grown  
where seed of better Arts, were early sown.

(*Donne*, p. 51)

Similarly, in ‘Sacrifice’ Herbert’s weed describes the sinful state of man, which makes his character weak: ‘[...] man’s scepters are as frail as reeds,| and thorny all their crowns, bloodie their weeds.’ In ‘Employment I’, Herbert mourns his distance from God’s bounties due to being tempted by the materialistic weed:

I am no link of thy chain  
But all my company is a weed  
Lord place me in thy consort; give one strain  
to my poor reed.

(*Herbert*, p. 57)

According to St Ignatius of Loyola’s contemplation on sins, ‘the composition will be to see with the sight of the imagination and consider that my soul is imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole compound self [...] in

banishment among brute animals.’<sup>109</sup> In this respect, the image of the weed shows Bishop’s soul trapped in her sinful body, which thrives in the company of the serpentine weed, in a state of exile in the grave. This serpent represents Bishop’s waywardness: the ‘two leaves’ of the weed divide her heart with creative defiance and motion her mind in varied directions. However, Bishop seems to be at ease in the company of the serpent, as she is engrossed in its physicality rather than its moral implications. Even ‘The Prodigal’ shows Bishop’s attraction to sin and suffering rather than redemption. Cheryl Walker supports my reading when she highlights that

Key West was full of sinners, and that was one of the reasons that Elizabeth Bishop felt so comfortable there. People didn’t seem to take much notice, for example, if one got drunk or in some other way stepped out of line, by failing to pay bills, say, or to meet appointments.<sup>110</sup>

The weed-like serpent finally presents a miracle of creative energies by immersing Bishop and itself in the ‘flood of water’, which divides Bishop’s heart and produces two streams, dissimilar to the four streams in Adam and Eve’s heaven that Bishop remembers in ‘Santarem’ (*PPL*, p. 175). The piercing of heart gives the sensation of the painful process of creativity oozing out. In doing so, she follows St Ignatius’s fourth exercise on Hell, where the exercitant is asked ‘to taste with the sense of taste bitter things, [...] and the worm of conscience.’<sup>111</sup> Bishop absorbs a ‘few drops’ of guilt – the unholy water coming from her divided heart – as they fell ‘upon her face’ (*PPL*, p. 16) and eyes. However, in tasting this miracle she tastes the ‘worm’ of complacency instead of St Ignatius’s ‘conscience’, as she seems to be overwhelmed with the motion that the ‘racing’ images have brought to her imagination and her dwelling place.

The water gushes out sidewise and ‘deflected’ leaving the weed’s leaves ‘fringed with heavy drops’ (*PPL*, p.16). The waywardness of the stream highlights the asymmetrical motion in the Baroque space. However, here due to the presence of the ‘twisting, waving’ weed, which acts more like a serpent, the sense of ‘deflected’ (*PPL*, p. 16) space indicates the cunning nature of the non-spiritual miracle. The

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<sup>109</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, ‘First Week: The First Exercise’, in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76 (p. 23).

<sup>110</sup> Cheryl Walker, ‘The Fall’, in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 43- 60 (p. 48).

<sup>111</sup> St Ignatius Loyola, ‘First Week: The Fifth Exercise’, in *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, trans. by Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd, 1915), pp. 23-76, (p. 41).

weed celebrates the Baroque contrariness of Bishop's imagination by embellishing its leaves with 'heavy drops' (*PPL*, p. 16) of vision, which drift in varied directions through the divided stream of water. The contrariness of this non-spiritual miracle can be seen in conjunction with the 'green leaves' 'edged with bird droppings', 'like illumination in silver' in the 'Seascape', which Bishop notes 'does look like heaven' and 'heaven is not like this' (*PPL*, p. 31). Considering this, Bishop overlaps heaven and hell because she considers heaven to be like hell in exhibiting 'blackness and strong glare' (*PPL*, p. 32). This is why, in 'The Weed', the streams that illuminate small scenes do not overcome the darkness of the place. Rather, they create a drama of glare and darkness because the illuminated scenes are produced by the contrary forces, where Bishop's heart is divided rather than kept intact, as in Herbert's 'Love Unknown.' In this sense, the miracle of 'half-clear streams' (*PPL*, p. 16) shows Bishop's incomplete and vague perception of things, which inculcate a sense of doubt in her in the absence of God. She reaffirms her habit of agnosticism and the indeterminate perception of her visual field by questioning her weed-like muse at the culmination of her poem:

The weed stood in the severed heart.  
 "What are you doing there?" I asked.  
 It lifted its head all dripping wet  
 (with my own thoughts?)  
 and answered then: "I grow," it said,  
 "but to divide your heart again."

(*PPL*, p. 16)

Through the sudden appearance of the weed and its improvisation of motion, Bishop's divided heart demonstrates 'interest and wonder' for the saints' 'dreams and all their valiant prayers'.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, in spatialising the contrariness of her miraculous visions, Bishop practises St Ignatius's exercises to make poetry a Baroque space of innovation and spontaneity of ideas. With this spirit, she comes close to Virgil Thomson's remark on the masque opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, a collaborative effort with Gertrude Stein:

Why did Gertrude Stein and I decided to write an opera about saints?  
 Simply because we viewed a saint's life as related to our own. In all  
 times, the consecrated artist has tended to live surrounded by younger

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<sup>112</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Love and Longing', in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 61- 78 (p. 76).

artists and to guide them into ways of spontaneity. And thus to characterise one's gift is indeed to invite "inspiration" and just possibly, through art, make "miracles".<sup>113</sup>

The opera included St Ignatius Loyola's character as well. Bishop saw this performance (*OA*, p. 19) and made a reference to Gertrude Stein with her notes on St Ignatius's exercises: "'Composition", influenced Gertrude Stein, with her love of "Saints"?'<sup>114</sup> This implies that Bishop was inspired by St Ignatius because, like Gertrude Stein, she believed in the saintly qualities of the artist who can compose miraculous art works, as inspirational as the miracles of saints.

Like Stein's understanding of spiritual composition, Bishop's 'The Weed' exercises the modern poet's expression of art as a miraculous process of innovation and improvisation. In 'The Weed' Bishop shows her perseverance and the forbearance of the saints in order to meditate on their imaginative powers and takes pains to produce new art and inspire many more lives.

In her essay on 'Composition as Explanation', Stein is of the view that 'what is seen' 'makes a composition'. Since 'each generation has something different at which they are looking', 'composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations.'<sup>115</sup> In this respect, it is Bishop's baroque ways of seeing which give her a different approach to poetry. Bishop's weed expresses her non-linear and 'serpentine line'<sup>116</sup> of baroque perception, which makes her poetry a dramatic space of undulating action, enticing the invisible, the unreal experiences to physical realities around us.

Bishop's association with Herbert's and Donne's response to a Baroque consciousness of infinite space offered her manifold ways of seeing space, both cosmological and in art. Bishop's observations of the unknown expanse of the universe in her poetry makes way for the idea of spatialising the unknown regions of

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<sup>113</sup> Virgil Thomson, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, <<https://operaparallele.org/four-saints-in-three-acts/>> For more details on Thomson's comment about the play see <<https://www.bmop.org/sites/default/files/1049-thomson-bklt-5.pdf>> [accessed 23 March 2016].

<sup>114</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p. 120).

<sup>115</sup> Gertrude Stein, 'Composition as Explanation', in *The Hogarth Essays* (NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company Inc., 1928), pp. 307- 20 (p. 307).

<sup>116</sup> Lomazzo quoted in: Severo Sarduy, 'Baroque cosmology: Kepler', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. Christopher Winks, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 292-315 (p. 297).

imagination, the realms of creativity, where Bishop's striving mind creates wonders of verse form.

Bishop's 'The Weed' describes her poetry as a miraculous space of Baroque art. Unlike the visions represented in Baroque ecclesiastical art, however, Bishop does not create a spiritual place of divine presence and saintly miracles. Her creative muse is a serpentine weed or weed-like serpent, which inspires her to a hellish place of miracles. Unlike Herbert, she wants to make her poetry 'new, tender, quick' (*Herbert*, p. 131) through aesthetic renewal, instead of her tears of repentance. Yet the 'twisting' serpentine line of the 'weed' in 'The Weed' recalls Herbert's curls, and both Herbert's and Donne's delight in the curvaceous design of the heavenly cosmos. But, contrary to Herbert and Donne, Bishop sees heaven and hell as overlapping cosmic extensions. Bishop's poetics improvises her shared interest in the curvilinear patterns of space by using it to express her own poetry as a non-religious or secularised baroque space. In this way, Bishop sees her modern baroque poetry as a place of plural observation and invention, where miracles are performed with language to discover more than one way of approaching life and art. This is why, Chapter two continues to discover Bishop's ways to invent poetry through the surprising play of scales in Baroque art and cosmology.

## Chapter Two

### Expansion and Contraction in the Baroque Space: John Donne and Bishop

The self can be seen to be a small part of an infinite totality of space, which constitutes things both near and far, as well as large and small, such as the earth and the heavens. This chapter introduces seventeenth-century religious saints', artists', poets' and men of science's consciousness of the limitations of the naked eye in beholding these changing scales of reality far beyond them. Early-modern ways of approaching this included using artificial means such as magnifying instruments like lenses, telescope and microscopes. They could also use extended metaphors, as in the poetry of George Herbert and John Donne, which, like scientific instruments, sought objective knowledge of the universe by expanding and contracting it through imaginative conceits.

In Herbert's and Donne's poetry the use of imagery such as tear, compass and map 'transcends the limitations of time and space to contract the world into an eye, or enlarge one second into eternity'.<sup>117</sup> This allows encompassing knowledge of the spatial relationship between heavens and earth. The image of the tear has been discussed often by scholars, especially in terms of the relationship between Herbert and Bishop. This preoccupation with Herbert and Bishop's connection has generally overlooked Donne and Bishop's relationship. However, my focus here is on Donne's metaphysical conceits of love and mapping, which exhibit Baroque spatiality by distorting the scales of love through the variable sizes of objects and cartographic boundaries.

Since Bishop liked Donne's 'love poems particularly' (*Conversations*, p. 23), this chapter sheds some light on the expansion and contraction of love in Donne's poems 'Love's Growth', 'The Flea', and 'The Sun Rising', and their relation to Bishop's approach to love in her poems 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore' and 'The Shampoo'. Moreover, I compare Donne's mapping of his self and his beloved in his metaphorical compass and map, found in his poems 'Hymn to God', 'Elegy 13: Love's Progress' and 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', to the expansion and contraction of Bishop's poetic self and art in her poem 'The Map'.

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<sup>117</sup> Murray Roston, 'The Baroque Vision', in *Milton and the Baroque* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1980), pp.1- 49 (p. 14).



Expansion and contraction, which I identify in Donne in this chapter, were characteristic of seventeenth-century art and science. In Baroque poetry there was a renewed interest in showing awe and wonder at the unmeasurable vastness of space, but there was also a surprising curiosity to respond to the universe's many changing appearances and thwarting of fixed reality. The awareness of being part of the continuity of space, which holds man, earth and the heavens in a reciprocal relationship, also reinforced its uncountable distances. The Baroque artist marvelled at the universe, which gradually reduced perspective of the earth and man to the 'microscopically small' in comparison to the dynamic space of its infinite worlds.<sup>118</sup> It further stretched his mind to play with the scale of the heavens, enabling him to know them in detail, though they otherwise remained unreal and hidden from the human eye in their magnitude. If the earth and human beings could be reduced in scale, so too could other celestial spheres be condensed and stretched in order to see them both closely in detail and at distance, varied in magnitude to other ethereal bodies.

As an example, in the Baroque paintings of Velazquez, Rembrandt and Rubens, the artists' stretching and contracting visions of earthly and eternal life is evidently expressed in their composition of varied sizes of bodies and spaces. Similarly, the effects of light and shadow add to the expanded and contracted vision of spaces in their artworks. For this reason, the *trompe l'oeil* effect was popular in Baroque art and architecture, giving an illusion of expanse in narrow spaces. Therefore, Baroque artworks incorporate artificial or imaginative means of obtaining knowledge of the spatiality of heaven, hell and other temporal and timeless realms of existence.

Earlier Counter-Reformation texts, such as St Teresa of Avila's *The Way of Perfection* (1577) which is 'intensely preoccupied with the minutiae of religious life',<sup>119</sup> realise man and God's relationship through the affinity between the great and small. St Teresa stressed imagining God near us by expanding the human soul to a 'palace [...] fit for so great a Lord.'<sup>120</sup> In doing so, she contracted the image of God's greatness to the human embodiment of a 'palace'. By juxtaposing contrasting

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>119</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Time and Eternity,' in *Elizabeth Bishop and God: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1- 42 (p.19).

<sup>120</sup> St Teresa of Avila, 'Chapter 28', in *The Way of Perfection*, trans. & ed. by E. Allison Peers (NY: Doubleday Image Book, 1964), pp. 87-90 (p.89).

sizes and reducing to the finite the infinite distances between man and God, St Teresa realises perception and feelings for God's manifold dimensions of love condensed to an earthly place: 'How wonderful is that He whose greatness could fill a thousand worlds, and very many more, should confine Himself within so small a space.'<sup>121</sup> Interestingly, Bishop copied various passages from St Teresa and kept her book 'in all climes.'<sup>122</sup>

It is no wonder that optical instruments such as the telescope, microscope, magnifying lens and camera obscura caught the interest of Baroque artists. Early-modern science featured 'mathematical theorization; observation employing high-power instruments; meticulous empirical inquiry – all were intrinsically embedded in the rich tapestries of Baroque.'<sup>123</sup> Galileo Galilei used the telescope for discovering the motion of other celestial bodies around planet Jupiter. The seventeenth-century mathematician Leibniz introduced the asymmetrical geometry of curves as another way of understanding the proximity and distance of the non-homogeneous dimensions of space, in opposition to the linearity of the Cartesian plane. There was a growing interest in making maps; 'like lenses, maps were referred to as glasses to bring objects before the eye.'<sup>124</sup> Dutch Baroque painters, such as Johannes Vermeer, is known for combining the sensuous with the factual in his maps in order 'to capture on a surface a great range of knowledge and information about the world.'<sup>125</sup> Bishop was fond of Vermeer's work, a relationship I return to in the next chapter. However, in this chapter, my focus is on Donne and his manoeuvring of scale as a general characteristic of seventeenth-century Baroque perception in art, poetry and science.

The metaphysical consciousness of the Baroque worldview was not limited to an awareness of new cosmology. Individuals used the Baroque play of scale to spatialise the expansion and contraction of their reciprocal relationship with God or a beloved in physical spaces. In Herbert's and Donne's poetry the contrary spaces expand and contract according to the poets' emotions for their sacred and secular loves. Herbert's poems such as 'Temper I', 'Man' and 'Antiphon I' exhibit man's

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>122</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Time and Eternity,' in *Elizabeth Bishop and God: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1- 42 (p.19).

<sup>123</sup> Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris, 'Baroque Modes and the Production of Knowledge', in *Science in the Age of Baroque*, ed. by Ofer Gal and Raz Chen-Morris, International Archives of the History of Ideas, 208 (Dordrecht: Springer Science and Business Media, 2013), pp. 1 - 11 (p. 3).

<sup>124</sup> Svetlana Alpers, 'The Mapping Impulse of Dutch Art', in *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*, ed. by David Woodward (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 51- 96 (p. 67).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

relationship to God through the expanding and contracting dimensions between earth and heaven, and soul and God. For instance, in ‘Temper I’ he realises being distanced from God: ‘the world’s too little for thy tent, | a grave too big for me’ (*Herbert*, p. 55). He wishes to make modifications within his soul and in the place it exists – namely, the bounds of earth. Therefore, he beseeches God to ‘stretch or contract me thy poore debter’ so that his soul can be purified, and his perceptual distances adjusted to ‘make one place ev’ry where’ (*Herbert*, p. 55). In this way, Herbert seeks unification with God. The big and small, grand and trivial, and familiar and strange dimensions of experience are brought into proximity in sensory interaction within the space of the poem. In contrast, Donne’s secular love in ‘The Good-Morrow’ ‘[...] makes one little room, an everywhere’ (*Donne*, p. 90) in order to stretch the expanse of emotions for each other. In ‘The Canonization’, Donne expands his domain of love by contracting the bounds of outer spaces in his beloved’s eyes. He makes his beloved aware of these efforts of love: ‘who did the whole world’s soul contract, and drove | into the glasses of your eyes’ (*Donne*, p. 96).

Like Herbert and Donne, Bishop was intrigued by infinity, as she told Marianne Moore in one of her letters: ‘every day I make another attempt at mastering infinity. I get it for two minutes and then it slides as if on ice’ (*OA*, p. 101). Through the act of comparing the finite against the infinite, she makes it possible to count infinity alongside finite things: the act of counting the finite ensures that infinity is a continuation of the finite. Keeping this in mind, it makes small and large kin. As a geographer in ‘Crusoe in England’, Bishop writes of facts as they appear in relation to her ‘giant size: ‘miserable, small volcanoes I could climb’ (*PPL*, p. 152) amidst the ‘islands spawning islands’ | ‘like frog’s eggs turning polliwogs| of islands [...]’ (*PPL*, p. 155). In ‘Summer’s Dream’ she qualifies the relationship between the aging mother and his son through their contrasting scales of sizes and attitudes: the ‘dwarf’ (*PPL*, p. 47) mother is more ‘cheerful’ than his ‘grumbling’ giant son (*PPL*, p. 48).

In early 1930s, Bishop’s attentiveness to scales made her read Newton’s *Optiks*<sup>126</sup> and she took interest in grinding binocular lenses at the Navy’s optical shop in Key West. She told Moore in a letter that ‘of course I could spend a lot of

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<sup>126</sup> Sarah Riggs, ‘Binocular Optics: Elizabeth Bishop’, in *Word Sightings: Poetry and Visual Media in Stevens, Bishop and O’Hara* (NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 39-76 (p. 45).

time – had to – watching everything through magnificent optical instruments of every kind, including periscopes.’<sup>127</sup> This is why her poems expand and contract terrestrial and extraterrestrial objects and spaces by seeing them as equally near and far, both close to and estranged from herself. In ‘Squatter’s Children’ the ‘speck-like girl and boy’ are near a ‘speck-like house’ where the sun displays a play of ‘gigantic waves of light and shade’ (*PPL*, p. 76). Bishop believes that ‘the world has wonderful details if you can get it just a little closer than usual.’<sup>128</sup> In the ‘Sandpiper’ she wishes to see the ‘minute and vast and clear’ world in ‘millions of grains’ of sand between her toes (*PPL*, p. 125-126). Bishop’s poems look for ways to stretch her limitations of vision and see distant spaces and things from close up, from varied viewpoints or in relation to other spaces and things that exist within the same environment. In this manner, Bishop translates her understanding of all those spaces and things, which exist beyond her vision or are occluded from her sight.

Bishop’s imaginative eye frequently makes use of big and small spaces and objects in order to make her poems consist of details of facts measured against a vast panorama. Sarah Riggs supports my observation of Bishop, noting that ‘accounts of binoculars, microscopes, stereoscopes [...] optical instruments are scattered throughout her letters’.<sup>129</sup> To attain proximity to the infinitude of the universe, I will now show how Bishop shares Donne’s play with the scales of things and spaces by adjusting and readjusting them to be alternately near and far in her vision.

### **Expansion and Contraction of Love in Donne and Bishop**

In Donne’s love poems there is a celebration of ‘amalgamating disparate experiences’ of his profound love by expanding the scope of the earth to the universe, and simultaneously contracting the universe within the space of the lovers. T. S. Eliot described this unified sensibility as a metaphysical quality of ‘devour[ing]

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<sup>127</sup> Brett Millier, ‘NORTH & SOUTH: 1941-1946’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 161-85 (p. 171).

<sup>128</sup> Brett Millier, ‘AT WHAT ... COST IN NERVOUS ENERGY? 1961-1963’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 319-50 (p. 335).

<sup>129</sup> Sarah Riggs, ‘Binocular Optics: Elizabeth Bishop’, in *Word Sightings: Poetry and Visual Media in Stevens, Bishop and O’Hara* (NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 39-76 (p. 44).

any kind of experience',<sup>130</sup> which Mario Praz sums up as 'a poetry of the inclusion of all realities [...] which seem to fit Baroque art well.'<sup>131</sup>

Donne's method of spatialising his love in microscopic dimensions that grow out to infinite spaces becomes evident in his understanding of the cosmic design holding both magnificent and miniature elements in harmonious relationship. His earthly measure of love is parallel to the finitely infinite set of cosmic bodies spatialised in '10. Meditation': 'This is Nature's nest of Boxes: The Heavens containe the Earth, the Earth, Cities; Cities, Men. And all these are Concentricue.'<sup>132</sup> There is a reciprocal relationship between lover and beloved, container and contained, which grows through contraction and expansion of these curvaceous boundaries. Donne's love energises the spaces surrounding him through his changing feelings for his beloved. His love multiplies through repetition of emotions, bringing variation to his feelings. Through the varied sizes of concentric circles, Donne distorts the physical details of his love motioning from big to small, or small to other different sizes of spaces. In this way, his love for his beloved remains his intense focus within the expansive bounds of the universe. Moreover, Donne does not wish to disperse his love by dividing it into different spaces.

In 'Love's Growth' Donne aims to materialise and expand his ephemeral and abstract emotions of love within a geography of earthly seasons and cosmic weathers that follow natural laws of expansion:

Love by the Spring is grown  
As, in the firmament,  
Stars by the sun are not enlarged, but shown  
[...]  
If, as in water more circles be  
Produced by one, love such additions take,  
Those like so many spheres, but one heaven make.

(Donne, p. 109)

Donne illuminates the expansive dimensions of his love in the conducive environment of warmth and attention from his beloved. His love's growth is felt like blossoming in the season of spring. It grows through repeated feelings, which

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<sup>130</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951) pp. 281-291 (p. 287).

<sup>131</sup> Mario Praz, 'Baroque in England', *Modern Philology*, 61 (1964) 169-72 (p. 173) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/434669>> [accessed 25 June 2015].

<sup>132</sup> John Donne, '10. Meditation', in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. by John Sparrow (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923), pp. 54-56 (p. 54).

generate spatial variations. Blossoming like the spring growth, his love is like the sun shedding light on the multitude of stars within the cosmic space. The comparison of the finite growth of love within the bounds of the poet's body and its infinite growth in the multitude of stars within heaven equalises them as contracting and expanding boundaries. The warmth of sun in spring shines out the winter of his love. In Baroque art 'light frequently connotes limitless space'<sup>133</sup>, which Donne acknowledges when he writes 'my love was infinite, if spring make it more.' Donne underlines the eminence of love through the use of *chiaroscuro*, a form of illumination, through the play of light and dark, whose treatment by Baroque artists such as Rembrandt was especially pronounced. The technique throws light on the details of love by giving it depth and expanse, as a three-dimensional object in proximity in space, against its distanced and shaded presence in winter. This is why, Donne asserts that 'no winter shall abate the spring's increase.'

Furthermore, Donne gives exactitude to the spatiality of love within himself. He defines its fluid and circular form, where constant repetition and multiplication likens to the infinite increase of celestial spheres in 'one heaven'. The invisible and transient love within mortal boundaries is equally visible and permanently increasing through the plurality of circular spheres within the large, but finite outer boundaries of 'one heaven'. (*Donne*, p. 109). Donne's love equally expands through its smaller and larger containments; it remains the same love whether looked through a microscope or a telescope. His love experiences Baroque abundance of space in its relationship between cartographic and cosmographic boundaries. There is no hierarchy of love, but rather fluid positions which all transcend and retreat to the earthly sphere.

Like the concentric circles in Donne's 'Love's Growth', Bishop's 'The Shampoo' expresses her surprise at experiencing the cosmography of her love for her Brazilian friend, Lota de Macedo Soares. The poem written just after a few months of intimacy with Lota in Brazil, radiates Bishop's love for her in 'concentric shocks' 'around the moon' (*PPL*, p. 66). In her notes to her third draft of 'The Shampoo', Bishop writes 'as though eternity were what two humans bargained with to achieve their moment of connection.'<sup>134</sup> The poem sees this moment of

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<sup>133</sup> John Rupert Martin, 'Light', in *Baroque* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 223-48 (p. 231).

<sup>134</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Time and Eternity', in *Elizabeth Bishop and God: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-42 (p. 33).

connection between two points of eternity by juxtaposing variable scales of the growing love between them, as Bishop records a night in Brazil: ‘Lota woke me up in the middle of the night to go out and look at the stars because they had never looked so close before – close and warm, apparently touching our hair – and never so many -.’<sup>135</sup>

The incident shows its connection to the creation of ‘The Shampoo’ as Bishop’s sensuous experience of the descent, warmth and abundance of the star-studded sky enables her to visualise her love’s ascent in ‘The Shampoo’.

As in ‘Invitation to Marianne Moore’ where Bishop renovates New York city to relocate her spatial relationship with Moore, here she repositions her growing love for Lota within the aging expanse of her ‘gray’ hair (*PPL*, p. 66). It gives her a hint of eternity, expanding her earthly love to heavenly love, spatialising it as modest and yet grand in its constant repetition through space and time. Bishop spatialises her love in the curvaceous growth of Lota’s grey hair, which recall her maid, Mrs. Almayda’s ‘permanent wave’, suggesting Bishop ‘baroque abandon’ (*OA*, p. 85). Similarly, the Baroque curves in Lota’s hair enables the two friends to abandon their earthly bounds and drift into outer space.

For Donne, the domain of love is interchangeably contractible and expandable because it possesses the same properties, of timeless growth of love, whether seen from near or distant quarters. Bishop sees her love spatialised in the larger scheme of creation as a relationship between contraries: the temporal and the timeless, or earthly and cosmic spaces. As we journey through time, it changes the form and space of existence. In this way, her orbits of love are not timeless or beyond decay, as Donne sees the constancy of love in the repetition of the variable motion of heavenly orbits. His love is shown as a relationship of similitude between the contracting spaces of earth and the expanding spheres of heaven. ‘The Shampoo’ presents this spatial and temporal expansion of Bishop’s changing love through Lota’s aging process. Bishop’s love cannot be constant as it does not hint at permanence through its transcendence. Lota’s aging hair shows Bishop’s love for her is changing in shape and size, as it expands to other spaces and times.

In 1952, the year she wrote this poem, she told her friend and painter, Loren MacIver about feeling ‘nice and relaxing in Brazil where ‘no one knows quite what

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<sup>135</sup> Brett Millier, ‘BRAZIL: 1951-1952’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 236-51 (p. 248).

season it is, quite what date or hour it is' (*OA*, p. 232). This timeless change of Brazilian life is visible in her poetic desire to see her fleeting love outside the realms of time and in an imperishable space. 'The Shampoo' is a transcendental experience of Bishop's awareness of the temporality of her love through its metaphorical journey in time and space:

The still explosions on the rocks,  
 The lichens, grow  
 By spreading, gray, concentric shocks.  
 They have arranged  
 To meet the rings around the moon, although  
 Within our memories they have not changed.

(*PPL*, p. 66)

Bishop begins with the setting of the pool of a stream behind Lota's house in Petrópolis<sup>136</sup> where the 'still explosions' of lichens on the rocks capture the constant, and therefore, temporally unnoticed increase of Bishop's emotions in her relationship with Lota. The lichens thrive in contact with the damp rock, as in the poem Bishop's love feeds on her intimacy with her beloved through the act of shampooing her. The rock recalls the aging lady in Bishop's 'Faustina, or Rock Roses', whose passing life is suggested by the wilted rock roses. In 'The Shampoo', the rock can be taken as symbolic of Lota. Just like the poet in 'Faustina, or Rock Roses' is surprised by the

rust-perforated roses  
 and wonders oh, whence come  
 all the petals.

(*PPL*, p. 57)

Bishop's outburst of emotions for Lota's aging indicates her marvel at the change in the form of lichens that 'grow by spreading, gray, concentric shocks', which in their 'memories' 'have not changed' (*PPL*, p. 66). Bishop suddenly looks at the details of her experience of love for Lota, which appear as a contrary reality for her. As in 'The Armadillo' the 'illegal fire-balloons', sent up as a ritual on St John's Day, enlarge Bishop's secular imagination through their ascendancy in the sky and make it 'hard | to tell them from the stars – Venus going down, or Mars' (*PPL*, p.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.



83), Bishop's mundane growth of love as lichens takes on a cosmic scale in the act of shampooing.

Since lichens grow from their contact with plants lacking vigour, Bishop's sphere of love expands with the natural aging process of Lota's hair. Just as the lichens outgrow the earthly size, Bishop takes a telescopic look at Lota's shampoo-laden hair, which appears to be greater in length and expanding outwards in 'concentric' circles similar to the celestial bodies that circle around the moon. However, unlike Donne's blooming circles of love, these 'concentric' (*PPL*, p.66) circles of hair show various stages of Bishop and Lota's aging love.

The variable circles of her beloved's hair drenched with shampoo construct a constellation of emotions, which like the 'mammoth letter' in Bishop's unpublished poem 'Dream – ', take on an uncanny appearance, getting 'bigger & bigger' (*PPL*, p. 214) in size and space. Travelling in time, Bishop's love moves beyond its contracted terrestrial space and magnifies to cosmic bounds. In doing so, Bishop's love verse shares Wallace Stevens's description of 'cosmic poetry', which 'makes us realise in the same way in which an escape from all our limitations would make us realise that we are creatures, not of a part, which is our everyday limitation, but of a whole'.<sup>137</sup> Here, Bishop and Lota's love, experienced as parts, has grown to meet its whole in the grand scheme of creation. However, this journey from parts to 'whole' is not about substituting one space or part for the 'whole' larger space, but a steady change in the love as it grows to unite with its greater counterpart in outer nature. Bishop's love points beyond itself and increases its volume through the varied proportions of an ever-growing cosmic space.

In 'Love's Growth', Donne's cosmic circles are interchangeable due to the reciprocity between contracted and expanded spheres in earthly or heavenly space, as they equally share the same space and centre of a galaxy. In contrast, Lota's circling hair indicate natural change and transformation of mortal love, which is irreversible and can only march ahead in time and space. Therefore, her love is not a timeless centre, as it changes its motion and form with its advancement in space and time. Donne's love is a distortion of scales; Bishop's love is a decentring of its scales from smaller to greater motions in space: love transforms Lota's grey hair to grey 'concentric' circles of lichens, which expand to orbits 'around the moon'; love

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<sup>137</sup> Wallace Stevens, 'A Collect of Philosophy', in *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose* (NY: The Library of America, 1997), pp. 850-67 (p. 856).

deviates from its path like the ‘shooting stars’ falling in different directions, which Bishop then tries to contain in her earthly sphere-like basin, which is aged, but ‘shiny’ ‘like the moon’ (*PPL*, p. 66)

Life is proliferated with aging processes, which bring changes to both sizes and shapes. Although aging literally shrinks the human body, Bishop grows and expands Lota’s grey hair to see the details of this ‘unnoticed’ (*PPL*, p. 66) aging of their love in a space of timelessness and perpetually present.

Since the grey hair has curvaceously grown through constant repetition of the cycle of life, it stretches Bishop and Lota’s domain of love to the ‘grey’ space of future in her unpublished poem ‘Once on a hill I met a man’, where life ‘will never end’ (*PPL*, pp. 205- 206). Therefore, ‘the heavens will attend’ on them. Time and space succumb to the ‘precipitate and pragmatistical’ (*PPL*, p. 66) nature of Lota, whose aging marks the hastening of life and love for Bishop. The grey hair is like ‘shooting stars’ in Lota’s ‘black hair’, and reciprocates Bishop’s love as they advance in age, time and space.

The shooting stars in your black hair  
 In bright formation  
 Are flocking where,  
 So straight so soon?  
 – Come, let me wash it in this big tin basin,  
 – Battered and shiny like the moon.

(*PPL*, p. 66)

Amidst unknown contours of love, Bishop’s keenness for knowing the geometry of her space urges her to question Lota about where her boundaries of grey hair are ‘flocking’. To reassert her earthly space, Bishop initiates a call for Lota to draw near: ‘come, let me wash it in this big tin basin, | battered and shiny like the moon.’ Bishop contracts Lota’s cosmic curls in the relatively small containment of the moon-like earthly basin to preserve the abandoning growth of their love. Lota’s grey hair is compressed, and their love made temporal within the bounds of the earthly moon-like sphere. Although the spatiality of the spherical basin suggests aging like Lota, it still gleams with the mortality of life.

Bishop and Lota become intimate in the act of washing their shampoo-laden hair within the enlarged space of cosmic life, where their relationship observes the expanse of timelessness and ever-lasting bounds of change and growth. The spherical moon becomes Walt Whitman’s ‘Kosmos’: ‘the past, the future, dwelling

there, like space, inseparable together.’<sup>138</sup> Love, as in Donne, is spatialised in physical spaces by an expanding and contracting the knowledge of love. However, there is no desire for Donne’s eternal love. Nevertheless, in line with Donne, Bishop’s love prefers the small earthly spaces instead of its cosmic bounds, yet celebrates the mortal and fleeting nature of love compared to Donne’s immortal love.

In Donne, the Baroque poem becomes a heterogeneous space of changing dimensions of experiences of love exhibited through the metaphoric relationship of near and far, and large and small spaces. Sometimes love is further condensed through telescoped images such as the ‘fly’ in ‘The Canonization’ and the ‘flea’ in ‘The Flea’. According to Toshihiko Kawasaki, Donne’s ‘microcosm and macrocosm not only correspond to each other as two entities and symbolically reflect each other, but also [...] they represent a definite system of relative values: the small world is more valuable than the larger.’<sup>139</sup>

In ‘The Flea,’ , Donne expresses his erotic love in physical dimensions, with the flea a metaphor for his spatial intimacy with his beloved. The flea serves as a metaphor for the consummation of love in a microcosm. The body represents the cosmic plurality spatialising Donne’s and his beloved’s love in the physical space of a minute creature.

The flea had bitten the lovers and its body now becomes their unified space of love: ‘It suck’d me first, and now sucks thee, | and in this flea our two bloods mingled bee’ for union: ‘we’re met | and cloysterd in this living walls of jet’ (*Donne*, p. 89). The union is preserved within boundaries that shrinks their love to a microcosm and reduces the distances between the lovers. As the emotions expands so does the boundaries of their space: ‘this flea is you and I, and this | our marriage bed, and marriage temple is’ (*Donne*, p. 89). In his verse, Donne constructs the erotic and profound dimensions of his love by opening up the flea’s body into a private room of union and, later, a sacred temple of recognition. In Donne’s poetry, boundaries give meaning to his varied sensuous experiences and keep their relationships intact. One space melts into another space and keeps its boundaries fragile for the proliferation of more spaces according to the changing feelings of the poet.

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<sup>138</sup> Walt Whitman, ‘Kosmos’, in *Leaves of Grass* (London: Siegle, Hill &CO., 1907), pp. 431-32 (p. 432).

<sup>139</sup> Toshihiko Kawasaki, ‘Donne’s Microcosm’, in *Seventeenth-century Imagery: Essay on Uses of Figurative language from Donne to Farquhar*, ed. by Earl Miner (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 25-43 (pp. 26-27).

Donne also explores love in cartographic terms. The self is spatialised among spaces and love is discovered between them. Love is expanded to eternal boundaries, and yet condensed to a micro-space of a room. Donne gives it stability and recognition through contours so that the fleeting moments can be etched in space. Donne's 'The Sun Rising' is a classic example of his expansion and contraction of worldly and cosmic spheres, where grand and little exist in similitude. The poem celebrates varied boundaries of love concretised and stabilised through the immensity of its space encompassing the sphere of the world and the cosmos. Waking up to the shine of the greater sun, which illuminates all things great and small, Donne intensifies his love for his beloved by diminishing the scope of the power and immensity of the sun in relation to himself. Donne experiences his love for his beloved as immense, as the relationship between celestial bodies. To express this more concretely, he sets himself and her beloved against the sun:

Thy beams, so reverend and strong  
 Why shouldst thou think?  
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink  
 [...]  
 If her eyes have not blinded thine,

(*Donne*, p. 93)

By contracting the power of the sun, Donne expands his own domain of love. He increases the immensity and distance of the cosmographic space of the earth to evince a multitudinous love in the invincible space of his earthly sphere, which resides in eternity beyond the laws of motion and time that direct celestial bodies. Here, his love resides and 'love, all alike, no season knows nor climes, | nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time' (*Donne*, p. 93). Even cartographically, Donne expands his scope of love in all places and physical relations on the earth, and contracts these spaces within the boundaries of his own microcosm, his room, where his beloved is 'all states' and he 'all princes' (*Donne*, p. 93):

To warm the world, that's done in warming us  
 Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere,  
 This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

(*Donne*, p. 93)

Donne encompasses the universality and immensity of love through the proximity of varied earthly spaces. Large and small are shrunk through distance and space within

the sphere of the room's cherished holding of love. Love is miniaturised and preserved from the fleeting times and changing motions of the earthly sphere, since it holds all motions and times within it. Therefore, the love bed will always be within the bounds of the shining sun; the sun will be close to this micro earth, attracted to its perpetual centre to nourish Donne's love for his beloved. In 'The Anniversary' Donne expresses his love to be an eternal space, which is beyond the timeliness of change and decay: 'All other things, to their destruction draw, | only our love hath no decay; | This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday' (*Donne*, p. 102).

Like Donne's 'The Sun Rising', where his small room of love attains a grand space in the cosmic design and contracts the celestial attention towards it, Bishop envisions a similar spatial arrangement in her love poem 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore'. Bishop's love for Marianne Moore is situated in their abodes in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The poet expands Moore's physical self to the stature of an ethereal figure, whose creative energies spark motion around her from Brooklyn to Manhattan, recalling the eminence of Donne's beloved whose eyes can blind the sun. Here, Bishop makes Moore the centre of attraction and her small abode in Brooklyn is enlarged to an extraordinary dwelling. In this way, Bishop's love for Moore gives her creative ascendancy over modern poets.

On Bishop's repeated requests, Moore descends from the earthly sky above the city of New York and magnifies the ordinariness of the landscape into an eye-catching scene:

From Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine  
Morning,  
Please come flying.  
In a cloud of fiery pale chemicals,  
Please come flying,  
To the rapid rolling of thousands of small blue drums  
Descending out of the mackerel sky  
Over the glittering grandstand of harbor-water,  
Please come flying.

(*PPL*, p. 63)

As Donne gave his lover supremacy over all things greater in size and beyond the terrestrial space, Bishop does here. She begins the poem by requesting Moore to 'come flying' 'in a cloud of fiery pale chemicals' from her apartment in Brooklyn to Bishop's place in Manhattan. Nevertheless, this invitation is unusual. The arrival is expected to occur not by modern transportation at ground level, but by an aerial

transportation through the clouds, whose method will probably hasten the act of coming. Moore's mobile dwelling place comes close to the depiction of angels and Virgin Mary perched in clouds in religious paintings. In these, this signifies the purity of soul and superiority of the saints and angels among God's creations. Rupert Martin is of the view that 'if the Baroque was the age in which divinity was brought down to Earth, it was also a time when men sought to become divine', as in Bernini's and Rubens's artworks.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Bishop elevates Moore's position to an angelic being by contracting her own self and reducing her space to a diminutive position. Bishop's invitation to Moore to come over from her place in Brooklyn to Manhattan is her desire to envision their relationship through a changing scale, which magnifies the mentor by contracting the spatiality of the disciple. Overwhelmed with Moore's 'manners and morals' (*PPL*, p. 499), Bishop's Manhattan is 'all awash with morals' (*PPL*, p. 64) displaying Moore's sense of restraint and modesty.

Moore's act of flying initiates Baroque motion in Bishop's ideas of love, rather than cementing her love in a place of worship. Like Donne, Bishop's centre of love, Moore's dwelling, is not given the boundaries of a room or the body of a 'flea' from where it keeps stretching out in concentric circles. Bishop keeps her centre of attraction, her beloved Moore, displaced in Brooklyn's skies. Moore is envisioned in a 'cloud of fiery pale chemicals', 'descending out of the mackerel sky', 'over the glittering grandstand of the harbor-water' (*PPL*, p. 63). In this eccentric expansion of her mentor through varied acts of coming, Bishop comes close to Pablo Neruda's baroque poem '*Alberto Rojas Jimenez comes flying*'. Bishop invites Moore in a similar way to Neruda summoning his dead friend in his poem. Neruda's friend also has a 'celestial voice',<sup>141</sup> which the appearance of Moore suggests here. Both Moore and Neruda's friend are ethereal and worldly; raised to a grand stature, but still rooted in their mortal living. Neruda exhibits contrary magnitude of images to show his mansion of love to his dead friend:

Among frightening feathers, among nights,  
Among magnolias, among telegrams,

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<sup>140</sup> John Rupert Martin, 'The Transcendental View of reality and the Allegorical Tradition', in *Baroque* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 119-153 (p. 140).

<sup>141</sup> Pablo Neruda, '*Alberto Rojas Jimenez comes flying*', in *Residence on Earth*, trans. by Donald D. Walsh (London: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1976), pp. 181-87 (p. 181).

Among the South wind and the maritime West,  
 You come flying.  
 [...]
   
 Over delegations and drugstores,  
 Wheels, and lawyers, and warships,  
 And red teeth recently pulled,  
 You come flying.<sup>142</sup>

Such a juxtaposition of contrary and far-fetched spaces and things: ‘magnolias’ and ‘telegrams’, ‘South wind and maritime West’, ‘delegations and drugstores’, and ‘wheels, and lawyers, and warships’ shows, in Severo Sarduy’s words, the ‘dispersion of meaning’ in post-modern baroque poetry (*Sarduy*, p. 276). These varied signifiers expand the signification of the poem and Neruda’s love for his friend. Similar to Neruda’s baroque manner of expanding his emotions through contracting contraries in his poetic space, Bishop presents an eccentric expanse of her baroque feelings in spatialising her love for Moore. Bishop brings together heaven and hell as overlapping spaces by envisioning Moore in a witch-like attire, wearing ‘black shoe’, ‘black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots’ with heavenly ‘angels’ (*PPL*, p. 63) by her side. Moreover, Moore is requested to pervade above the contraries of life: ‘above the accidents, above the malignant movies’, ‘the taxicabs and injustices at large’ (*PPL*, p. 64). In this manner, Bishop stretches the bounds of her feelings by displacing them in varied acts of her request to Moore and in seeing Moore motioning towards her in different ways: while sitting like a ‘fairy godmother’<sup>143</sup> in a cloud, coming like a witch in the company of angels, or like a ‘day-time comet’. Such variety in Bishop’s use of signifiers to express the immensity of her invitation acknowledge her mentor’s rich vocabulary of ‘long unnebulous train of words’ (*PPL*, p. 64) and gives Baroque abundance to her poem.

However, Neruda’s repetition of ‘you come flying’ ‘among’, ‘beneath’, ‘beyond’ and ‘over’<sup>144</sup> places shows a more candid and close relationship between friends than found in Bishop’s invitation of ‘please come flying’. Throughout the poem, Bishop’s choice of ‘please’ and emphasis on coming ‘over’ and ‘above’ places maintains her reverence for her mentor and highlights Moore’s superior

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>143</sup> Jerome Mazarro, ‘The Poetics of Impediment: Elizabeth Bishop’, in *Postmodern American Poetry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 166-98 (p.188).

<sup>144</sup> Pablo Neruda, ‘Alberto Rojas Jimenez comes flying’, in *Residence on Earth*, trans. by Donald D. Walsh (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 1976), pp. 181-187 (p. 181).

position in art above modernity. Bishop's choice of vocabulary shows restraint in the scale of her invitation in comparison to Neruda's.

Bishop establishes a relationship of love and reverence for her mentor through the expansion and contraction of the spatiality of sky, river and land in the New York city. Bishop seems to be looking through her binoculars, which upon very close observation show the grandness of the Brooklyn sky as a distorted reality; her eyes discover a strange look of nature through dissecting its varied spatial patterns. Bishop shares Moore's 'unusual awareness of visual patterns, with something like the fascination of a high-powered camera'.<sup>145</sup> Through her narrowed vision, a 'cloud of fiery pale chemicals' gives an extra-ordinary background of pale highlights to the sky and dwarves its massive sense of blueness into 'thousands of small blue drums', which turn it into 'a mackerel sky' (*PPL*, p. 63) To have such details of perspectives, she liked adjusting her binoculars while observing scenes, such as her demonstration of the plural vision on a seascape where she could see the minutiae in the panoramic view: 'an ancient Brazilian Navy cruiser from bow to stern, and a couple of fishing boats [...] all look wonderful, - the boats have links in every chain, meshes in every fish-net, and the ladies have hairs on their arms.'<sup>146</sup> Similarly, Bishop compresses the distance between her place in Manhattan and Brooklyn by giving us a close-up of the Brooklyn sky.

Moore's abode in the cloud complements her apartment in Brooklyn, which Bishop thought of as 'otherworldly' in her memoir 'Efforts of Affection': 'as if one were living in a diving bell from a different world, let down through the crass atmosphere of the twentieth century'. From this 'diving bell' Bishop 'never left [...] without feeling happier, uplifted, even inspired' (*PPL*, p. 484). In her memoir, Bishop gives reasons for such 'otherworldly' feelings for Moore, as she found her 'talk, like her poetry was quite different from anyone else's in the world' (*PPL*, p. 486). Jonathan Post elucidates Bishop's understanding of Moore being 'different' when he appraises Moore as 'a self-styled baroque virtuoso' who 'consciously inhabited two cultures'.<sup>147</sup> Post sees Moore's inclination towards seventeenth-century literature, such as in her experimentation with prose works of Thomas

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<sup>145</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in *Marianne Moore: Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), p. 5-12. (p. 8).

<sup>146</sup> Brett Millier, 'AT WHAT ...COST IN NERVOUS ENERGY? 1961-1963', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 319-350 (p. 335).

<sup>147</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p.112).



Browne.<sup>148</sup> It is this otherness of Moore, lurking on the boundaries of modernity, to which Bishop remained attracted and in which she valued against the atmosphere of contemporary poetics.

To Bishop, Moore's interests in the poetry of relationships between varied spaces and times 'showed a mind not much like anyone else's' (*PPL*, p. 486). Due to being different, in terms of holding two cultures, Bishop sees Moore similar to her earlier mythic construction of her Key West maid, Mrs Almyda. Bishop's heightened emotions in response to Mrs Almyda's archaic expression of unconditional love for her expand her persona to a 'phoenix', whose resurrection marks Mrs. Almyda's selfless and ever-lasting love. Bishop's notes to her poem on Mrs Almyda, 'Hannah A', more vividly express her maid's never-ending and overwhelming love and care for her:

Mrs. Almyda is a phoenix, a mythological bird of some sort [...] self-sacrificing [...]. Her exclamations of "precious Love!", "Pleasant Hope!" etc., somehow add to the mythological character – no one else uses them, that I've heard. [...] her heavy pats of affection, are like the clumsy Pelican taking off on one of her wonderful, powerful flights – once off the water she soars – Mrs. A's love is like that.<sup>149</sup>

As with Moore in 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore', the phoenix-like maid becomes a metaphor for Bishop's transcendental love for her. Yet, the 'heavy flight' of a pelican contrasts with Moore's lightness, presenting Bishop's baroque experimentation with bringing motion in heavy and light materials in her poetry and prose. However, as Brett Millier's description the maid's relationship to Bishop as 'nurse, advisor, even a mother figure on whom she depended',<sup>150</sup> is similar to what Bishop writes of Moore in her 'Invitation'.

In 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore', the land and river show that everything below is awaiting connection with what lies beyond and above them: at the river the waves and ships are brimming with movement back and forth, up and down, and the modern infrastructure is replete with cordial feelings for Moore. This emphasis on the upward gaze is a characteristic of Baroque religious art, which

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'Notes: "Hannah A"', in *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*, ed. by Alice Quinn (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 257.

<sup>150</sup> Brett Millier, "'Well, WE HAVE COME THIS FAR': 1938-1940", in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 133-60 (p.144).

directs the eye to the space of infinite movement and allows it to wonder at the divine miracles. Here too, the landscape responds to the magical transformation of Moore's poetic space mounting the sky.

Moore's metaphoric expansion compliments the panoramic view of the landscape demonstrating Bishop's unrestrained emotions for her cherished friend and mentor:

Whistles, pennants and smoke are blowing. The ships  
are signaling cordially with multitudes of flags  
rising and falling like birds all over the harbor.  
Enter: two rivers, gracefully bearing  
countless little pellucid jellies  
in cut-glass epergnes dragging with silver chains.  
The flight is safe; the weather is all arranged.  
The waves are running in verses this fine morning.  
Please come flying

(*PPL*, p. 63)

The richness of Moore's flight across Brooklyn constructs New York as a baroque place well-suited for a flamboyant poet. Bishop stretches their love to an ornate expanse, which ensures that the 'weather is all arranged' and the 'waves are running in verses' to give the setting an asymmetrical Baroque arrangement for the two friends to meet. Shifting her focus from the sky, Bishop enlarges the distant view of river and land between Brooklyn and Manhattan, and closely observes their spatiality. The meticulous descriptions of forms seen through narrowing and widening scopes add to the baroque plurality and variety of scales in her poem. Bishop moves her sight from one image to another, one visual pattern to another. The 'glittering grandstand' gives an inspiring view of the harbour and the rivers. The ships' close-up presents a grand welcome 'signalling cordially with multitudes of flags'. Bishop's eye that moves close to the flagged ships is narrowed down in vision by the distance and the ships contract this grandeur into their 'rising and falling like birds' (*PPL*, p. 63). The near and distant views diverge as in Baroque art, presenting the twists and turns of Baroque perception, and translating Bishop's understanding of Moore's 'grammar that suddenly turns and shines | like flocks of sandpipers flying' (*PPL*, p. 64). Looking again from a distance through her binocular lens, Bishop gives meticulous attention to the 'two rivers', which bear 'countless little pellucid jellies' 'in cut-glass epergnes' 'dragging with silver chains' (*PPL*, p. 63). The 'epergnes' becomes a classic example of Baroque exuberance, which brings

heavy materials, here crystallised water, into motion by dragging it with its ‘silver chains’. Through this abundance and variety of motions, Bishop values Moore’s ‘miracles of language and construction’ (*PPL*, p. 472), which give her poetic thought motion and make her experiences vivid.

As Bishop’s emotions ascend to greater heights, she makes repeated requests and relooks at Moore in contrary ways: descending as a witch with a coterie of ‘angels’, and then as ‘light’ and a ‘daytime comet’ that shoots down to Manhattan. Through her contrary perceptions of Moore, as a fairy, a witch and a ‘daytime comet’, Bishop sees her as she sees Moore’s poetry written in a ‘clear’ and ‘dazzling way’ (*PPL*, p. 472):

Come with the pointed toe of each black shoe  
Trailing a sapphire highlight,  
With a black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots,  
With heaven knows how many angels all riding  
On the broad black brim of your hat,  
Please come flying.

(*PPL*, p. 63)

The details of the black accessories of the mentor, such as the ‘pointed’ toes of shoes and ‘broad’ hat, coupled with ‘a black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots’ suggest a witch-like extravagance and the ‘blackness of hell’, as the flies describe it against the ‘gilded beauties of heaven’ in Bishop’s unpublished poem ‘In a Room’ (*PPL*, p. 212). Nevertheless, Bishop’s perception of hell and heaven, as discussed in the previous section, is rather as overlapping spaces. Therefore, Bishop demonstrates her understanding of heaven and hell as the magnitude of the ethereal realm when she enlarges Moore in her black accessories and in the company of ‘many angels’ (*PPL*, p. 63). Moreover, Moore’s coming as a ‘light in the white mackerel sky’, ‘like a daytime comet’ (*PPL*, p. 64), further elucidates Bishop’s crosshatching of heaven and hell.

Although maintaining an ethereal state here, Moore’s black hat anchors her in Bishop’s earthly memory of their first rendezvous when she was wearing a ‘large flat black hat’ (*PPL*, p. 473). Like Donne, Bishop situates herself on the periphery when looking at Moore, lurking on the boundaries of earth and heaven. Bishop elevates Moore’s poetic stature by physically placing her above the mundane life of the city. Moreover, the celestial light that enfolds Moore does not carry the heavenly

illumination of soul, but the pounding of creativity and the multiplicity of her poetic renditions sought by the grimness of New York City. The ‘grim museums’ have contracted into ‘male-bower birds’ and ‘lions’ await outside the public library to enlighten themselves with Moore’s ‘priceless set of vocabularies’ *PPL*, p. 64).

Bishop celebrates the fluidity of Moore’s verse and the vivacity of her character through the expansion and contraction of the physical spaces within her poem. Bishop’s contemporary baroque spatiality lies between Donne’s Baroque pattern of distorting circles of love and Neruda’s post-modern baroque pattern of eccentric signifiers that disperse the centrality of love. Like Donne, she makes her love her centre of attraction, but like Neruda she breaks down the symmetry of that love by decentralising it. Through the transformation of her perceptions of her beloved mentor Bishop sees her love through the plurality of signifiers, rather than fixed in concentric circles.

### **Maps in Donne and Bishop**

Among the metaphysical poets, Donne exhaustively made use of maps and navigational devices such as the compass to champion the spirit of knowledge, signifying his perception of an age of discoveries and land explorations. As mentioned before, since seventeenth-century maps were seen as similar to optical devices, they displayed ‘what was seen in a microscope, something that was also otherwise invisible.’<sup>151</sup> Therefore, Donne’s poetic maps and compasses suggest his adoption of the geographical description of the world to cartographically ascertain his intangible love through spatialisation. In this way, he captures the contraction and expansion of the physical dimensions of himself and his beloved. Moreover, topographically, Donne’s maps describe the characteristics of places through the anatomical mapping of his love, or his bodily ailments, as well as his ideas about life, death, and resurrection.

Like Donne, Bishop remained fond of compass and maps. According to her friend Linda Nemer, while travelling Bishop kept her ‘compass in her pocket book, and when sleeping always oriented her head to the north’,<sup>152</sup> which surfaces in her

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<sup>151</sup> Svetlana Alpers, ‘The Mapping Impulse of Dutch Art’, in *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays*, ed. by David Woodward (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 51- 96 (p. 67).

<sup>152</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, ‘Elizabeth Bishop’s Written Pictures and Painted Poems’, in *In Worcester, Massachusetts: Essays on Elizabeth Bishop from the 1997 Elizabeth Bishop Conference at WPI*, ed. by Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 199), pp. 167-75 (p.168).

writings and notebooks as her memories of Nova Scotia. Seeing herself in changing relationships of distance and proximity to places she considered memorable, Bishop mentioned that ‘I always like to feel exactly where I am geographically all the time on the map.’<sup>153</sup> This feeling of seeing herself in variable relationships, as a place among others on the map, brings Bishop close to Donne. In order to study their interests in maps and make a close reading of Bishop’s ‘The Map’, I will begin with shedding some light on Donne’s mapping of self and his beloved.

Donne’s poems such as ‘Love’s Progress’, ‘Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness’ and ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’ show his interest in the contours of the spaces in the world and demonstrate Donne’s changing emotions about his intangible love, life and death in the expansion and contraction of his bodily self in geographic dimensions. Emotions are expressed in spatial contours, such as spheres and hemispheres, or in longitudes and latitudes, which encompass incongruent places including the poet’s varied moods of love and longing. Donne enlarges his body and his beloved’s, as a three-dimensional map, which navigates his emotions of love in tangible spaces.

In ‘Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness’, Donne applies a two-dimensional map to his three-dimensional body. He expands and contracts the anatomy of his sick body through the topography of the world:

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown  
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my south-west discovery

(*Donne*, p. 332)

The physicians turn into cosmographers to discover the details of Donne’s spherical body, a microcosm among many others in the macrocosm. Seeing physicians’ interest in his topography, Donne spatialises his ailing body for them to discover his feverish state through their ‘south-west discovery’ (*Donne*, p. 332). The contracted space of ‘south-west’ describes Donne’s feverish state, which has absorbed the warmth of sun in the south and is inclining towards west: the place of sun-set of his life. However, Donne is not dejected with this awareness of his shrinking life:

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<sup>153</sup> Brett Millier, ‘The U.S.A SCHOOL OF WRITING: 1934-1935’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 78).

What shall my west hurt me? As west and east  
 In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,  
 So death doth touch the resurrection.

(*Donne*, p. 332)

Donne transcends his feelings of anxiety over his journey towards death by envisioning his movement from west to east, from the space of sunset to the space of dawn, as a journey towards 'resurrection' (*Donne*, p. 332) in the after-life. Like a cosmographer, Donne spatialises his religious beliefs through the cartography of this world, which is not linear, but curvaceous. Since the earth is a three-dimensional sphere, its curves join west with the east, which can only be realised in the contracted space of the two-dimensional maps. In this way, Donne expands the topography of his ailing body outwards to the cartography of the earth, in order to express his journey towards immortal life, from death to rebirth, from earth to heaven, through natural motions of this universe. The curvaceous motions of the earth in the universe suggest that life and death, mortal and immortal life, planets and heavens are coexisting spaces in the unified whole of the cosmos.

Similarly, in 'Elegy 13; Love's Progress', the small space makes way for the big, when the topography of Donne's beloved informs the cartography of the world. Donne spatialises his beloved's physical beauty within the boundaries of spaces on the world map:

The nose like to the first meridian runs  
 not twixt an east and west, but 'twixt two suns  
 It leaves a cheek, a rosy hemisphere,  
 on either side, and then directs us where  
 upon the Islands Fortunate we Fall.

(*Donne*, p. 60)

Donne gives dimensions to his fleeting love for his beloved in giving it the stability of expansive and choicest boundaries. The beloved's nose, as a meridian, marks Donne's non-linear perception of seeing this world. Rather than longitudinally separating the immense distances between east and west, the nose-like meridian gives a latitudinal description of the world in order to bring together the northern and southern hemispheres as close as his beloved's two 'rosy' cheeks on either side of her nose. By compressing cartographic distances of this world, Donne can navigate the details of his 'fortunate' place of love. Moreover, in 'The Good Morrow' Donne further contracts his world of love among other worlds by removing all boundaries

between hemispheres. He self-importantly views himself a world among other worlds, where he and his beloved come closer in an eternal relationship of two hemispheres, but without any divisions of meridians and longitudes: ‘Where can we find two better hemispheres | without sharp North, without declining West?’ (*Donne*, p. 90). Donne sees his self and his beloved immortalized in their eternal space, which will never bear the coldness of north, or see the sun-set in the west.

In ‘Valediction: Forbidden Mourning’ Donne and his beloved are like the two compass legs, which spatialises the contraction and expansion of the concentric circles of their love through Donne’s proximity and distance from his beloved:

As stiff twin compasses are two,  
thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show  
to move, but doth, if th’ other do.  
and though it in the centre sit,  
yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans, and hearkens after it,  
and grows erect, as that comes home.

(*Donne*, p. 121)

The compass celebrates the plurality of these two souls, exhibiting their intimacy as the two joined legs of the compass, which can stretch and contract their relationship, but never break it apart. Donne’s compass represents varied dimensions of his love: it motions in concentric circles when his beloved takes a central position; it forms oblique angles, when Donne moves ‘far’ and it exerts strict verticality when it unites with his beloved. For Donne, love is an expression of the changing dimensions of their two bodies in space, which brings variety in their emotions for each other. Donne spatialises the dimensions of her love through the changing dimensions of his body and his beloved’s in order to make their mortal love last for longer in the physical spaces of this microcosm.

Like Donne’s, Bishop’s poems study the contours of spaces and their positions near and far, however contrary to Donne, Bishop does not explicitly spatialise her bodily self as a cartographer of a personal world among other worlds. Bishop studies spaces to know her spatial distance and closeness, her familiarity and strangeness to them among the larger scheme of things. Bishop neither becomes one with spaces nor determines her position in the microcosmic boundaries like Donne. She surveys spaces to see them in relation to other spaces and her own undefined spatiality among them.

According to Jonathan Ellis, Bishop's 'fusion of maps and bodies' is influenced by Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*.<sup>154</sup> Ellis finds the 'metaphors of touch' between land and sea as 'lovers'' 'gentle play fight' in 'The Map'. In this sense, he views the map as a 'body' which is 'on the threshold of becoming human'.<sup>155</sup> Due to Bishop's sensitivity to details of the shapes and colours of places, Linda Anderson sees the surface of the map folding 'itself into an interior of bodily sensation' (*LOC*, p. 43), exhibiting memories of Bishop's hometown and personal visit to Newfoundland and Labrador. Victoria Harrison further qualifies it as an expression of 'same-sex love.'<sup>156</sup> Critics, so far, have hinted at Bishop's feminine attachment to the map on account of her intimate memories of some places, and assumptions about her lesbianism.

Instead, I intend to look at 'The Map' as a body of the world overlapping with Bishop's body of art and her poetic self beyond female subjectivity, orphanage, lesbianism or familial attachment to places. Unlike Anderson's understanding of 'The Map' as a '(self)-portrait' (*LOC*, p.41), I will explore the poem as Bishop's preference for self-expression over self-projection. 'The Map' presents her as a public poet who wants to be sought, heard and felt primarily through the body of her art and not through spatialising her private self. Therefore, overlooking her female subjectivity, I will discuss Bishop's poetic self by studying 'The Map' as a cartographic expansion of the landscape and space of art and topographical contraction of details of places. In her memoir 'Primer Class' Bishop notes that:

Only the third and fourth grades studied geography. On their side of the room, over the blackboard, were two rolled-up maps, one of Canada and one of the whole world. [...] Miss Morash pulled down one or both of these maps, like window shades. They were on cloth, very limp, with shiny surface, and in pale colors, - tan, pink, yellow, and green - surrounded by the blue that was the ocean. The light coming in from their windows, falling on the glazed, crackly surface, made it hard for me to see them properly from where I sat. On the world map, all the Canada was pink; on the Canadian, the provinces were different colors. I was so taken with the pull-down maps that I wanted to snap them up, and pull them down again, and touch all the countries and provinces with my own hands. [...] I got the general impression that Canada was

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<sup>154</sup> Jonathan Ellis, 'The Sea and Its Shore', in *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 54-82 (p.65).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>156</sup> Victoria Harrison, 'Writing Intimacy', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 42-73 (p. 46).



the same size as the world, which somehow or other fitted into it, or the other way around.

(*PPL*, pp. 407-408)

Bishop's early observation of the two maps in her memoir 'Primer Class' shows her non-linear Baroque way of approaching geography. She shows her child-like fascination for their expanded and contracted view as she wishes to 'snap them up' and 'pull them down.' Seeing through the intervention of light and colours, the maps' 'limp and shiny surface with pale colours' approach facts through the distortion of their scales. She wishes to touch spaces by folding them up to her, or expanding them to see their details. Bishop saw that the map of Canada 'was the same size as the world', as expansive as the map of the world and vice versa. This 'impression' is created by expanding the map of Canada to the size of the world, and simultaneously seeing the map of the world contracted to the size of the map of Canada. This magnification and contraction gives Bishop a sensuous apprehension of both the maps – from a distance and from close quarters. Like her 'Primer Class' maps, Bishop's 'The Map' is a construct of varied and contrary ideas about Bishop's poetic space. She spatialises these ideas through her sensuous connection with folded and expanded spaces.

Donne uses maps to spatialise his bodily self and his beloved's body to identify their bounds of love and actualise their emotions. Bishop uses 'The Map' to celebrate her Baroque sensuousness for making poetry as a physical space of motion, which expands and contracts innumerable spatial connections in relation to Bishop's spatiality without pinning down her position or defining the boundaries of her experience. This is why, in 'The Map' Bishop lends importance to this sensuous experience of the artist over the historian in the process of drawing the map. Her conclusion to the poem, 'more delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors' (*PPL*, p. 3), filters her mode of perception away from the linear vision of the historian who freezes the geography of space and time in history. Such an embodied vision maintains the map as a changing geography of merging and converging spaces, which expand and contract in relation to the poet's sensory appreciation of spaces.

In the very first perception of 'The Map' - 'land lies in water' (*PPL*, p. 3) - 'land' is contracted by the expanse of 'water'. Later, the same land is expanded in size by contracting the sea through the acts of lifting and tugging it. The seashore

towns are compressed in contrast to their names, which expand alongside the relatively large body of water. ‘Norway’s’ dimensions are contracted to the size of a ‘hare.’ Bishop indicates a similar change in dimensions when she says that ‘North’s as near as West’ (*PPL*, p.3). Pursuing knowledge through the lens of imagination, Bishop brings near what is distant with the change of direction and scale of perception, so that her map gives an approximation of territories, rather than knowing their contours and positions in exactitude.

Keeping this in mind, cartographically, Bishop’s ‘The Map’ functions as a spatial form of poetry, which approaches the contours of facts through imaginary diagram. In order to elaborate on this Baroque aspect of Bishop’s poetics, I will approach ‘The Map’ in terms of the post-modern concept of the *rhizome* introduced by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. As a subterranean stem with ‘ramified surface extension’,<sup>157</sup> Deleuze and Guattari describe *rhizome* as a spatial form of writing, which is like ‘a map, not a tracing’ (*DG*, p. 12) The *rhizome* as a map does not reproduce an already existing reality, or make ‘photos or drawings’ (*DG*, p. 25), but rather constructs a diagram ‘entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real’ (*DG*, p. 12). As a diagrammatic form of writing it is made of a multiplicity of lines that signify neither a subject nor an object, but point at ever-evolving non-linear connections and relationships between varied spatial dimensions.

Interestingly, the *rhizome*, as a map, comes close to Bishop’s thought of poetry as a non-linear space, a multi-dimensional construct mapped on a two-dimensional space of the paper: ‘it’s like making a map. Eventually all the pieces fall in place. Occasionally, I lose a scrap and that poem never did get written’ (*Conversations*, p. 3). Due to similarities, Bishop’s understanding of poetry as a diagrammatic form can be studied in relation to the *rhizome*.

Topographically, I see ‘The Map’ as ‘a detailed description [...] of the physical features’<sup>158</sup> of Bishop’s aesthetic disposition in her poetry. Therefore, I will explore this aesthetic appraisal of her poetic perceptions in conjunction with Deleuze’s post-modern baroque concept of the *fold*. According to Deleuze, a *fold* is

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<sup>157</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ‘Introduction: Rhizome’, in *A Thousand plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 3-26 (p. 7) <[http://composingdigitalmedia.org/digitaliteracy/docs/Deleuze\\_guat\\_Rhizome.PDF](http://composingdigitalmedia.org/digitaliteracy/docs/Deleuze_guat_Rhizome.PDF)> [accessed 15 May 2016].

<sup>158</sup> *OED* online <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/topography>> [accessed 12 June 2016].

‘an infinite line of inflection, the curve’.<sup>159</sup> This line of beauty describes the world as ‘an infinite series of curvatures or inflections’ between inner soul or ‘monad’ and outer body, and matter (*D*, p. 64), which touch at ‘infinity of points an infinity of curves’ (*D*, p. 24) Studying ‘The Map’ in relation to Deleuze’s concept of the Baroque *fold*, it demonstrates the folding perception of the seventeenth-century Baroque soul, which delights in the infinite expansion and contraction of spaces in curves. However, my focus here is on Bishop’s contraction of spaces through the fold.

Since the human soul and body, and other natural features of the world, such as wind, water, fire, etc. have varied curvaceous characteristics, I agree with Tom Conley’s view that Deleuze’s *fold* ‘assumes the form of a map’.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, I study ‘The Map’, as Bishop’s aesthetic topology of her spatialised perceptions.

### **‘The Map’: Expanding *Rhizome* and Contracting *Fold***

‘The Map’ was written as a result of Bishop’s looking at a map on Christmas Eve 1934, in her home in New York. In her 1976 interview with J. Bernlef, she generally refers to it being a ‘red map’ which ‘attracted’ her to it because of its ‘[...] names running out from the land into the sea’ (*Conversations*, p. 66). In her letter to Frani Blough, two years before she wrote the poem, she recollects her visit to Newfoundland and Labrador where ‘the streets and houses all fall down toward the water’ (*OA*, p.7). According to Adele Helft, *The Times Survey Atlas of the World* (1922) had a map titled ‘Cartographer of the World 1921’ which had ‘red’ areas and ‘yellow Labrador’, with ‘names going out to sea’ as in Bishop’s ‘The Map’.<sup>161</sup> However, Bishop does not seem to be interested in the identification of the map she came across, as much as she is absorbed by its imaginative perception.

‘The Map’ as a *rhizome* studies the expansive relationship between land and water in multiple ways. As two bodies, land and water motion towards each other in varied textures, dimensions, speed and density. Such heterogeneous contact between these two bodies gives asymmetrical and indeterminate form to the poetic map. In this way, ‘The Map’ refers to a spatial form of poetry that expands itself like a

<sup>159</sup> Gilles Deleuze, ‘What is Baroque?’, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1993), pp. 27-38 (p. 35).

<sup>160</sup> Tom Conley, ‘The Baroque Fold as Map and as Diagram’, in *Rethinking the Baroque* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 203-217 (p. 215).

<sup>161</sup> Adele Haft, ‘The Poet As Map-maker: The Cartographic Inspiration and Influence of Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Map”’, *Cartographic Perspectives*, 38 (2001), 37-65 (p. 45) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.14714/CP38.794>>

*rhizome* discovering connections between different ideas and things across space and time brought together within the proximity allowed by art. In a letter to Jerome Mazarro, Bishop's description of her process of writing poetry characterises the *rhizome*: 'It takes an infinite number of things to come together, forgotten, or almost forgotten, books, last night's dream, experiences past and present – to make a poem' (*OA*, p. 621). Since Bishop's poetry is a construct of multiplicity of things, it maintains a fluid form of writing, which comes in contact with its influences, but does not establish definite relationship with any one of them.

As a *rhizome*, 'The Map' constructs a 'horizontal' diagram of land and water as 'lines of articulation' (*DG*, p. 3), which become 'lines of segmentarity and stratification' (*DG*, p. 21) in their non-linear motion on the two-dimensional surface or the 'plane of consistency' of the map:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.  
 Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges  
 Showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges  
 Where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.  
 Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,  
 Drawing it unperturbed around itself?  
 Along the fine tan sandy shelf  
 Is the land tugging at the sea from under?

(*PPL*, p. 3)

Keeping in view that the *rhizome* is 'a map, not a tracing' (*DG*, p. 12), Bishop's observation that 'land lies in water' approaches factual information about land and water through an indirect and imaginative line of thought, which sees land and water as strata of lines running across the page in layers without indicating a point of beginning or end of the land or sea. Bishop does not intimate which land or water body she is looking at on the map. It is as if we already know this as readers, and accordingly she has prioritised her expanse of perceptions over any identification of places.

As in a *rhizome*, Bishop's poetic map keeps on evolving and expanding its perceived reality of land and sea by moving the eye in varying directions. From one line to the next the choice of feminine rhyme in 'shadows' and 'shallows', and 'edges' and 'ledges' (*PPL*, p. 3) further indicates the sensuousness with which Bishop uses shade and depth to go through varied dimensions of the stratification of land and sea on the map and in her verse. In this sense, the 'green' land and 'blue'

water ‘under’ it indicates that the two bodies, as above or below each other, are ‘surface extension[s]’ (*DG*, p. 7) on a ‘plane of consistency’ (*DG*, p. 9). The land and sea are only segments, as they do not give a complete view of the inside or outside of their bodies. The first stanza draws attention toward a repeated contact between land and sea, which makes their contours indeterminate, in order to present them as open spaces.

Like the *rhizome*, Bishop’s map does not reproduce a coded model of established facts in a symmetrical arrangement of land and sea in grids. Each line on the map tends to move beyond grids to indicate a coming and going, rather than describing land and sea as ‘subject or object’ (*DG*, p. 8) in defined boundaries. It is precisely for these qualities that Bishop’s map becomes a point of departure from her inspirational seventeenth-century maps. The seventeenth-century Baroque maps, such as of Donne and Vermeer, served to locate the “‘self’”, ‘with which as subjects we find our bearings and with which we locate [...] ourselves in time and space.’<sup>162</sup> Bishop’s baroque map is concerned with locations, which are not described exactly; emphasis is put on the dimensions and directions to places. Therefore, neither the places as objects nor the self as a subject are located and identified in Bishop’s poetry.

Through ‘The Map’ Bishop introduces a similar unsettled and indeterminate approach to places in her other poems, such as ‘From the Country to the City’ where the ‘lines’ go ‘nowhere’ (*PPL*, p. 9). Due to the indefinite nature of lines, the movement from the country to the city remains a perpetual act of savouring different ways of entering in the city. In the ‘12 O’ Clock News’, Bishop focusses on directions, such as the ‘undisclosed distance to the east’, rather than specifying the locale. This is why, she keeps on delaying the identification of the ‘large rectangular “field”’ by seeing it in plurality of perceptions as ‘dark speckled. An airstrip? A cemetery’ (*PPL*, p. 163).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the *rhizome* or map ‘fosters connections between fields, removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency’ (*DG*, p. 12). As a matter of choice, Bishop does not define the contours of land or sea and only

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<sup>162</sup> Tom Conley, ‘The Baroque Fold as Map and as Diagram’, in *Rethinking the Baroque* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 203-17 (p. 205).

emphasises their connections through the proliferation of their dimensions into each other's spaces on the surface of the map. In this sense, land and sea are bodies without organs and their relationship is about transversal of boundaries, where dimensions expand outwards to maintain the 'exteriority of their relations' (*DG*, p. 3). The 'shadowed green' land serves to remove any 'blockages' (*DG*, p. 12) where the two strata – land and water – converge and open up; the intersection of the 'green' line of the land with the 'blue' dimension of water makes way for a shadowy connection between them. This convergence between the shadowy land and shallow water continues to remove hindrances between the two bodies in many ways: the 'line of long sea-weeded ledges', where 'weeds' hang from the 'green' land towards the 'blue' sea; the oblique dimensions of the land leaning down 'to lift the sea from under', or 'land tugging at the sea from under' (*PPL*, p. 3) are openings on the map, which connect the dimensions of land and sea at different points.

However, such connections do not serve as positions. They indicate instead paths that break the barriers between land and sea and move on in other directions serving as other points of contact. Like the 'shadows' of the land in the first stanza, the second stanza makes a new entry into the map through the 'shadow of Newfoundland' in contrast with 'Labrador's yellow' (*PPL*, p. 3) dimensions. Thus, Land and sea are bodies without organs because they keep on 'dismantling' themselves by maintaining outside relations. On the map, land and sea have no inside but only outside as they focus on the multiplicity of outer relationships with other spatial bodies without organs. The two different bodies of Newfoundland and the Labrador Peninsula are connected to each other through the oblique arrangement of the feminine rhyme 'shadow'/'yellow' on the page. This manner is characteristic of the *rhizome* which 'connects any point to any other point' (*DG*, p. 21), and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature.

Like the Baroque artist, Bishop's questioning, 'Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under?' 'is the land tugging at the sea from under?' (*PPL*, p. 3) is an acknowledgment of her artistic endeavours. Her acts of leaning, lifting or tugging and holding on to her materials are an expression of her indeterminate perceptions, which show a curiosity for the unknown dimensions of land and water. These acts can be the beginning or the end, the entry or the exit to places on the map. Bishop's map shows the struggle between land and sea as her struggle of mapping her

emotions and desires in language. Her language is becoming with each new set of words in a line chalking out her changing relationship with her materials.

As the *rhizome* grows on desire, so Bishop's map thrives on 'semiotic flows' (*DG*, p. 22). Amidst land and sea, Bishop's poetic self comes in bodily contact with her materials to spatialise her semiotic desires. The leaning, lifting, 'tugging' and stroking of the 'lovely bays', the holding of 'water between thumb and finger' or the printer's excitement (*PPL*, p. 3) point at the poet's 'body without organs' (*DG*, p. 4), which opens up through varied external postures to contact with other bodies outside herself. These varied contacts do not erase the artist's body altogether, but refer to segments or parts of her body, which make her a point of convergence, an opening between the plurality of dimensions of land and sea. Her nerve fibres weave her bodily connections between land and sea, and self and art. She is like the Norwegian 'hare' which is more of a 'profile' (*PPL*, p. 3), an (out)line serving as a line of contact between the Norwegian territory and the sea. Unlike Donne's explicitness, Bishop's subjectivity remains missing in her poems, mostly hiding behind the multiplicity of her third-person pronoun 'we'.

'The Map' begins from the middle of somewhere, and maintains that indefinite state of the *rhizome* till the end of the poem, pointing out neither a definite place nor a position at land or sea. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari describe this 'middle' (*DG*, p. 21) position of the *rhizome* similar to a 'weed' (*DG*, p. 11), which proliferates between things and fills in a space with the abundance of perceptions. This weed-like rhizome recalls Bishop's poem 'The Weed'. As discussed before, the weed is Bishop's creative line of thought, which grows between transcendental spiritualism and romanticism. As the 'weed' obliquely spatialises Bishop's creative dimension, it represents the middle path of the *rhizome* in 'The Map', where 'line' of 'weeds' (*PPL*, p. 3) motions between land and sea.

Like the weed-like *rhizome*, Bishop's map lurks between positions and identities to draw plural meanings: 'the shadow of Newfoundland' lies between the island and sea; 'bays' hold water in between land and sea to provide 'a clean cage for invisible fish'; 'peninsulas' lie between mainland and sea, and the 'profile' of the Norwegian hare motions between land and sea in order to survey the sea 'where land is' (*PPL*, p. 3). Although 'mapped waters are more quiet than the land is' (*PPL*, p. 3), their in-between relationships speed up the process of becoming by defying

identification with any one perception of these bodies. These spaces are dwindling forms, which do not come to a standstill, but delight in a plurality of perceptions.

Considering that ‘The Map’ is not only rooted in reality but also imagination, like the *rhizome*, it is an ‘antigenealogy’ (*DG*, p. 21). Given that ‘more delicate than the historian are the mapmaker’s colors’, Bishop’s poetic map does not observe hierarchy or linearity in its perceptions and spaces. This is why her ‘topography displays no favorites’ because the land is where sea is and ‘North’s as near as West’ (*PPL*, p. 3). The map, like the *rhizome*, is an ‘assemblage’ (*DG*, p. 8) of perceptions, which make land and sea, north and west, equally visible from near and distant spaces and from various vantage points.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, *rhizome* as writing is a moving line, which has ‘nothing to do with signifying’, but ‘surveying, mapping even realms that are yet to come’ (*DG*, pp. 4-5). In this sense, Bishop’s poetic map does not signify; it can only direct to things and draws a set of connections. The poem’s closing lines reiterate that poetry does not always signify; it can describe the process of ‘becoming’: ‘Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors? | What suits the character or the native waters best’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Unlike a historian’s definite narrative of geography, Bishop views land and sea as multiplicities in a *rhizome* undergoing change in form and colour by opening up the boundaries to the other.

Exhibiting varieties, land and sea dismantle themselves through their outer contacts to the extent that the countries acquire colours according to their convergence with the other. Before writing ‘The Map’, Bishop wrote in her notebook that ‘name it friendship if you want to – like names of cities printed on maps, the word is too big, it spreads all over the place, and tells nothing of the actual place it means to name.’<sup>163</sup> In this sense, the poetic language itself is a body without organs as it spatially conjoins outside its place of origin and blurs the process of signification. This is why ‘the names of seashore towns run out to sea’ and ‘the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains’ beyond their grids on the map. The poetic language keeps a middle state between its origin and belonging. Even the names – ‘Newfoundland’ island and ‘Labrador’ peninsula do not describe their space, or inside or outside boundaries, as they are only seen in shadowy or coloured

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<sup>163</sup> Brett C. Millier, ‘The U.S.A SCHOOL OF WRITING: 1934-1935’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 77).



dimensions. Therefore, language itself defines a transversal of identities: writing as map is an assemblage, a set of ideas which do not define subject, object or places beyond the names. In this manner, poetic language is an expansive space of connections; it grows beyond signification and focuses on being somewhere between becoming referential and existing as pure aesthetics. These qualities of 'The Map' recall Fiona Green's ideas, as mentioned in the introduction, about the functional and the aesthetic purpose of Bishop's poetry.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the *rhizome* map 'is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable and has multiple entrance ways and exits' (*DG*, p. 21). Seeing it in this light, Bishop's 'The Map', is a cartography of varied ideas, which come together in an indefinite relationship, such as land and water. Due to this mobile relationship, there are many ways of reading Bishop's map, as its perspectives are not fixed. The three stanzas of the poem contribute to the heterogeneity of Bishop's map, which can be reordered, detached from other stanzas or connected at any point with them. In doing so, the stanzas will remain meaningful in offering a different entry way to the map. 'The Map' describes Bishop's baroque form of poetry, which is about mapping contrary relationships between her ideas related to far and wide. This mobile and expansive form shows her disapproval for any barriers in modern poetry, which can compartmentalise her poetic space from establishing new relationships. By advocating *rhizome* as her baroque form of verse, Bishop wishes to remove all kinds of obstacles from her modern poetic space by making it spacious, enabling all manner of interactions outside itself.

Other than surveying paths, 'The Map' implicitly delights in curvaceous spatial dimensions. The curves and *folds* have been characteristic of seventeenth-century attire, paintings and architecture. Like the seventeenth-century Dutch painter, Vermeer, Bishop sees the map as an object of beauty that *folds* places distant and out of sight to contract knowledge in a different way.

As mentioned before, 'The Map' shows the tendency of making art referential as well as purely aesthetic. Therefore, seeing it as form of beauty with reference to Deleuze's baroque *fold* is precisely because Bishop, like Deleuze's baroque soul exhibits the world 'as an infinite series of curvatures' (*D*, p. 24); a universe decorated with *folds*. For Bishop, knowledge can be gained through the distortion (read as decoration) of facts: the places on the map, such as 'Newfoundland', 'Labrador' 'peninsulas', 'bays', and directions to north or west

(*PPL*, p.3) can be reached through Bishop's curvaceous perception. It is this interest in curves, which attracted her to take course on 'Specimens of Advance Mathematics: The Family of Curves' in 1934 in New York.<sup>164</sup>

Deleuze's concept of the *fold* is inspired by Leibniz, the seventeenth-century philosopher and mathematician of 'pleat, of curves and twisting surfaces' (*D*, p. xi). Bishop believes in Leibniz's imaginary geometry, which saw that a line is never 'without curves' (*D*, p.14). Bishop's observation of the flight of birds in her prose work 'The Sea and Its Shore' demonstrates her connection with Leibniz's geometry. Bishop sees art as a non-linear form, which shares a seamless bond between knowledge and craft, or line and curve. Comparing the flight of papers with the flight of birds, Bishop describes this dual purpose of art form – functional and aesthetic:

A bird, of course, inspired by a brain [...] by a desire that could often be understood to reach some place or obtain some thing, flew in a line, or a series of curves that were part of a line. One could tell the difference between its methodological flights [...] and its flights for show. But the papers had no discernible goal, [...]. They soared up, fell down, could not decide, hesitated, subsided, [...].

(*PPL*, p. 576)

Art indiscernibly has an aesthetic goal attached to it. It can be empirical, but decorative at the same time as well. Like the curvaceous characteristics of the flight of birds, Bishop savours the 'twisting', and 'quivering manoeuvres' (*PPL*, p. 576) of textures of written papers through the eyes of her protagonist, Edwin Boomer. In being attracted to the curves and *folds*, Bishop, like Deleuze, is responding to the space of modernity, marvelling at the infinite continuity of space compressed into the finite through speedy vehicles and mass media. Through seeing objects and language motioning in *folds*, Bishop is rediscovering modernity and making it accessible through folding and refolding its infinite stretch of space.

Following Leibniz, Deleuze sees the world is made of 'infinite' (*D*, p. 24) *folds* between soul and matter. These *folds* are inseparable from each other and exhibit 'folding-unfolding', 'contraction-dilation' (*D*, p. 8) in this world. Similarly, Bishop's 'The Map' sees the world contracting into *folds*. In order to understand her

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<sup>164</sup> Brett Millier, 'The U.S.A SCHOOL OF WRITING: 1934-1935', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 74).

proximity to the land and sea, Bishop extends the boundaries of her expression by creating folding dimensions of liminality and depth through ‘shadows’ or ‘shallows’, and actions such as lifting the land or ‘tugging’ (*PPL*, p. 3) at the sea. In doing so, she contracts the near and far, as well as large and small, proportions of spaces.

According to Deleuze, human beings, as well as wind, water, fire and land have *folds* like ‘a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds’ or a ‘tunic’ (*D*, p. 6) of varied textures, ‘scales’ and ‘speeds’ (*D*, p. 36). In line with this thought, Bishop’s map *folds* land and sea through varied curves as if weaving them together in an ornate garment of *folds*: ‘like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Bishop shrinks the world around her by drawing *folds* of different speeds and scales, shades and ‘shadows’, between the agitated land and the ‘quiet’ sea (*PPL*, p. 3).

According to Deleuze, the ‘fold is divided into folds, which are tucked inside and which spill on the outside’. In this sense, the *fold* has an ‘exterior always on the outside, an interior always on the inside’ (*D*, p. 35). Like the *folds* between soul and body, the ‘shadows’ and ‘shallows’ become the inside and outside *folds* between land and water. This is why the Norwegian ‘hare’ ‘investigate[s] the sea, where land is’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Bishop is charmed with the idea of bringing spaces in proximity of distance and time through *folds*. Bishop’s map produces curvaceous *folds* of light and dark; the *folds* of soul are ‘tucked inside’ through the shadowy surface between land and sea, whereas these *folds* also ‘spill onto the outside’ (*D*, p. 35) when land bends toward the sea as ‘edges and sea-weeded ledges’ (*PPL*, p. 3) in order to refold it, ‘to diminish, to reduce’ (*D*, p. 9), the distances between Bishop’s baroque soul and the world around her.

According to Deleuze, Baroque ‘endlessly produces folds’ (*D*, p. 3), with the challenge being ‘not how to finish the fold, but how to continue it’ (*D*, p. 34). In ‘The Map’, Bishop identifies this continuity of *folds* between land and sea through the ‘bays’ folding water in their recesses, and ‘peninsulas’ holding water between the curves of ‘thumb and finger’ (*PPL*, p. 3). The *folds* of ‘bays’ and ‘peninsulas’ are folded with that of the poet’s curvaceous body, implied through the bending shape of the hand, which ‘stroke[s] these lovely bays’, and the curvilinear posture of the ‘thumb and finger’ of the ‘peninsulas’. Moreover, Bishop sees writing as a series of *folds* when she describes that ‘the names of seashore towns run out to sea, | the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains’. The curvaceous letters naming

towns and cities run out to the curvy mountains and the fluid sea, and the coast *folds* into the undulating profile of the Norwegian ‘hare’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Bishop’s poetic language *folds* between her soul and matter as a matter of baroque expression.

Like Deleuze’s baroque soul, Bishop creates poetry as inside and outside *folds* between her words and world and between her poetic self and landscape.

In ‘The Map’, Bishop makes ways of entry through twisting and turning bodies of matter entwined with her baroque soul, bringing ‘North’ ‘as near as West’ ‘as when emotion too far exceeds its cause’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Bishop’s folding map contracts distances into proximity, estrangement into intimacy between herself and the world around her. In doing so, Bishop sensuously perceives that ‘Norway’s hare runs south in agitation,’ and the ‘Labrador’s yellow, where the moony Eskimo has oiled it’ (*PPL*, p. 3). The two-dimensional map *folds* into a three-dimensional landscape; the map becomes a *fold* between *folds* of art and reality, and between the poet’s soul and her poetic space.

Deleuze uses what he terms Leibniz’ ‘allegory’ of the ‘Baroque House’ (*D*, p. 5) to explain the correspondence between *folds* of soul and that of the matter in the universe. Deleuze describes the ‘Baroque house’ having two floors or levels: the upper level belongs to the soul, or the inside and the lower to the body, or the outside and universal matter. The soul, like the upper floor of the ‘Baroque house’, is a ‘dark’ interior, with no ‘opening onto the outside’ (*D*, p. 4), but is embellished with *folds* of perception ‘furling and unfurling in every direction’ (*D*, p. 86) to express the world. The lower chamber carries *folds* of the body and the world, which are ‘infinitely porous’ (*D*, p. 5). Both the floors are folded up with another *fold* in between them.

Bishop’s ‘Primer Class’ description of the number ‘eight’ shares an affinity with Deleuze’s description of the ‘Baroque house of *folds*’: ‘I think I was in love with eight. One began writing it just to the right of the top, and drew an S downwards [...] not make it a straight line, but a sort of upside down and backwards S, and all this in curves’ (*PPL*, pp. 403-404). In ‘The Map’ there is a frequent repetition of the syllable ‘s’, such as in ‘sea’, ‘shadow’, ‘shallows’, ‘sea-weeded’, ‘shelf,’ and ‘seashore’ (*PPL*, p. 3), which coincides with Bishop’s folding perception of the places on the map.

In ‘The Map’, the land carries the characteristics of the upper floor of the ‘Baroque house’. It is ‘shadowed green’ against the ‘blue’ colour of the sea, which

carries the fluidity of the porous body or ground floor of the 'Baroque house'. Since the 'bays', 'peninsulas' and the curvaceous 'names' of the 'seashore towns' refold with the *folds* of the sea, in order to maintain different flows of curves, the sea becomes 'a world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid' (*D*, p. 5). Since the *folds* bend 'on the edges of juxtaposed areas' (*D*, p. 93), the 'green' land and 'blue' sea are merged together through the folded surfaces of the 'shadows', 'edges', 'sea-weeded ledges' (*PPL*, p. 3) and leaning dimension of the land in-between them. According to Deleuze, 'clarity endlessly plunges into obscurity' (*D*, p. 32) in the *folds* of the soul. Similarly, Bishop's baroque soul sees 'shadows wavering as 'shallows', 'edges' becoming 'ledges', and leaning becoming 'tugging' (*PPL*, p. 3) in the process of her refolding with her poetic materials. The *folds* of colours and 'shadows' reveal and distort the dimensions of land and water to maintain the complexity of beings and the approximation of the topography of places. The relationship between land and sea serves as contrasting background and foreground to give density and opacity to their two-dimensionality, as in a painting by Rembrandt.

According to Leibniz, the soul is 'metaphysical' (*D*, p. 23) whereas the body is physical. Therefore, Deleuze sees the baroque soul and body as 'organized along two vectors: a deepening toward the bottom, and a thrust toward the upper regions' (*D*, p. 29). 'The Map' displays such a contrary exchange of energies between the land and sea. The act of the land leaning down to 'lift' or tug the sea from underneath shows the baroque soul's desire to lift its fluid body upwards, whereas the body as the fluid sea lends the land, or the soul its 'conformation' of weightiness through its 'quiet' 'waves' (*PPL*, p. 3). Bishop's baroque soul soars high in restlessness to do miracles, such as creating poetry, whereas her body remains gravitated to the ordinariness of life. In 'tugging' and lifting, the two floors of the 'Baroque house' Bishop exercises opposing motions between the land and sea coexisting above and below each other.

'The Map' shows how Bishop's baroque soul is always refolding between two *folds*: *folds* of perceptions and *folds* of her poetic material. Her poetic map, like Deleuze's *fold*, 'conveys the entire world, but does not express it without expressing more clearly a small region of the world' (*D*, p. 25). 'The Map' is a series of micro-perceptions of the macro-perception of the world. Bishop is interested in the small

vision of the world; she focusses on a few places she names on the map as a small area of perceptions, rather than exhausting the reader with panoramic views.

Both, Donne and Bishop delight in the expansion and contraction of Baroque space in their poetry. They spatialise their love and bodily self in the cartographic contours of spaces and topographic description of places on the map. Donne distorts the near and far perspectives of his love by keeping the motion intact from small to big, and big to small concentric circles of space, making it an intimate and expansive boundary of love. Bishop, on the other hand, diverges her near and distant dimensions of love. Through the use of varied signifiers, she displaces her much-loved friend and mentor.

Like Neruda, Bishop's contemporary baroque poetry decentralises her expanse of love. Sharing their fondness for maps, Donne and Bishop, spatialise their bodily self in the contours of their poetry. Bishop remains discreet in this regard, and spatialises her body in shades and shadows. However, Donne is more explicit in expressing the topography, or details of the anatomy of his body and that of his beloved. Moreover, like Donne, Bishop's expanding and contracting geography of self and love gives her a variety of baroque ways to spatialise facts and imagination in relation to the empirical and aesthetic dimensions of her poetry. In this way, the discussion in this chapter reinforces Fiona Green's functional and aesthetic approach to Bishop's poetry and its connection to Baroque spatiality.



## Section Two

### The Baroque Geometry

*In the previous section, I established Bishop's Baroque inheritance in her visual dynamism, which characterises her spatialised perception of modern poetry. I discussed how Bishop's poetry of motion exhibits a consciousness of a vast universe, where varied spaces and things can be seen through the expansion and contraction of their spatial boundaries, brought into a contrary relationship within the field of vision. In this way, Bishop's cartographic and topographic interests aid her visual poetics – language maps her perceptions of distances to and from vast spaces and surveys contours of places, rather than tracing them as a static fact.*

*So, in this way, Bishop's spatialised perception is built on Baroque geometry in her proximity to Leibniz's asymmetrical geometry, as seen in Chapter Two, rather than classical geometry. Therefore, in this section I argue that, for Bishop, geography matters most because there is so much of geometry in it. In literary scholarship on Bishop, critics have referred to Bishop's *Geography of Gender*,<sup>165</sup> 'Geographic Feelings',<sup>166</sup> geography 'as history',<sup>167</sup> 'inner geography',<sup>168</sup> 'youthful geography',<sup>169</sup> and geography as 'ecology'.<sup>170</sup> However, a discussion on geography as geometry, which builds these engaging relationships between Bishop's art and nature, has been overshadowed.*

*This section, which will comprise two chapters, takes up this missing subject of geometry in detail and demonstrates that it plays a pivotal role in Bishop's Baroque understanding of an inner and outer geography of space. Chapter Three focuses on Bishop's Baroque geometry of indeterminate lines as*

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<sup>165</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, *Geography of Gender*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1993).

<sup>166</sup> Susannah Hollister, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Geographic Feeling', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 58 (2012), 399-438. <<https://doi.org/10.1215/0041462X-2012-4008>>

<sup>167</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, 'Preface', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poet* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp ix-xv (p. x).

<sup>168</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, 'In the Footsteps of Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poet* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 1-26 (p. 8).

<sup>169</sup> Adele Haft, 'The Poet As Map-maker: The Cartographic Inspiration and Influence of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map"', *Cartographic Perspectives*, 38 (2001), 37-65 (p. 40).

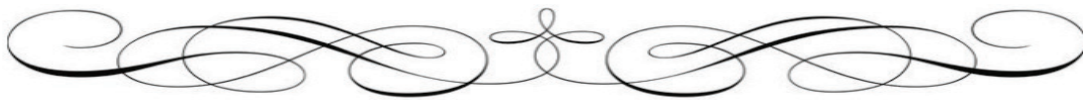
<<http://www.cartographicperspectives.org/index.php/journal/article/download/cp38-haft/837>> [accessed 23 June 2015]

<sup>170</sup> Iris Shu-O Huang, 'Landscapes, Animals and Human Beings: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry and Ecocentrism', *Intergrams*, 10 (2010), 1-24 (p. 2) <<http://benz.nchu.edu.tw/~intergrams/intergrams/102-111/102-111-huang.pdf>> [accessed 12 May 2016].

*incomplete and unclear dimensions of vision, where their preference for diagonal motion references art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's description of the 'painterly [...] depreciation of line'<sup>171</sup> in Baroque art. This chapter comprehensively establishes Bishop's relationship with Wölfflin through an in-depth analysis of her landscape poems, 'Questions of Travel', 'Cape Breton' and 'The End of March'.*

*Chapter Four will then expand on Bishop's affinity with the Cuban poet and critic Severo Sarduy and his neo-Baroque reading of the seventeenth-century mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler's planetary geometry of the imperfect circle called ellipse and its linguistic equivalent ellipsis (Sarduy, p. 293). This chapter will elucidate the geometrical decentring of space and the linguistic decentring of meanings as characteristics of the ellipse and ellipsis through discussion of Bishop's poems, 'In the Waiting Room', 'The Bight' and 'One Art'.*

*In these chapters, I establish that Bishop is aware of the fact that 'our sense of sight is never equally good in all directions',<sup>172</sup> therefore she uses the Baroque geometry of indefinite lines and ellipses to bring dimensions to that which remains incomprehensible. Through lines and ellipses, Bishop seeks a perspective outside definitive contours and finds beauty in the surprising dimensions beyond the field of vision and their infinite motion. Since Bishop's poetry shares the seventeenth-century spirit of geometrical description of physical motion, her visual poetry of moving and changing dimensions of indefinite lines and ellipses shows reality as an incomplete and distorted embodiment of an ever-becoming truth. In this way, she sees herself, landscapes and interiors as geometrically coextensive spaces, which grant her the motion of 'being continually nowhere'<sup>173</sup> and elucidate, in Jay Prosser's words, her 'unwillingness to settle geographically.'<sup>174</sup> This aspect will first be considered in the context of Wölfflin's definition of Baroque and, in particular, the painterly style.*



<sup>171</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, 'Introduction', in *Principles of Art History: The Problem of Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. by M. D. Hotinger, (NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1932), pp. 1-17 (p. 14).

<sup>172</sup> Edward Kasner and James Newman, 'Assorted Geometries – Plane and Fancy', in *Mathematics and the Imagination* (NY: Simon and Shuster, 1940), pp. 112-53 (p. 133).

<sup>173</sup> Edward Kasner and James Newman, 'Beyond the Googol', in *Mathematics and the Imagination* (NY: Simon and Shuster, 1940), pp. 27-66 (p. 60).

<sup>174</sup> Jay Prosser, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Art of Losing', in *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 123-62 (p. 125).



### Chapter Three

#### Bishop and Wölfflin: The *Painterly* Style

According to Rene Wellek, Heinrich Wölfflin is the first one to ‘transfer the term “baroque” to literature’<sup>175</sup> by referring to the Baroque characteristics in Torquato Tasso’s poetry in his book *Renaissance and Baroque*.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, in this chapter, I wish to be the first one to explore Bishop’s poetic affinity with Wölfflin’s definition of the *painterly* Baroque.

I will particularly focus on the *painterly* characteristics of indeterminate, non-linear and diagonal motion of lines in Baroque art to see Bishop’s ways of beholding nature and art as a *painterly* geometry of moving lines rather than definite contours.

Wölfflin first describes the *painterly* style of the seventeenth-century Baroque art in contrast to the classical in *Renaissance and Baroque* and reevaluates it in his later book *Principles of Art History*. As a further deliberation on the Baroque style, Wölfflin delineates five principles of Baroque art: *painterly*, *recessional*, *open form*, *unity* and *unclearness*, all seen in Baroque painting, sculpture, drawing and architecture. Since Wölfflin includes the other four principles in his description of the *painterly* style and mentions that these principles serve as ‘the different roots of one plant’ (read *painterly* Baroque) (*PAH*, p. 108), I will include them as part of the *painterly* characteristics in my discussion on Bishop’s *painterly* poems, as comprehensively Baroque in nature.

In recent scholarship, Linda Anderson connects Bishop’s reading of Wölfflin’s *Principles of Art History* in the early 1930s with her reflections on Baroque spatiality in ‘The Map’. Anderson is of the view that

For Bishop, also attuned to Baroque spatiality, or the conjunction of different planes and points of view, the map becomes an example of the instability of appearance and the impossibility of arriving at an objective vision. The excitement ascribed to the printer [...] enacting the same kind of restlessness she admired in the baroque.

(*LOC*, p. 42)

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<sup>175</sup> Rene Wellek, ‘The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship’, *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism: Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 78) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797>> [accessed 26 March, 2014].

<sup>176</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘The Causes of the Changes in Style’, in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 71-88 (pp. 83-85).

Anderson's comment about Bishop's unstable perspectives puts out interesting feelers to study her as a *painterly* poet. However, Anderson does not delve into these peculiar characteristics and her study refers to a generalised and brief perspective of the Baroque in Bishop's poetry. In her chapter 'Journey of Lines', Anderson describes Bishop's 'lines' as journeys into the memories of people, places and her writing desk. Similar to the use of lines in her drawings and paintings, Anderson observes the visual lines in her poetry as 'archival traces', 'inscription' (*LOC*, p. 7), or 'storyline' (*LOC*, p. 150), connecting temporal and spatial records of travelling in the process of writing and otherwise. I agree with Anderson's perspective of lines of connection, but I equally find potential in a diametrically opposite view of these lines. Therefore, I intend to look at Bishop's use of lines from a *painterly* perspective, which disintegrates chronological and spatially linear 'lines of connection', to surprise the poet and her visual field with a 'form-alienated' (*PAH*, p. 29) spectacle.

Before comprehensive discussion of the poems, I begin by introducing Wölfflin's *painterly* style and then explore Bishop's closeness to this approach in her *painterly* apprehension of the world around her. This is through her attitude to art and nature, and her interest in forms in her noted observations and prose writings.

Differentiated from Renaissance or Classical art, Wölfflin's Baroque is a *painterly* style finding beauty in the indeterminate and incomplete contours of the period. Unlike what he calls the classical linearity of 'line as the path of vision and guide of the eye' (*PAH*, p. 14), the *painterly* eye maintains swaying forms and does not settle into definite shapes and planes in a picture. Therefore, spaces and objects keep oscillating between front and back or near and far perspectives in variable planes. Hence, his *painterly* paintings establish the principle of indistinctness of forms, rather than aiming at their clarity. According to Wölfflin, the linear style gives tangibly perfect form to things, but the *painterly* style totally dissolves the plastic surfaces and boundaries of a picture plane. In this sense, it characterises openness of form. Since it makes the 'tactile picture' a 'visual picture', therefore, 'it appeals only to the eye' (*PAH*, p. 21). Since the line does not 'take the lead' (*PAH*, p. 37), therefore, the interest remains in the 'picturesque' (*PAH*, p. 38) scene of broken, fragmented or dissolving lines. Such worn-out lines develop a backward and forward relationship between foreground and receding planes exemplifying a 'unified unity' (*PAH*, p. 158) between varied parts or planes in the visual field.

The *painterly* perception in Baroque paintings depends on how things appear to the eye to be moving and changing. Bishop, too, is interested in seeing objects and artworks as moving lines, showing indefinite dimensions of experiences. Due to Bishop's lifelong association with art galleries and artists, and her making of drawings and watercolours, critics have bracketed her with her chosen painters, including Paul Klee, Alexander Calder and Kurtz Schwitters, for her sensitivity to poetic textures. In an interview with Ashley Brown, Bishop expressed how 'flattered' she was to read art critic Meyer Shapiro's observation that 'she writes poems with a painter's eye' (*Conversations*, p. 24). Expanding on Shapiro's comment, I propose that what excites Bishop in seeing paintings is the 'painter's orientation of the eye, more than the paintings themselves. So, in communicating with the visual compositions of established painters, Bishop explores strategies of painting a poem. In doing so, she looks for ways to reduce the distance between verbal and visual representation. However, in doing so, she does not seek the aid of painting in poetry, but explore ways of representing poetry by painting words.

Contrary to Bishop's analysis of Moore's 'architectural' language of 'accuracy, proportion, solidity, balance', which makes a 'still life, easel painting',<sup>177</sup> Bishop's undetermined perceptions make her poetic language more visual than tactile or a self-sufficient object. Instead of stasis, it is in perpetual motion, and more realistic than real because it focuses on appearances rather than static facts. Bishop is interested in the raw dimensions of the visual field, which are not perfected or made fanciful, such as in her published poem 'Florida'. Bishop believes in writing poetry as a visual experience, and not as a plastic form anchored in space and time. She describes how: 'If after I read a poem, the world looks like that poem for 24 hours or so, I am sure it's a good one – and the same goes for painting'.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, unlike Moore's poetic language of 'classical geometry' (*LOC*, p. 27), which relies on tactility and definite frames, Bishop's language is *painterly*, as it presupposes the unstable dimensions of reality, which are always subject to change. They do not give tangible bounds to her visual field; for example, in her poem 'Casabianca', love is visually perceived from varied angles and in relation to other dimensions of things within sight, assimilating its complexity through its changing

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<sup>177</sup> David Kalstone, 'From the Country to the City', in *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell*, ed. by Robert Hemenway (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989), pp. 3-29 (pp. 11-12).

<sup>178</sup> William Benton, ed., *Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1997), p. 97.

perspectives. Bishop's 'Visits to St Elizabeth' similarly presents such a spectacle through the addition of one new 'line' of perspective in each stanza, which gradually expands the spatial vision of the poem. It is these unsettling frames in her visual poetics, which differentiate her from the modern ekphrastic tradition established in W. H. Auden's *Musée des Beaux Arts*, William Carlos Williams' collection, *Pictures from Breughel and other Poems*, or Wallace Stevens' inspiration from Picasso's work in 'Man with the Blue Guitar'.

According to Zachariah Pickard, ekphrastic poetry 'engages with a work of art', commonly painting, in order to describe it as a fixed object with established viewpoints.<sup>179</sup> In this sense, Bishop's 'Large Bad Picture' and 'Poem' are ekphrastic poems about family relics. However, these poems, which I will touch upon in Chapter Five, clearly differentiate Bishop's interest in moving perspectives, rather than describing static objects, artworks and their definite contours. Unlike the modernists, Bishop uses her interest in artworks, such as paintings, to observe varying approaches in the manner of *painterly* paintings. To clarify, in Michael Davidson's article 'Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem' he differentiates between ekphrastic poems and *painterly* poems:

A poem about a painting is not the same as [...] a 'painterly' poem which activates strategies of composition equivalent to but not dependent on the painting. Instead of pursuing at a reflective distance from the work of art, the poet reads the painting as a text, rather than as a static object, or else the larger 'painterly' aesthetic generated by the painting.<sup>180</sup>

Following Davidson's explanation, I propose that Bishop's landscape poems, which I will discuss later in this chapter, are not ekphrastic works composed to show her fondness for landscape paintings. Rather they show strategies of *painterly* paintings read as verses. In this way, Bishop's landscape poems are not monumentalised objects or stationary fields of vision, as seen in ekphrastic poems. Instead, they are visual productions of the 'illusion of movement' (*PAH*, p. 66) that relates to the poet's unclear spatial dimensions.

Observing similar *painterly* approaches in Hopkins' poetry, Bishop qualifies

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<sup>179</sup> Zachariah Pickard, 'Description', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Description* (London: Mc-Gill Queen's Press, 2009), pp. 172-188 (p. 192).

<sup>180</sup> Michael Davidson, 'Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42 (1983), 69-79 (p. 72) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/429948>> [accessed on 19 October 2016]

him as a ‘baroque poet’ (*PPL*, p. 667) whose use of ‘alliteration, repetition, and inside rhymes’ keep his poetic language in motion. The repetition of rhymes and words serve as spatial coordinates, which keep changing the dimensions of experience and the meanings tentative. Bishop notices how his ‘odd rhymes’ break down the ‘margins of poetry’ and ‘a single short stanza can be full of aflame with motion as one of Van Gogh’s cedar trees’ (*PPL*, p. 667). In concurrence with Wölfflin, Bishop sees Hopkins’s poetry as visual ‘patches’ (*PAH*, p. 11) of lines where the ‘total picture is the thing that counts’ (*PAH*, p. 20). The rhythmic lines merge, converge and intersect in stanzas, dissolving their definite meanings into a unified mass of light and colour, which suppress the contours like Van Gogh’s illumined cedar trees. In this sense, Hopkins’s repeated sounds, consonants, and odd rhymes set up a *painterly* relationship between the poetic stanzas and create an unstable visual reality of the poem, rather than giving independent meanings to stanzas, or fixity to his poetic form.

Bishop’s ideas about the form of a novel also suggest a *painterly* motion between varied events and emotions back and forth in time and space. Her idea of novel exhibits ‘a bent line, or possibly a double wave [...] or two waves pursuing each other’ to the extent that they amass as a ‘bramble bush’ (*PPL*, pp. 674-675). In the *painterly* sense, Bishop submerges separate parts of her novel in the form of a moving foliage; it is this ‘restless mass’ (*PAH*, p. 16) of ‘bramble bush’ which gives Bishop her idea of beauty. Considering Bishop’s perception of motion, her novel takes its dimensions from within: the non-linear motion of events gives it a *painterly* vagueness instead of exhibiting an established form of a romantic, feminist or a modernist novel.

Bishop’s attitude to perceiving reality as an art form is equally *painterly*. The perceptual dimensions of her ‘circus tent’ of reality comes close to Wölfflin’s *painterly* temperament. Critics have understood Bishop’s ‘circus tent’ as ‘a room to play’<sup>181</sup> or ‘tentative constructing of reality from the immediate material of observation’<sup>182</sup> in Bishop’s poetry. However, the Baroque geometry of her ‘circus tent’ has not come into critics’ focus.

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<sup>181</sup> Jonathan Ellis, ‘Elizabeth Bishop: North & South’, in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Neil Roberts (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2001), pp. 457-468 (p. 459).

<sup>182</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights, Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (p. 160).

Reality, then is a huge circus tent, folding, adjustable, which we carry around with us and set up wherever we are. It possesses the magical properties of being able to take on characteristics of whatever place we are in, in fact it can become identical with it.<sup>183</sup>

This ‘circus tent’ embodies Wölfflin’s *painterly* style along with other principles of Baroque art. Bishop describes reality as ‘spatial’, rather than ‘flat’.<sup>184</sup> This is because it is a three-dimensional tent, having length, breadth and depth, which defies a linear vision and an existence in a single plane. Due to being foldable and ‘adjustable’ its dimensions can be compressed in space and expanded in *recessional* planes (*PAH*, p. 73). Being capable of motion, the tent exhibits visual reality rather than tactile geometrical fact. Like the motion of Bishop’s imagined walls in her uncollected poem ‘The walls went on for years & years’ (*PPL*, p. 227), one can imagine the mobile tent’s *painterly* geometry of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines merging and converging, moving backwards and forwards, or diagonally moving its two-dimensional frontality into a three-dimensional perspective. Bishop’s idea of reality, like her imaginary walls, parade a *painterly* process of ‘becoming’ (*PAH*, p. 52) whenever it ‘take[s] on characteristics of whatever place we are in.’ The reality tent maintains a heterogeneous spatiality as it makes constant adjustments with the changing perceptual and spatial dimensions of the poet. In this way, it demonstrates Wölfflin’s *open form* of art, which ‘points out beyond itself’ (*PAH*, p. 124). Thus, giving a limitless approach to a *painterly* perception of reality in art.

The fact that reality as a ‘circus tent’ has the ‘magical properties’ of being ‘identical’ to our sense of space points at the coextensive nature of its *painterly* dimensions. Penetrating the dimensions of life in art and vice versa, this ‘circus tent’ of reality composes a *unified unity* (*PAH*, p. 158). This creates together a fleeting show of visual reality, bringing art and life, real and unreal dimensions into one space and time. This merging of the real with the unreal dimensions evokes a non-tactile vision of reality, which makes the incorporeal as much an equally real and corresponding space.

Probably, this is why Bishop keenly observed that her grandmother’s eye had the *painterly* qualities of being real and unreal at the same time.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, ‘Excursive Vision’, p. 129.

<sup>184</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Introduction’, in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 29-37 (p. 31).

My maternal grandmother had a glass eye. the idea of it has fascinated me all my life. Quite often the glass eye looked heavenward, or off at an angle, while the real eye looked at you [...] the situation of grandmother strikes me as rather like the situation of the poet: 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.'

(PPL, p. 706)

In her grandmother's 'glass eye', Bishop identified her poetic challenge to make the unreal, invisible and intangible vision visually spatialised in the real space of her poetic language. Yet, I see that in identifying the problem here Bishop found the solution to it. The dimensions of her grandmother's vision engage with the problem of naturalising the unnatural vision. Geometrically, the 'real' and horizontal dimension of her grandmother's eye serves as a plane for the diagonal, or oblique dimensions of the 'glass eye'. Thus, her grandmother's 'glass eye' becomes the *painterly* eye, which as seen in the Baroque works of Rubens and Rembrandt commonly delights in the diagonal motion. The grandmother's real eye provides a material plane or dimension of space that can see beyond it into the immaterial realms of experience through the diagonal motion of her 'glass eye'. Thus, Bishop's grandmother visualises the conjunction of real and unreal dimensions as correlated spaces, something of which Bishop was 'fully reassured' when she read Herbert's metaphysics where 'that still one eye| should aim and shoot at that which is on high'.<sup>185</sup> In Herbert, as seen in previous section, Bishop found the ease with which his eye visualises a connection between the real and metaphysical dimensions within the space of his poems.

Bishop's fascination for her grandma's plurality of vision continues to appear in her later prose work 'A Trip to Vigia'. The scene describes how the unreal can be visualised through the *painterly* eye for the real, or tangible space:

Huge thunder clouds rolled back and forth, the river was higher, the tide had turned. The pearly silent, huge church of Vigia had made us all feel somehow guilty [...] the town's little white houses were turning mauve. In the high, high skies, shafts of long golden beam fell through the thunderclouds. Nature was providing all the baroque grandeur the place lacked.

(PPL, p. 467)

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<sup>185</sup> Bonnie Costello, 'Introduction', in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1-13 (p. 5).

As an example of Bishop's 'circus tent' of reality, the scene shows how nature allows Bishop to set her visually dramatic tent and magically make her perceptual dimensions one with the dimensions of this place. The change in the environment gives the place the *painterly* spectacle it actually lacked: everything from the sky to the earth is in movement, which in *painterly* sense, passes over the sum of things' (*PAH*, p. 19). The roaring clouds defy the linearity of the sky, as they move front and back. The emphasis is on the characteristic verticality of a Baroque scene, with 'high' sky and river. Instead of a uniform plane, the scene shows a conjunction of planes receding backwards to the highest point of clouds in the sky. Coupled with this, the streaks of white, mauve and gold lend a shaded and inconclusive character to the scene.

At many instances in her prose work, Bishop sees the *painterly* unreal, or 'magical', by rearranging the spatial reality of things around her. In 'Seven-Days Monologue' Bishop uses the technique of foreshortening to compress the distant vision of the 'thin green steeple of the church' into a 'close-hauled' 'sail' (*PPL*, p. 537), in order to bring it towards her, as an exaggerated foreground of a *painterly* painting. In contrast, in 'The Riverman', as the man distances himself from his house he sees it 'a piece of washing| forgotten on the bank' (*PPL*, p. 85).

Interestingly, Bishop's idea of memory as lines of numbers expresses a *painterly* restlessness between the material and immaterial dimensions of experience. In her essay 'Primer Class', she recalls memory as numbers 'clumsily written' 'in pencil, blue crayon, or blurred ink'; 'columns squeezed together', with 'crooked', 'long vertical lines between them' (*PPL*, p. 402). Such memorial lines evoke a mass of non-linear, broken and unclear dimensions of varied spaces and times, which can be visually felt, but tangibly remain 'mysterious' for Bishop (*PPL*, p. 402). Bishop discovered a similar fascination for the variable expression of lines through her own hand-writing in 'Primer Class'. She expresses the dynamism of her contours of writing as 'artistically enjoyable' 'brushstrokes':

I came to admire my own handwriting in pencil, [...], perhaps as a youthful Chinese student might admire his own brushstrokes. It was wonderful to see that the letters each had different expressions, and that the same letter had different expressions at different times.

(*PPL*, p. 409)



Bishop observes the strange quality in her words for motioning as fluid lines on an adventitious canvas. Each letter has its own spatial dimension, which varies in relation to the spatiality of other letters and its own changing relationship to them in a visual field on the page or canvas. Like her feelings for her ‘two capital letters’[EB], which sometimes look ‘miserable, slumped down and sulky’ and at other times ‘fat and cheerful, almost with roses in their cheeks’ (*PPL*, p. 409), Bishop imagines her handwriting to be a process of discounting fixed forms. In this way, she spatialises writing as a *painterly* act, which consists of a fluid form of multi-dimensional and indefinite contours of letters making up different words in a changing relationship to each other. The indefinite spatiality of letters gives incomplete meanings to words and insufficient modes of perception. In Wölfflin’s words, such a *painterly* expression of writing letters to construct words in a text creates ‘a total figure’ of the text, which is something different from the sum of the parts’ (*PAH*, p. 25).

Further, Bishop explores an equally *painterly* verse form to demonstrate her *painterly* vision of reality. Peggy Samuels observes Bishop’s understanding of a verse form as having watery surface and depth. She correlates Bishop’s ‘glassy water’ with a note written on the back of a page from Erwin Panofsky’s 1930s lecture on the Baroque at New York University: ‘tensions between 2-dimensional surface and 3-dimensional picture utilized’.<sup>186</sup> Samuels concludes that Bishop’s fluid verse is suspended between two and three dimensions, capable of absorbing and modulating the surfaces points in the *painterly* lines of her verse, whose fluidity maintains a variable motion between two and three-dimensional geometry in their visual fields.

It is fascinating to note Bishop’s use of mathematical numbers, instead of words, when noting Panofsky’s ‘2 & 3’ dimensions of space. It shows her preference for thinking about her poetic form spatialised as indeterminate geometrical lines, which keep changing the dimensions of her perceptual field or object. Bishop thinks of poetry as ‘lines’, which, instead of stressing boundaries, instead move forward, backward, upwards, downwards and diagonally to spatialise, rather than construct, a plastic form within her poems. The ‘2 & 3’ dimensions point to Bishop’s liminal verse, which never maintains a linear perspective of its subject, but rather keeps the

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<sup>186</sup> Peggy Samuels, ‘Verse as Deep Surface: Elizabeth Bishop’s New Poetics, 1938-39’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52 (2006), 306-329 (p. 311) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20479774> > [accesses 14 April 2016].

process of signification open to more possibilities in its engagement.

By changing tenses, Bishop found another way of repressing the plane surface of a poem and giving it the perspective of movement. In an interview with Ashley Brown, she said, ‘switching tenses always gives effects of depth, space, foreground, background, and so on’ (*Conversations*, p. 26). The shifting of tenses visualises changing perspectives within a single poem, moving backwards and forwards, and ascending or descending in space. It can suggest close and distant views, or visible and invisible objects in a relative relationship within the open expanse of a poem. In this way the poem does not abide by any contours or cohere with the picture plane; it represents different planes in a ‘recessional’ arrangement: foreground receding backwards so that the eye repeatedly looks from front to back and vice versa.

Bishop’s interest in lines as perceptual dimensions of reality and poetic form establishes that her Baroque geometry of space facilitated her writing of *painterly* poems. I will next explore how her poetic ‘language [...] questions its ability to paint’,<sup>187</sup> which keeps it vacillating between incomplete forms of experience.

### **‘Questions of Travel’ questions a *Painterly* Eye**

In discussing Bishop’s *painterly* artistry in spatial landscapes, I begin with her mid-career poem ‘Questions of Travel’, which looks back at the poet who has also been painting. The poem traces Bishop’s *painterly* eye writing a poem-painting and questioning her *painterly* perceptions to find answers to her questions of travel. Critics have recognised the poem for its ways of recording the perceptions and expectations of a traveller in foreign places. However, more than this, I find it to be an examination of the rudiments of Bishop’s *painterly* perception, which allow her to travel to places abroad. I argue that travelling does not bring new perspectives for Bishop. Instead, it is her *painterly* eye, which makes her home exist abroad and vice versa, by distorting the perspectives through different angles of vision. Home/abroad, foreground/background, real/metaphysical, stasis/motion are contrary states that always coexist, in home as well as abroad, and will determine a painterly perspective from the ‘unpainterly’ (*PAH*, p. 50) or linear perspective.

Bishop’s compass, which always points north when travelling anywhere in

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<sup>187</sup> Michael Davidson, ‘Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42 (1983), 69-79 (p. 69) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/429948>> [accessed on 19 October 2016].

North America and Canada, instead points south in ‘Questions of Travel’, written in Brazil. It puts Bishop in a diametrically opposite position, outside herself, from which she can see what determines her painterly landscape poetry written about or in north or south. Bishop’s foreignness in Brazil enables an ‘emotional self-awareness’,<sup>188</sup> which in Panofsky’s words, is a ““modern” form of imagination and thought’,<sup>189</sup> of her *painterly* style. In the poem, the Baroque in nature gives her the occasion to reflect on her own *painterly* observations. Therefore, I intend to read Bishop’s ‘Questions’ as her encounter with her own Baroque ways of seeing, and her naïve justification of her reasons for staying home or travelling abroad.

The opening of ‘Questions of Travel’ has been analysed by critics, such as Bonnie Costello, as a ‘complaint about all the flux and first reflects negatively on the motives for travel’.<sup>190</sup> Jeffrey Gray describes the scene to be ‘rife with complaints about nature’s excess’ as a ‘disapproving reaction common in northern travellers’ accounts of the South’.<sup>191</sup>

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams hurry too  
rapidly down to the sea,  
And the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops  
Make them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,  
Turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.  
– For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,  
aren’t waterfalls yet,  
In a quick age or so, as ages go here, they probably will be.  
But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,  
The mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,  
Slime-hung and barnacled.

(PPL, p. 74)

According to these critics, Bishop’s complaints about ‘too many waterfalls’, ‘crowded streams’ and the ‘pressure of clouds’ show the incongruities between reality and her aesthetic preferences. Nevertheless, I find that Bishop’s complaint of a traveller looking forward to an appealing change of view is a humorous approach to the transmutation of rain on this side of the hemisphere. The abundance of rain

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<sup>188</sup> Irving Lavin, ‘Introduction’, in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 1-18 (p. 9).

<sup>189</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ‘What is Baroque’, in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 19-88 (p. 75).

<sup>190</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights, Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (p. 153).

<sup>191</sup> Geoffrey Gray, ‘Postcards and Sunsets: Bishop’s Revisions and the Problem of Excess’, in *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century*, ed. by Angus Cleghorn, Bethany Hicok, Thomas Travisano (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pp. 26-40 (p. 28).

and its dramatic variations show Bishop's emotional response to the landscape; the rain excites her *painterly* eye to transform it and give it the illusion of mass movement. To use Erwin Panofsky's words, Bishop's 'emotion and reflection' has led 'to a kind of awakening'.<sup>192</sup> As a common-sense observer, Bishop becomes aware of her overwhelming feelings for the rain and draws humour from her exaggerated perspective of the volume of rain and her overstated interest in commonplace things. In this amplification of 'pressure' of clouds and density of rain, I see a caricature of her *painterly* eye, which delights in the diagonal experience of a reality grown out of proportion.

Like Panofsky's 'real [Baroque] humourist' who 'contrast[s] with the satirist', Bishop 'not only excuses what (s)he ridicules' as Baroque abundance, 'but deeply sympathizes with it'.<sup>193</sup> She questions her idea of beauty as it is manifested in what she belittles, and pities herself for not being able to see the *painterly* at home. These overstated, small picturesque things of a Baroque nature include the rain Bishop sees as 'waterfalls' representing 'an unrelenting oratory' of a 'politician's speech', trees 'like noble pantomimists', 'the wooden tune| of disparate wooden clogs', the 'grease-stained filling station floor', the 'music of the fat brown bird', a 'broken gasoline pump', church towers and crosses, 'wooden footwear', and 'calligraphy of songbirds' cages' (*PPL*, pp. 74-75).

In the first stanza of 'Questions of Travel', Bishop is not framing a scene from a distance; she is composing it as she sees it in relation to her space. It begins with Wölfflin's *painterly* beauty in 'form-alienated' line, which 'lends itself to be painted [...] without addition'.<sup>194</sup> Bishop seems to be composing the rainy scene as a mass of lines accumulated in the plurality of her language. Her *painterly* eye indulges in Baroque plenitude, seeing 'too many', 'too rapidly' and 'so many' in the landscape (*PPL*, p. 74).

Bishop views the whole scene from the perspective of the rainfall. The landscape is approached diagonally, an angle characteristic of *painterly* style and commonly adopted in the Baroque works of Tintoretto, Pieter Brueghel the Elder and Vermeer. The place is grasped not in plane sections of objective truth, but as a

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<sup>192</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'What is Baroque?' in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style*, ed. by Irving Lavin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 19-88 (p. 75)

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>194</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, 'The Painterly Style', in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 29-37 (p. 29).

picture of an exaggerated foreground thrust upon the artist's space. The whole movement resides in the animated spirit of water, which keeps changing its form and maintains its perpetual transition without stressing its boundaries.

Bishop foreshortens the rain falling on the sides of the mountains; the mountain sides are diagonally stretched towards the foreground to bring them near to her eye and give an illusion of depth to rain. In this way, the larger-than-life 'waterfalls' seem to spill beyond the picture plane and into her space. However, in receding backwards, the unusually large waterfalls scale relationally to streams, and further in the depths submerge into the background of the sky, until where the line of sight perceives them as mere 'streaks' of rain. Similarly, Bishop's photographs of Brazil defy the frontality of the picture plane and focus on diagonal planes of perception. In a photograph of two boys sitting in the road (Figure 8), and the Amazon photograph (Figure 9), we enter the picture spontaneously from a diagonal path and come across shades and shadows visualising and engulfing the forms respectively.

The emphasis is on the verticality of the scene, which exerts 'pressure' on the landscape, as commonly found in Baroque art. She sees everything in flux, as the clouds move 'mile-long streaks' of 'tearstains' through space and time into diagonal and undulating streams on the sides of the mountains, maximising into a greater density of massed 'waterfalls' (*PPL*, p. 74). By witnessing a consistent metamorphosis of rain, Bishop's *painterly* eye 'perceives everything as vibrating and suffers nothing to settle into definite lines and surfaces' (*PAH*, p. 26). The 'waterfalls', 'streams' or 'streaks' of 'rain' do not have an independent meaning, but are subordinate to the overall massive movement of water, in relation to the diminished scale of the mountain. The whole movement depends on the relationship between foreground and background, between diagonal frontality of streams and receding space of rainfall on 'mountaintops'. The *painterly* eye moves from the spectacle of visual waterfalls looming large in the frontal plane, then to the streams in a successive plane and then back to their genesis in the rain drops, at greater distance and height.

To see the rain is to see Bishop seeing it. Contrary to Lorrie Goldensohn's

observation of Bishop's emphasis on 'line and contour, on the tactile element',<sup>195</sup> I find Bishop's perceptual dimension does not use line as a path of vision, but as a medium of *painterly* 'depreciation' (*PAH*, p. 14), deriving pleasure from the incomplete form of beauty. It is in the discounting of this medium that Bishop finds her subject. Bishop's *painterly* eye looks at the 'patches' of the 'restless mass' of rain as 'waterfalls' and 'streams', without stressing their contours. Water submerges the contours in its varied manifestations, so that the line does not 'take the lead' and accordingly distinguish the forms. Instead, water, in its 'broken', 'diffused' and 'twisted' lines of 'streaks' or 'tearstains' as streams and waterfalls, does not retain the form of rain. The fragmentary lines appear and disappear as the rain transforms itself to emphasise the overall volume of water. Bishop looks from an oblique angle, which glorifies the rain and diminishes the magnitude of the mountains by receding them backwards so that they appear as 'hulls of capsized ships' (*PPL*, p. 74). As visually inverted ships, the mountains appear as condensed frames occluded by the presence of the slime and sea creatures over them, which make their shape *painterly* vague and fragile. The position and shape of the mountains recall Bishop's unpublished poem 'Rainy Day, Rio' where she holds a similar view that the 'Mountains should really not protrude' (*PPL*, p. 247). This is because the mountains hinder the front and back motion of the *painterly* eye with their huge, singular dimensions and mass.

The theme of passage dominates 'Questions of Travel'. Eleanor Cook describes the waterfall as 'seeming to deposit lint, like fabric being laundered'.<sup>196</sup> Considering Cook's point of view, I see the fragmented, vague 'streaks' or 'tearstains' as material fibres of rain, which continuously return ragged and exhausted from passing down the rough terrain. It is as if, receding backwards after their show of 'waterfalls', the raindrops are finally left high and dry in the depths of the sky. The 'streaks' and 'tearstains' of rain resemble the depreciation of the written lines on the poet's primer class slate. She 'liked best' when she washed the lines off and saw them drying 'like clouds' where 'the last wet streak would grow tinier and tinier, and thinner and thinner' into the greyness of the slate (*PPL*, p. 404). The journey of rain

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<sup>195</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, 'Written Pictures, Painted Poems', in *"In Worcester, Massachusetts": Essays on Elizabeth Bishop, Worcester Polytechnic Studies*, 18, ed. by Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp (NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999), pp. 167-176 (p. 176).

<sup>196</sup> Eleanor Cook, 'Kinds of Travel, Kinds of Home, Kinds of Poems: Questions of Travel', in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 141-93 (p. 152).

corresponds to the *painterly* motion of Bishop's writing on the slate, which excites her for exhausting the dimensions of words to spatialise the changing nature of experiences. Thus, her wet slate, like the rain in 'Questions of Travel', allows the lines of words to continue to change in a subordinate relationship to the larger meanings of the written text.

After their steep journey down the earth, these worn-out rain drops in the sky present a picturesque sight, like Bishop's 'stained' writing walls in her prose work, 'In Prison' (*PPL*, p. 585). The light shines through these rain drops, causing striking shades of light and suppressed silhouettes identified as 'streaks' and 'shiny' 'tearstains'. The sky, stained with raindrops, provides the spectacle of Bishop's writing wall, which provided a non-homogenous and indeterminate texture for her writing. According to Wölfflin, the picturesque 'exists as a picture for the eye', whose broken, twisted and crumbled movements suggesting the 'rustling life of forms' (*PAH*, p. 24). In this sense, the 'tearstains' and stained walls suggest Bishop's eye for the picturesque in her *painterly* language and nature, as she finds beauty in the worn out materials repeatedly visualised in the poem: the 'slime-hung and barnacled' 'hulls of capsized ships', the 'old stonework', the 'grease-stained filling station floor', the 'broken gasoline pump' and the 'weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages' (*PPL*, pp. 74-75). These imperfect and wearied textures offer *painterly* indeterminate and incomplete forms, susceptible to the changes of light and colours. Similar to 'Questions of Travel', in several of her Brazilian photographs Bishop creates picturesque impressions beyond the need for the tactile. Bishop's photograph of the rusty stone wall (Figure 10) shows it diagonal to the picture plane and directed to the vertical, with a cropped and fractured wooden door at the other diagonal end of the frame. Even the plant hanging from the wall complements the ragged texture of the wall. The whole scene is picturesque; the light and shade seeps into the raw crevices of the walls and the door to affect their surfaces with new tonalities, like the drained rain drops in 'Questions of Travel' after they go through their diagonal metamorphosis.

According to Lorrie Goldensohn, Bishop's poems and watercolour paintings show a 'fondness for line as both medium and subject'.<sup>197</sup> However, whereas

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<sup>197</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, 'Written Pictures, Painted Poems', in "*In Worcester, Massachusetts*": *Essays on Elizabeth Bishop, Worcester Polytechnic Studies*, 18, ed. by Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp (NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999), pp. 167-76 (p. 167).

Goldensohn finds affinity between Bishop's verbal and visual work, I find a dissimilarity of form. I agree with William Benton that in Bishop's paintings 'nothing is tentative – the line may wobble, but it rules'.<sup>198</sup> Considering the above discussion on Bishop's landscape with rainfall, her paintings are not *painterly*, her landscape poems and Brazilian photographs are. Bishop's north and south landscape watercolours: *Nova Scotia Landscape* (Figure 11) and *Brazilian Landscape* (Figure 12) are more linear than *painterly* in form. Each painting's lines can be read as having an immediate relation to real objects.

The fact that Bishop told her friend Loren McIver that the *Brazilian Landscape* could be cut into separate sections<sup>199</sup> indicates the autonomy of its parts, which according to Wölfflin is a quality of linear art works. In linear style, each form is 'free and complete'.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, each part has an individual identity separate from the whole. Both paintings, despite their varied natural features, find harmony in their picture planes. They suggest tactility and calmness, rather than movement. The varied planes and silhouettes in the *Nova Scotia Landscape* are defined through clear lines and symmetrical forms such as the houses, boats, mountains and trees. Although in *Brazilian Landscape* the view is situated very close to a truncated tree, pitched above an undulating plane, it abruptly serves as the middle of the picture, thus balancing the perspective on both sides. The mountains, overwhelmingly present in the picture, contrast to historical Baroque paintings. In them, mountains are usually absent in the landscapes, or are reduced in scale and positioned at angles, thus not occluding the background altogether.

Bishop's *painterly* vision of rain, from its marks to waterfalls, is her way of bringing close distant dimensions of not just space, but also the fourth dimension, time. As mentioned in the first section, Bishop was interested in Edward Kasner's geometry of the fourth dimension, in which he spatialised time through the repetition of the three-dimensional geometry of a thing.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, through the infinite number of three dimensions of a thing, we can visualise the spatial pattern of its fourth dimension. Time cannot be touched in space and can only be visualised in

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<sup>198</sup> William Benton, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Other Art', <<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/03/09/elizabeth-bishop-other-art/>> [accessed 26 August, 2016].

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, 'The Grand Style', in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 38-43 (p. 38).

<sup>201</sup> Edward Kasner and James Newman, 'Assorted Geometries: Plane and Fancy', in *Mathematics and the Imagination* (NY: Simon and Shuster, 1940), pp. 112-53 (p. 130).



geometry. The quick transformation of rain as ‘waterfalls’ in the poem is a visual spectacle created by Bishop’s *painterly* eye rather than a record of a tactile fact about her perceptual field. When the *painterly* eye penetrates into the fluid materiality of rain and into the space of the immaterial, these ‘waterfalls’ anticipate the future of such continuous rainfalls. Bishop informs us that the water drops are not ‘waterfalls yet’, but ‘in a quick age or so, as ages go here, they probably will be.’ In this sense, Bishop’s repeated perception of rain sees ‘waterfalls’ as the fourth dimension of rain, similar to Kasner’s imagination of the fourth dimension of time visualised in space. Bishop’s fourth-dimensional and incorporeal vision of rain unites real and fictive spaces together in present time and space.

As the above discussion makes clear, the manoeuvring of the rain conditions Bishop’s exaggerated and picturesque perception of the sights and sounds around her. The ‘sudden golden silence’ (*PPL*, p. 75) after rain, like the ‘golden beams’ from ‘thunderclouds’ in ‘A Trip to Vigia’ (*PPL*, p. 467), marks the shift from Bishop’s faithful observation to her common-sense interrogation. In questioning herself, occluded behind ‘we’, she finds reasons for travelling and seeking beauty in the extravagance of ordinary rainfall and other disparate, if small, objects in nature. She asks herself, ‘is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?’ Given Wölfflin’s view that the Baroque style is ‘tied to the material’<sup>202</sup> finds echoes in Bishop’s *painterly* engagement with the landscape made through rainfall, I see that it is lack of material for her poetic imagination that makes Bishop travel, going to places where her imagination can be realised. This creates the visual reality of her ‘circus tent’, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Therefore, it is the *painterly* textures of the place which determines Bishop’s reasons for travel or staying at home, and not the poet’s ‘lack of imagination’.

To further elucidate Bishop’s reasons for choosing home or abroad, I refer to Eleanor Cook’s recent criticism of the poem. Cook finds Bishop’s development from ‘Arrival at Santos’ to ‘Questions of Travel’ as a steady transition from being a complaining tourist, who finds ‘a disappointing scene for those hoping for the sublime or at least the picturesque’,<sup>203</sup> to a traveller who ‘reflects on questions of

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<sup>202</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Principles of Art History: A Revision’, *Logos*, International Journal of Philosophy of Culture, 22 (1933), 210-218, (p. 216) translated and quoted in: Jane O Newman, ‘Inventing the Baroque: A Critical History of Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Debates’, in *Benjamin’s Library: Modernity, Nation and the Baroque* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 23-76 (p. 57).

<sup>203</sup> Eleanor Cook, ‘Kinds of Travel, Kinds of Home, Kinds of Poems: *Questions of Travel*’, in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 141-93 (p. 144).

travel and of home'.<sup>204</sup> In Cook's observation of this change in Bishop's stance, I find that her change of approach matches the change in the nature of the environment: 'Arrival at Santos' is a static poem, but 'Questions of Travel' is about motion, which stimulates her Baroque mind to question her restlessness for the view. In 'Arrival at Santos', I see an absence of *painterly* motion, as the scene indicates stasis: 'Here is a coast; here is a harbour' is a 'meagre diet' (*PPL*, p. 71) for the *painterly* eye, which complains about the stillness in 'here'. The mind perceives immobility in 'Arrival at Santos', as the scene does not alter the perspective of the traveller, who wished 'to see the sun the other way around' (*PPL*, p. 74). Her hope that the non-homogenous nature of space would show the changing properties of things seems to remain unfulfilled. Therefore, Bishop sees 'Arrival at Santos' as an 'impractically shaped' scenery (*PPL*, p. 71):

Oh tourist,  
Is this how this country is going to answer you  
And your immodest demands for a different world,  
And a better life, and complete comprehension  
Of both

(*PPL*, p. 71)

In contrast, in 'Questions of Travel' motion generates *painterly* questions: 'should we have stayed at home?'; 'is it right to be watching', or 'what childishness is that' (*PPL*, p. 74) which makes Bishop travel to this Brazilian landscape. In Wölfflinian terms, it is 'dissatisfaction and restlessness rather than fulfilment'<sup>205</sup>, in the *painterly* textures, which attracts Bishop to physically change her position from home to abroad, and take an interest in 'Questions of Travel', rather than her feelings upon 'Arrival of Santos'.

It is due to the fluid nature of the materials in 'Questions of Travel' that Bishop politicises the rainfall. Further, through its non-linear and twisted discourse it recedes the static shapes of mountains from the foreground. By rearranging the foreground and background, Bishop distances the fixed mountains, which have always reminded her of 'something at the back' (*LOC*, p. 74), perhaps her 'home' in the background, which now contrasts with the *painterly* frontality of the Brazilian

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>205</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, 'The Grand Style, in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 38-43 (p. 38).

rain, the foreign place that is not home.

By choosing the rain as her mode of perspective rather than the mountains, Bishop chooses the *painterly* ‘inexpressibility of an infinitude of form, which seems to defy any attempt at fixation’ (*PAH*, p. 37). It is the fluidity that matters to her and not the tactility, where reality is a visual rearranging of background and foreground, and the *painterly* eye keeps on withdrawing from the picture plane towards the diagonal recession. With the far and estranged brought near to sight and touch we are able to ‘dream our dreams| and have them, too’ (*PPL*, p. 74). Bishop goes here to visualise her dreams through a materiality capable of shaping them as intangible and passing forms of beauty. In this sense, Bishop travels from home, where, materials, such as of the mountains, show the rigidity of its matter. This movement sometimes shows the limitations of her eye to put firm materials into motion and thus lend them a vague beauty by dissolving their ‘tectonic’, or solid forms (*PAH*, p. 15).

Similarly, the repetition of ‘pity’ intensifies Bishop’s feelings for the *painterly* in nature, which is sometimes estranged from her sight. Therefore, it is ‘right to be watching strangers in a play| in the strangest of theatres’ (*PPL*, p. 74) where what matters for Bishop is the visual appearances rather than the tactile sensations of things and scenes:

But surely it would have been a pity  
not to have seen the trees along this road,  
really exaggerated in their beauty,  
not to have seen them gesturing  
like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.

(*PPL*, p. 74)

The ‘restless’ surfaces and edges of trees overwhelm the Baroque eye with their dramatic performance of ‘pantomimists’, which separates them from their form. Their flamboyant actions express their freedom to move in dimensions that defy their plasticity. Following Wölfflin, ‘order disappear[s]’ when the swaying form of trees bring ‘lively variation in the axial directions’ (*PAH*, pp. 24-25).

If reality is nowhere to be held but is to be grasped in the incomplete form of things, the worn-out and broken, rather than the linear and perfect, then it is ‘right’ for Bishop ‘to stare at some inexplicable old stonework’. She ponders ‘blurr’dly and inconclusively’ at the relationship between disparate things such as ‘two-noted’

‘wooden clogs’, ‘crudest wooden footwear’ and ‘whittled fantasies of wooden cages’ (*PPL*, p. 75).

The situation of home and abroad is like the dichotomy between the iceberg and the ship in ‘The Imaginary Iceberg’. In this poem of the North, Bishop says that ‘We’d rather have the iceberg than the ship | although it meant the end of travel’, and this is a ‘scene a sailor’d give his eyes for’ (*PPL*, p. 3-4). Critics have looked at the relation between the iceberg and the ship as a dialogue between mind and body, imaginary and real, where ‘[Bishop] holds the imaginary above the visible’.<sup>206</sup> However, in recent criticism Jonathan Ellis calls it a ‘baroque poem’ for not presenting an absolute choice between mind and body but having both essentially exist together: ‘Bishop is troubled not by the conflict between iceberg and ship and whatever allegorical meanings we ascribe to them, but by the insistence that such distortions exist at all.’ As Ellis mentions that the iceberg ‘may tell us more about the emotional life of the poet’,<sup>207</sup> this relationship between ice and emotions can also be seen as a coexisting relationship between stasis and motion. Therefore, in ‘The Imaginary Iceberg’ and ‘Questions of Travel’, it is the painterliness of the eye, which matters to ideas of motion rather than travel as travel itself does not guarantee motion of perceptual dimensions. If it is about the visual indeterminacy of the material, which matters here as well as there, home and abroad, in the iceberg and the moving ship, then it doesn’t matter where Bishop spatialises herself to visualise the *painterly* ‘world of shifting semblances’ (*PAH*, p. 14). It is equally seen in the apparently static ‘iceberg’ and in the flowing Brazilian rainforest.

This is why, despite sailing on a ship in uniform motion, Bishop prefers to wait on the iceberg, which is made all pervasive as a ‘cloudy rock’ (*PPL*, p. 3). Like the rain in ‘Questions of Travel’, the iceberg has the capability to generate a *painterly* landscape for the Baroque eye. Contrary to this, the ship’s movement suggests stasis, as it invokes no change to space and time. The ship’s motion takes Bishop nowhere, but gives a feeling of being perpetually stranded: ‘the snow lies undissolved on the water’ (*PPL*, p. 4). Bishop prefers to stay and watch the performance of the imaginary, which becomes a visual reality for her rather than the actual possibility of travelling on a ship.

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<sup>206</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights, Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (p. 92).

<sup>207</sup> Jonathan Ellis, ‘Ice and Snow’, in *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 21-53 (p. 40).

Hence, as a traveller in Brazil, Bishop sees that it is a matter of perspective, using varied dimensions of the visual field that bring visual motion and change to her scenes. It is not always necessary to travel for a definite change of sight and site. Therefore, home and abroad are postures of Bishop's *painterly* eye. Similarly, in 'The Imaginary Iceberg' she gives up the physical displacement of the ship for her displacement of perspective at sea, which presents this massive iceberg whose vertical heights 'correct ellipses in the sky', and create a dramatic stage with its 'airy twists of snow' (*PPL*, p. 4). Therefore, it can be said that in the poem, Bishop sides with ideas of stasis/being at home, which brings *painterly* movement, and in 'Questions of Travel' she delights in travel/being abroad. In this sense, home/abroad, iceberg/ship, imaginary/real are all capable of holding moving perspectives for the *painterly* eye, which savours the visual discrepancies over stranded facts.

Just as home does not mark stasis, or linear dimension of experience, nor does abroad always mean motion or visual reality. Home/abroad, background/foreground are equally capable of being tactile and visual, linear and *painterly* 'methods of composition' (*PPL*, p. 241). When the eye identifies the *painterly*, be it on this side, or the 'other side of the sun', it is 'like changing positions in a canoe' (*PPL*, p. 241).

So 'where should have we been today?' The answer is actually nowhere in particular because home/abroad are coextensive spaces. According to the mathematician Edward Kasner, whom Bishop read, 'motion endows an object with the strange property of being continually nowhere'.<sup>208</sup> Thinking of home and abroad gives Bishop an indeterminate position, which is 'nowhere' when in stasis, but also continuously in motion to see the world as an indefinite space. It does not matter where home is; it is as equally mobile a place as abroad, which enables her eye to perceive the variations around her. Even if home is static, it can still generate motion through *painterly* correspondence with the changing textures, which defy its fixity of vision. Abroad gives a sense of motion through its definite change of site; however, if this change of place and time is unable to bring about indeterminate perspectives, then it is as static a position as sitting in one's home. In this case, Pascal is 'entirely right| about just sitting quietly in one's room' (*PPL*, p. 75).

If indeed Bishop sees the world as a series of interconnected parts,

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<sup>208</sup> Edward Kasner and James Newman, 'Beyond the Googol', in *Mathematics and the Imagination* (NY: Simon and Shuster, 1940), pp. 27-66 (p. 60).

subordinate to a whole not conceivable, then home and abroad are not independent spaces. They are dependent on ‘continent, city, country or society’. In this way, home or abroad remain small parts hinged to other parts of an infinite social and geographical continuity. Therefore, in choosing a home anywhere, or finding an abroad, one is inescapably attached to the other in a ‘unified unity’ (*PAH*, p. 158):

Continent, city, country, society:  
The choice is never wide and never free.  
And here, or there . . . No. should we have stayed at home,  
Wherever that may be?

(*PPL*, p. 75).

Bishop does not want to be only at home or only abroad, because ‘the choice is never wide and never free’. In making a definite choice of place, her eye will not have the freedom to shift her perspective to sight of *painterly* materials. However, choosing home at the close of the poem as an undefined space, ‘where that may be’, as an interrelated part of an indefinite world, Bishop wishes to construct a ‘homelier’ (*PPL*, p. 19) geometry, an intimate relationship of *painterly* foreground and background, containing what excites her far and beyond, as well as what remains foreign to her.

Therefore, in Pascal’s words, I see Bishop’s preference for home as her choice to remain ‘frightened and [...] astonished at being here [home] rather than there [abroad]’.<sup>209</sup> Bishop’s *painterly* eye demands her to be restless in order to see all that is in flux, which drifts through the uniformity of space beyond her to bring an element of surprise from the unknown forms of things and spaces.

### **The *Recessional* Landscape of ‘Cape Breton’**

Composed out of Bishop’s visits (from 1946 to 1948) to her maternal grandparents’ region, Nova Scotia, the northern landscape of ‘Cape Breton’, unlike the southern landscape in ‘Questions of Travel’, does not have waterfalls and mountains in its foreground. The landscape entices the *painterly* eye to bring closer the water, sky and mainland through a diagonal meandering motion. It is as if we are moving diagonally into Pieter Brueghel’s (The Elder) Flemish *Landscape with the*

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<sup>209</sup> Blaise Pascal, ‘Of the Necessity of the Wager’, in *Pensées*, trans. by W. F. Trotter (NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2003), pp. 52-70 (p. 61).

*Fall of Icarus* (Figure 13), or Johannes Vermeer's home town painting of *View of Delft* (Figure 14), through a zigzag pattern diagonally moving in and out of the foreground, the waters and mainland of an adventitious frame.

These painters' works were part of Wölfflin's discussion of Baroque art. Bishop was familiar with both artists, for example encountering Breughel's works, including *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, in 1935 in Brussels.<sup>210</sup> In response to Randall Jarrell's general association of her poetry with Vermeer's works, Bishop acknowledged that 'it has been one of my dreams that someday someone would think of Vermeer, without my saying it first' (*OA*, p. 312). Therefore, in discussing the poem as a composition of recessional landscape, I refer to both these artists' works here to show their *painterly* affinity with Bishop's poems.

In Breughel's painting the ploughman diagonally directs the eye to the shepherd, then to the fisherman, meandering subsequently to the wobbly trees inland, followed by the island out in the sea. From there it moves to the boats approaching the semi-circular port and the town inside the mainland, to the mountains further back and so on and so forth. Similarly, Bishop recedes diagonally outwards from the steep posture of birds on the cliffs, to the unbalanced motion of sheep on the edges of the island, the zigzag sea overlapping with the vibrating mist, through the enticing 'serpentine line'<sup>211</sup> of the shag's neck. She moves into the undulating valleys and narrow gorges at the back, to the diagonal gradation of conifer trees, from there outside to the rickety road, which is abandoned for the picturesque interior of mountains and forests, which catches up with the motion of the bus down the steep meadows and their neighbouring brooks. This diagonal movement, in Wölfflin's terms, 'passes over the sum of things' (*PAH*, p. 19) and foreshortens near and far planes, so that the suddenness of perspective can be maintained as the eye constantly drifts to and from close to distant and big to small perspectives. In this sense, nothing settles in rows and the 'eye is continually forced to form recessional relations' (*PAH*, p. 74). Even the literal representation of the poem on the page gives the impression of a meandering motion through the irregular length of verse lines, which seem to be moving both inwards and outwards.

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<sup>210</sup> Linda Anderson, 'The Story of the Eye: Elizabeth Bishop and the Limits of the Visual', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Poet of the Periphery*, ed. by Linda Anderson and Jo Shapcott (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2002), pp. 159-174 (p. 159).

<sup>211</sup> Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo quoted in Severo Sarduy: 'Baroque Cosmology: Kepler', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. by Christopher Winks, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 292-315 (297).

Critics such as David Kalstone, Jonathan Ellis and Colm Toibin agree that Bishop artfully weaves her homelessness and longing with her mother's memories of Cape Breton in the eponymous poem. Instead, I find in the poem Bishop's alternative approach to her own personal memory; her lonesome delight in the perils of imagination to see beyond any longing for the sensuous experience of touch. Bishop does not seem to revive her mother's temporal memory of this place. The scenes depicted here are not frozen events in time, but are seen as passing tales of visual reality, whether serving as memory, myth or geographical awareness. Even if we keep the maternal association in mind, the landscape can be seen as a *painterly* response to her mother's spatial memory, which may reside in the *painterly* beauty of the visual field, rather than anything tactile. Unlike T S Eliot, Bishop is not suggesting an escape from emotions, but uses the Baroque to intensify the representation of her feelings in the rising and falling of the landscape. Bishop undergoes a journey of variable feelings through her *painterly* 'idea of the place' (*PPL*, p. 175) which seems to lift any heaviness from her memories, or any burden of fixed forms in the landscape. Bishop prefers to de-frame her picture plane by engulfing any tactile enclosures in nature and pointing out what lies beyond their linear dimensions. Instead of tracing a chronology of events or scenes, Bishop exchanges any symmetry in the setting by twisting its forms and foreshortening them.

The poem begins with the description of the bird islands, Ciboux and Hertford, which Bishop visited during her trip to Cape Breton. The details can be read as her records of those islands and her observation of the striking variation of scale between the mainland and these islands:

Out on the high "bird islands", Ciboux and Hertford,  
 The razorbill auks and the silly-looking puffins all stand  
 With their backs to the mainland  
 In solemn, uneven lines along the cliff's brown grass-frayed  
 edge,  
 While the few sheep pastured there go "Baa, baa."  
 (Sometimes, frightened by aeroplanes, they stampede  
 and fall over into the sea or onto the rocks.)

(*PPL*, p. 48-49)

At first, the beginning of the poem seems to be a prelude to the actual scene. The birds, 'with their backs to the mainland', seem to be not in line with the picture plane



of the poem, which, as we read the poem further, focusses instead on motioning towards the mainland. It seems as if Bishop is merely using the bird islands as a stand-point to see the sea, sky and distant mainland with her binocular vision. However, once Bishop sees the contours of islands in *painterly* motion, they suggest ways to move this plane into a three-dimensional relationship with the other spatial contours in her frame. Therefore, Bishop diagonally foreshortens the island, probably one of the bird islands where she is standing, to make her spatial position at the island a coextensive space with her *painterly* frame. In this case, the island shares its elevated vantage point with Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and Vermeer's *View of Delft*, making the high cliff of birds Bishop's near station-point from where she initiates Wölfflin's 'into-the-picture movement' (*PAH*, p. 94) towards the mainland.

Although Bishop brings one of these bordering islands within her *painterly* frame, interestingly, we know that the birds do not look out to the mainland. However, if the birds have their 'backs to the mainland,' (*PPL*, p. 48) how can Bishop look out to the mainland from their standpoint? The answer to this lies in Bishop's prose 'Being Alone', where she explains:

in being alone, the mind finds its Sea, the wide, quiet plane with different lights in the sky and different, more secret sounds. we will never go on voyages of discovery, and never find the islands of the Imagination, [...] while we stand on the shore with our backs to the water and cry after our companions.

(*PPL*, p. 323)

Considering Bishop's ideas about having imaginative encounters with reality, her preference to stand on either of these bird islands, rather than on the shore of the mainland, seems understandable. With the naive indifference of the birds to the mainland, Bishop embraces her loneliness to explore her 'islands of imagination' where the changing sights and sounds are not marred by any previous experiences. In foregrounding the simplicity and detachment of the birds from the scene behind them, Bishop adopts their indirect posture of not directly looking at the landscape behind them. This indirect perception is characteristic of the *painterly*, matching Bishop's reading of Juan Gris's perception of things: 'looking the way they look

when we aren't looking at them'.<sup>212</sup> The oblique stance of the birds, on the slanting surface of the cliffs, anticipates a diagonal angle of Bishop's perception and motion of the visual field caught unaware, somewhere between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of a linear picture-plane. We see a similar posture in Vermeer's foregrounded characters in the *View of Delft*, where women standing close to sight, and some distant characters at the diagonal station-point of the quay, have their sides to the expanding scene of sea and land in the background. Even in Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* we are introduced to the diagonal landscape through the motion of the exaggerated figure of ploughman, and the shepherd near him, who motion in oblique dimensions to the mainland.

It is the *painterly* posture of birds, with their non-linear mode of perception, that attracts Bishop to choose the island for looking at the receding scene in the background. However, Bishop gives us more reasons to agree with her choice. The addition of the adjective 'silly' to describe the birds introduces Bishop's 'vague theory' of having learnt 'most from having someone suddenly make fun of something one has taken seriously up till then. I mean about life, the world, and so on' (*PPL*, p. 858). Like Breughel's clumsy-looking ploughman and shepherd, the birds' posture illustrates Bishop's frivolous response to the landscape, which must have had profound associations for her. For Mariana Machova, the poet's sense of being funny gives a 'way of seeing things' that occurs 'differently and afresh'.<sup>213</sup> While standing with the 'silly' birds, she prefers to be 'cheerful', if not 'profound'<sup>214</sup> about the place around her.

Bishop tries to approach the landscape differently in being honest about how it appears to her now. Having an eye for visual appeal, she seems to venture into unweaving the known to weave the here and now about 'Cape Breton'. This is why the whole poem is written in the present tense: 'all stand with their backs'| 'sheep go "Baa, Baa"', 'mist hangs in layers', 'road clammers'. There are improvisations of present continuous with 'dripping serpent-neck', 'forests standing', birds 'floating upwards' and 'meshing' and the verse closes on this continuity as the 'birds keep on

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<sup>212</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'The Rose and the Crystal', in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 72-100 (p. 84).

<sup>213</sup> Mariana Machova, 'The Diary of "Helena Morley"' in *Elizabeth Bishop and Translation* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 29-44 (p. 36).

<sup>214</sup> Jonathan Ellis, 'Introduction', in *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 3-20 (p. 14).

singing', 'mist follows' and the 'chill' keeps on 'rippling the dark brooks' (*PPL*, p. 49).

To carry on with this jaunty stance of the 'silly' birds, Bishop further describes their position as 'solemn, uneven lines'. The word 'solemn' conveys Bishop's truthful account of the indeterminate lines of the birds, whose nature is never plastic, but only visual. These irregular lines recall Bishop's idea of personal memory, which is 'clumsily written' (*PPL*, p. 402) in crooked lines, and remains incomprehensible for her. She acknowledges that 'poetry is a way of thinking with one's feelings', but her bird-lines, like her memory-lines, stamp her realisation that she has not been 'very successful' in expressing 'personal' feelings.<sup>215</sup> Bishop is not suggesting that she is restraining or keeping her emotions vague. Perhaps she is putting aside any expected impressions of this place, for the sake of the 'suddenness of perspective' (*PAH*, p. 84), emerging from her visual observations. In this sense, the *painterly* indeterminacy of these 'uneven lines' of birds represents the tentativeness of emotions, which keep meandering as the *painterly* eye wobbles with the landscape, like her 'compass needle' in her 'Sonnet', 'wobbling and wavering| undecided' (*PPL*, p. 180).

Although the birds are standing, their non-linear position does not give a 'flaccid effect' (*PAH*, p. 2); the variation in bird-lines anticipates movement like the ploughing lines in the exaggerated foreground of Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. According to Wölfflin, for the figures who 'stand along the edge', 'care is taken that they do not settle into a row and that the eye is continually forced to form recessional relations' (*PAH*, p. 74). The inconsistent patchy lines of birds withdraw from any geometrical plane and give the suggestion of a non-uniform foreground, whose purpose is not to determine the individual form of varied birds, but emphasise their *painterly* silhouette in the gradation of lines.

The 'grass-frayed' edges of the cliffs add to the effect of motion of the non-linear lines of birds. The frayed bounds of the cliff disrupt any illusion of solid boundaries; the worn-out grass gives a picturesque effect to the cliff, drawing attention to the beauty in its broken surface. This *painterly* surface remains impalpable and gives the illusion of movement, as if merging with what lies ahead. Since the island's plane is repressed and brought into movement, the 'contents of

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<sup>215</sup> Victoria Harrison, 'Articulating a Personal Poetics', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 19-41 (p. 29).

[the] picture can no longer be grasped in plane sections' (*PAH*, p. 74). The slanting nature of the edges takes us diagonally down to the rocks on which the gullible 'sheep' can fall, to the 'shag's rising and falling serpent-neck'. The eye moves in and out of the waters, noticing the 'mist' hastening up to the rising valleys and deep gorges, 'clambering' up and down the road into the interior and out again, through the bus moving down the meadows and to the rippling 'brooks' as the vanishing point of sight.

The anticipated falling of the sheep, on the gradation of rocks down the edges, or in the expanse of the sea, recalls the 'wobbling, tipping' of the cow in 'Santarem' (*PPL*, p. 176). The panicking of the calm sheep at the noise of the aeroplane in the sky prepares the onlooker for a foreshortened vision of the sky. By making the distant jarring sound audible to the sheep below, Bishop condenses the expanse of the sky in diagonal proximity to the island cliffs. Bishop is bringing the plane above, near in space, to where its sounds can tremble the innocent sheep to establish a relationship between the frontality of the island and the diagonally receding sky above and backwards. In Wölfflin's words, the recessional planes 'set the small beside the big' (*PAH*, p. 84). This relationship between the stumbling motion of sheep and the shuddering sound of the plane is expressed in parenthesis to additionally highlight the recessional perspective, which is beginning to supplement the picture.

Behind this innocent move of the sheep, the *painterly* motion is taken up by the light. It diagonally falls on the sea and illuminates the surface as unsettling the glaring 'silken' texture, which is 'disappearing' by 'weaving and weaving' (*PPL*, p. 49) its fibres in and out of the mist. The mist merges and converge with the sea in all directions.

Like Vermeer's emphasis on the light and dark clouds in *View of Delft*, which drape the scene in impalpable shades of colours and bring depth to the waters and mainland, Bishop's atmospheric variations of light and mist suggest depth in the contact of sea and sky, while keeping its textures intangible and non-plastic. The mist and water cannot be separately seen in different planes. They are bound to be seen in recessional relationship: front and back, up and down, receding from any possibility of two-dimensional projection. The layers of mist and shining fibres of water coexist as 'strokes' and 'flecks' oscillating the appearances of whatever comes amidst them, the 'shag' or the 'motor boat'. The mist overlaps the motorboat and due

to this occlusion of the boat, the mist appears to be vibrating in ‘rapid’ (*PPL*, p. 49) motion instead. It seems that the whole landscape is a series of variable motions coming in contact through the merging and converging of their indeterminate boundaries.

The *painterly* vagueness of the mist suppresses the definitiveness of forms interspersed in the planes of sea and sky. However, the shag’s ‘serpent-neck’ moving in and out of the water rescues us from any bewilderment and its diagonally undulating neck leads the eye to sudden changes of perspective backwards inside the mainland.

The dripping serpent neck directs the eye to the misty valleys and gorges, setting its small self in immediate relation to the great physical features in the background. The rapidity of mist quickly submerges separate shapes at a distance and compresses them to bring them in an oscillating relationship with other things. Bishop does not like heaviness, so she chooses the mist to penetrate further into the mainland and sway the solid objects into motion by manoeuvring their forms through a partial visibility of overlapping and occluded fragments.

The mist rises among valleys, descends in gorges like spirits of snow, and spirals upwards around the gradation of conifer trees, ‘each riser distinguished from the next’ as a ‘nervous irregular saw-tooth edge’ (*PPL*, p. 49). As it magnifies towards the foreground in iridescent colours, the mist diagonally foreshortens the conifer trees so that they appear to be quivering zigzag edges of saw-tooth. In this *painterly* way, ‘the close view and the distant view diverge’ (*PAH*, p. 44). The recession continues as the ‘stereoscopic view’ of trembling conifers merges with the ‘wild’ road outside in view.

The ‘clambering’ motion of the road makes its edges steep and *painterly* unstressed along the coast. As the eye moves along the road, we come to know that it is a ‘Sunday’ scene, as suggested in Vermeer’s painting.<sup>216</sup> Both artists give countable presence and subordinate role to human characters, as in Baroque paintings. In doing so, they emphasise the *painterly* motion, which connects everything in the scene, rather than giving attention to individual characters. The ‘yellow’ bulldozers standing there appear to be ‘small’ in size because they are distant; the churches are also diminished in scale and appear to be defying their form

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<sup>216</sup> Alter A. Liedtke, Michiel Plomp and Axel Ruger, ‘Delft and the Arts before 1600’, in *Vermeer and the Delft School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 21-41 (p. 24).

as undefined and suppressed ‘hills’. The unequal sizes of the bulldozers and churches become equal in a space of recession. This play of scales continues as the road distances further, and Bishop remains faithful to her observation as the ‘little churches’ are reduced to crystal ‘arrowheads’ (*PPL*, p. 49).

As the road moves from outside the mainland to the interior, Bishop sees it abandoned, let loose, its destination undetermined. Whatever prior meaning the landscape had ‘appears to have been abandoned’ (*PPL*, p. 49) by the nature as well as the poet. The road holds back itself from tracing any chronology; therefore, visually ‘we cannot see’ (*PPL*, p. 49) any historic tale being told here. Instead, the road loses itself in the new sights and sounds of the interiors it comes across.

There the ‘reputed’ ‘deep lakes’, ‘disused’ tracks, ‘burnt forests’ and rocky mountains invoke a picturesque sight of worn-out surfaces in ‘gray scratches’ (*PPL*, p. 49), like Bishop’s imagined ‘junk-room’ where different things ‘decayed, and fell together and took a general odor’.<sup>217</sup> These ‘admirable scriptures’ ‘made on stones by stones’ do not preach a moral atmosphere, rather they suggest the *painterly* restlessness of a picturesque present. In this way, the isolated lakes and paths, the ruined forests and the barren mountains celebrate their crumbling and ruffling life separated from any definite meanings. Tactility is avoided for any sensuous touch, and the wearied interior appears less plastic from a distance, ‘made on stones by stones’. The ‘song-sparrow songs’ show how nature contributes to Bishop’s *painterly* encounter with the interior. The sparrows recall Bishop’s ‘North Haven’, where she tells Robert Lowell that ‘you can’t derange, or rearrange,| your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.)’ (*PPL*, p. 176). In this poem it is as if she might not have been able to compose new meanings of the interior if nature had not provided her the flight of visual reality through the upwards motion of the song-sparrow songs – it as if the birds are lifting away any tangibility of the interior to ‘freely’ compose it in new rhymes. These ‘song-sparrow songs’ apparently mesh up with ‘fish-nets’, perhaps formed by the thin ‘snowy’ mist of overlapping streaks of ‘brown’ ragged texture in the interior:

And these regions now have little to say for themselves  
 Except in thousands of light song-sparrow songs floating  
 Upward

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<sup>217</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, ‘Whispering Galleries’, in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 165-91 (p. 171).

Freely, dispassionately, through the mist, and meshing  
In the brown-net, fine, torn fish-nets.

(*PPL*, p. 49).

As the birds rise above the interior and mingle with the mist, the eye bustles with the motion of the bus, taking uneven turns up and down the road, like the bus in 'The Moose'. Since it is Sunday, it rushes past its usual stopovers. At the moment, it is not 'packed with people', and out of the finite number of passengers, the bus drops a 'man' with a 'baby' who 'climbs over a stile' and goes diagonally 'down the small steep meadow' to the 'invisible house', which lies beside the 'dark brooks' – the vanishing point of the frame (*PPL*, p. 50). Just as Vermeer gave an open perspective to his painting with the archway that shows the water channel behind the mainland, Bishop gives her poem an 'open form' by making the brook her diminishing point of vision:

The birds keep on singing, a calf bawls, the bus starts.  
The thin mist follows  
The white mutations of its dream;  
An ancient chill is rippling the dark brooks.

(*PPL*, p. 50)

The last stanza of the poem reinforces the unity among different parts and motions of the landscape. Retreating from the brooks, the eye goes backwards to 'the thin mist' transforming the outside and inside of the mainland. The singing of the birds recalls the road to the interior and also points back to the birds on the island, and the calf connects to the naïve sheep on the island. Reading the scene backwards, the eye connects the highest point in the background with the figures or objects in the front. Here, the 'dark brooks' as the highest vanishing point direct the reader backwards to the misty mainland and the sea in the middle of the frame, and to the island as the near station-point.

In Wölfflin's *painterly* style, the 'eye is trained to take in the total appearance in which the single object has no further essential significance' (*PAH*, p. 40). In this way, the birds and other objects in the diagonal landscape remain subordinate to an adventitious frame.

Like Alexander Calder, Bishop presents birds, island, sheep, sky, sea, valleys, gorges, road, forests, mountains and brooks in a relationship of disparate motions. In this way, Calder suggests that 'each element can move, shift, or sway

back and forth in a changing relation to each of the other elements in this universe. Thus they reveal [...the] law of variation among the elements of life.’<sup>218</sup> However, where Calder brings plastic forms into motion, Bishop’s *painterly* eye composes a motion that makes objects or things lose their plasticity, and withdraw from their forms to grasp their visual forms in movement. In some of her work, however, Bishop’s use of lines to suggest movement can be seen as linking to the ideas of other twentieth-century artists such as Paul Klee.

### **‘The End of March’: ‘keeping the same “lines” all the time’**

Written during her stay at John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read’s Duxbury house, ‘The End of March’ draws in the reader and onlooker in a landscape pronouncedly made up of lines, such as tide-lines, ‘dog-prints’, ‘lion-prints’, kite ‘strings’, ‘ghost’, ‘crooked-box’, ‘palisades’, ‘railroads’, or ‘wires’ (*PPL*, pp. 167-168). As mentioned before, critics such as David Kalstone and Linda Anderson have understood these lines as Bishop’s memories of her process of writing poems, or her relationship with varied times and places she has been part of. Making it a modernist expression, Peggy Samuels, Lorrie Goldensohn and Linda Anderson draw an affinity between Bishop’s use of lines and Paul Klee’s surrealist ‘walk with a line’ (*LOC*, p. 144) philosophy. Bishop was close to surrealism in her representation of the unconscious and her juxtaposition of different realities. However, as is evident from Bishop’s discussion in Darwin letter (*PPL*, p. 861) she does not believe in the surrealist split between the conscious and the unconscious, nor is there a complete independence of the unconscious in her poetry. Considering that Klee never associated himself with surrealism, and, like Bishop, positioned himself as a ‘humble mediator’<sup>219</sup> between the conscious and unconscious, I wish to probe their play with lines as something other than a surrealist endeavour. Therefore, I will read Bishop’s ‘The End of March’ as her translation of Klee’s ‘journey of lines’ into the *painterly* style. Klee’s lines visualise reality as it appears to the eyes, because they are not linear or static, they do not ‘render the visible, but [...] make visible’,<sup>220</sup> and they champion the fact that ‘motion underlies all stages of becoming’ (*LOC*, p. 148).

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<sup>218</sup> Peggy Samuels, ‘Composing Motions’, in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Arts* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 176-201 (p. 179).

<sup>219</sup> Paul Klee, *On Modern Art*, intro. by Herbert Read (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p. 19.

<sup>220</sup> Margaret Plant, ‘Comedian to Comedy’, in *Paul Klee: Figures and Faces* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 12-29 (p. 15).



Like the *painterly* in Wofflin's Baroque, Klee aims at deforming and deviating from symmetry and therefore is 'counter-classical'.<sup>221</sup> Where Klee's lines 'lead to abstraction' (*LOC*, p. 146) of the unconscious, *painterly* lines obscure the form to keep the spectator uncertain of sudden change of perspectives. In this sense, Klee's lines and *painterly* lines defy definite classical forms and meanings in order to make visible to the human eye what remains invisible to their touch. Klee supports my perception with his remarks about his work in 1902: 'I myself notice how much I have been caught by the Baroque until now'.<sup>222</sup> So far, Bishop and Paul Klee have not been put together in a Baroque relationship, therefore, in my discussion of the poem, I will explore *painterly* use of lines between the two artists. I will discuss 'The End of March' as a *painterly* rendition of the modernist Klee. The poem interprets Klee's 'automatic' 'line', which 'goes for a walk, so to speak, aimlessly for the sake of the walk' (*LOC*, p. 146) in order to represent the changing dimensions of the landscape, as visualised in her dream, from portrait to scenery and back again – keeping the same "lines" all the time.'<sup>223</sup> In this way, the lines focus on moving vertically upwards and submerging backwards, horizontally stretching across the picture-plane. Such motions not only describe an advancing view, but, like some of Klee's art works, represent Bishop's ideas of fate and free will integrated into incongruent experiences of self and nature, real and unreal, conscious and unconscious.

The poem opens up with the Duxbury landscape in the North, where Bishop stayed with her friend Alice Methfessel. The first line of the poem informs us of the unwelcoming weather for a leisurely walk. Being 'cold and windy' and 'scarcely the day' chosen for a journey on foot, Bishop raises questions about the necessity of her undergoing this excursion in odd circumstances:

It was cold and windy, scarcely the day  
to take a walk on that long beach  
Everything was withdrawn as far as possible,  
indrawn: the tide far out, the ocean shrunken,  
seabirds in ones or twos.  
The rackets, icy, offshore wind  
numbed our faces on one side;

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., *Figures and Faces*, p. 13.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., *Figures and Faces*, p. 13.

<sup>223</sup> Brett Millier, 'EVERYTHING CONNECTED ONLY BY "AND" AND "AND": 1935-1936', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, Ltd., 1993), pp. 86-111 (p. 88).

disrupted the formation  
of a lone flight of Canada geese;  
and blew back the low, inaudible rollers  
in upright, steely mist.

(*PPL*, p. 167).

Considering the weather, it does not appear to be a Wordsworthian walk seeking solace in nature to recollect emotions in tranquillity.<sup>224</sup> However, this absolutely necessary walk can be understood as Bishop's Baroque 'unpremeditated' experience, in which nature conspires to provoke her into thinking about the distances between her art and life, as well as her desires and their fulfilment, amidst her helplessness and determination to make such dichotomies into corresponding spaces in her life. It is as if nature has given Bishop this opportunity to actualise her reading of Simone Weil's *Waiting for God*, in which the philosopher notes 'I always believed and hoped that one day Fate would force upon me the condition of a vagabond and beggar which [St. Francis] embraced freely.'<sup>225</sup> Interested in the physical and spiritual struggles of saints in relation to her own physical ailments, Bishop can be seen imagining herself as St Francis in this chilly environment on the beach, which for her could invite an asthmatic attack at any time. However, the inevitability of being on foot in hostile conditions, which would cause physical and environmental discomfort, shows that Bishop has chosen no other place to be. We know that Bishop has always desired to embrace a landscape of stretching shorelines as her abode; here, nature ordains her the fate of her 'freed' 'rainbow-bird', in her unpublished late poem 'Sonnet', which flies 'wherever| it feels like, gay!' (*PPL*, p. 180). Hence, this walk gives Bishop the opportunity to drift with the finitely infinite distances from shore, even if it comes with afflicting herself with physical distress, such as facial numbness or a severe asthma attack.

'The End of March' not only paints a journey in time from winter to spring, but also sees nature as a way to approach a metaphysical view of the world. The journey through nature makes way for invisible, or spiritual, experiences to enable compression of larger truths encompassing necessity and desire, or fate and free will.

According to Eugene d'Ors, 'when a baroque painter paints a miracle, the

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<sup>224</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' <http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html> [accessed 21 November 2016].

<sup>225</sup> Cheryl Walker, 'Time and Eternity', in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 1-42 (p. 27).

sky goes into convulsions [...] a huge apocalyptic wind shakes it and carries it off theatrically'.<sup>226</sup> The 'rackety, icy,| offshore wind' (*PPL*, p. 167) corresponds to the treatment of the wind in Baroque paintings. The 'rackety' wind gives a hint of the 'intervention of divinity' as it has an exalted presence, which presides over changing seasons in the poem and opens up the sea and land to the sky; its potent voice and 'steely' qualities make its backward thrust, to all opposing motions, a fatalistic act in retrospect. Like the 'winter air' 'huntress' in her poem 'The Colder the Air' (*PPL*, p. 5), or the storm 'growling' like a 'dog' in 'Little Exercise' (*PPL*, p. 32), it shows that the divine power of wind exercises disruption on this universe. This furious motion of the wind numbs the faces of the walkers, interrupts the flight of geese and pushes back the waves with 'steely' pressure. Bonnie Costello and Cheryl Walker have already associated the concept of fate and God with the 'lion' in the poem. But I consider the wind as equally divine: it like the sun hovers in the sky, but as a lion it descends down on the land, coalescing heaven and earth in a more vigorous relationship.

In a *painterly* style, the wind introduces the poem as a fleeting show of disruption in the sky, sea and at shore, which we can savour for moments because the scene excites us through its 'visual' appeal and not its tactility. The landscape emphasises *painterly* movements, which discount any definite contours. The atmospheric pressure sways the landscape around and makes its spatial boundaries loose. We are told that it is a 'long beach' (*PPL*, p. 167), therefore, the shore stretches across and beyond the frame. The frame is adventitious as it comes across sudden perspectives due to the continuous motion available in all directions. As characteristic of *painterly* art, the poem 'will not say everything where it can leave something to be guessed' (*PAH*, p. 198). Thus, the kite, the electric wires' source, and the boards of the artichoke house remain elusive, allowing the reader to think about their absences as beauty of the obscure, and they keep open the possibility of many more connections existing outside the line of sight.

It is as if we are thrust into the middle of an action already ongoing. Therefore, the landscape defies any geometric relation to the picture-plane. The ocean adds to the *painterly* motion by receding from the foreground, as if

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<sup>226</sup> Eugenio d Ors, 'Debate on the Baroque in Pontigny', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. by Wendy B. Faris, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 78-92 (p. 81).

compressing its expanse with overlapping waters to suggest depth in a distant background. The wind brings restlessness to the otherwise calm waters and keeps the motion intact between the density of the ocean in a diminishing plane and the low waves in the frontal plane. In this way, the wind gives a three-dimensional perspective to the two-dimensional landscape: the ocean remains ‘withdrawn’| ‘indrawn’ from the frontality of the beach. Furthermore, the ‘tide far out’ (*PPL*, p. 167) gives a decentred perspective from the picture plane.

Since ‘the picture is freed from tectonic relationship’ (*PAH*, p. 132), the expansive ocean moves away from any close contact. Remaining vague and unclear, the low waves that desire to be in the forefront are forced to retreat by the overwhelming force of the winds. The tenuous waves are made to rise upwards and move back as ‘steely mist’ (*PPL*, p. 167) contributing to the distorted texture of water, which augments the blurredness in the background. In contrast to the vast ocean folded in the background, the small birds, single geese, and even the tide-line become visible as nearby station-points for the poet. The seabirds are visualised in numbers of ‘ones and twos’ (*PPL*, p. 167), which suggests their liminal form that increases or decreases their geometric dimensions at any moment.

Bishop continues to relate the foreground to the wind whirling back and forth. Her roaring wind affects the motion and distorts the form of everything which comes in front of it: tides, geese, the poet and her companions, the kite and its string, and Bishop’s ‘artichoke’ dream-house (*PPL*, p. 168). In this way, the wind lends the *painterly* eye a movement of dispersal. The dramatic ‘convulsions’ of the sky build proximity between finite and infinite natures. The uncountable distance suggested by the length of beach alongside the depth of ‘shrunk ocean’ is seen further through the countable number of birds and geese, a ‘sodden’ ghost and a cherished house (*PPL*, p. 168). The changing of seasons and the vastness of the scene within the limited space and time of the poem shows a fragment of cosmic unity, a glimpse of infinity caught on the beach.

This all-pervasive wind makes Bishop experience more than what Cheryl Walker thinks to be the ‘loss of God in modern world’, and the poem does not begin with Walker’s assertion of being ‘a landscape of misery’.<sup>227</sup> Rather, the motion of the landscape allows Bishop to be introspective about the scene and look inwards at

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<sup>227</sup> ‘Cheryl Walker, ‘Suffering Meaning’, in *God and Elizabeth Bishop: Meditations on Religion and Poetry* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 79-97 (p. 86).

her desires and outwards to see herself towing her fate. Therefore, it is the presence of God which makes her think about the reality of fate and free will amidst a fragment of cosmic unity.

According to Eleanor Cook, the poem is ‘hardly a pilgrimage but a walk with a goal in view’.<sup>228</sup> I agree with Cook that Bishop does not undergo a ‘pilgrimage’ However, like Klee, she behaves like a saint who sees a metaphysical worldview as part of a cosmic totality.<sup>229</sup> This spiritual worldview is achieved through the *painterly* composition, which relates varied parts of the field in asymmetric cosmic motion, where small and large animals, humans and plants coexist and spiritually share similar feelings and emotions.

In this universal field, Bishop’s following of the ‘track’ does not set her journey as a linear motion: the track is not a tracing in the wet sand. Rather, she follows fragile impressions, which at length seem to be ‘big dog-prints’. However, with the addition of foreshortening they appear as ‘lion-prints’. The *painterly* Baroque ‘avoids the acme of clarity’ (*PAH*, p. 198), therefore, neither the nature of footprints, nor the visual field, are definite in their beginning and end. With Klee, she shares her fondness for an indeterminate space where even the foot-prints do not retain a consistent form; the foot-prints enlarge the scope of creatures who have trod this path and relate their irregular motion to the movements of stars and planets. Klee’s artworks such as *Heavenly and Earthly Time*, and *Sunset* show a metaphysical world, where earth, planets, animals, plants and humans share a bond of intimacy and bestiality within the cosmic existence. For Klee, being ‘on a footing of brotherliness to my neighbour, to all things earthly’ means that ‘the earth-idea gives way to the world-idea’, which makes his ‘love’ ‘distant and religious’.<sup>230</sup> Bishop follows this ‘brotherliness’ by experiencing the wide-range of emotions amidst this Baroque consciousness of plurality of spaces. Therefore, she becomes a ‘cosmic point of reference’<sup>231</sup> by treading on the curvaceous lines of ‘big dog-prints’ or ‘lion-prints.’ For Klee, this relationship between humans and animals serves to ‘exaggerate and deform’<sup>232</sup> the figure in his work and make a mockery of human

<sup>228</sup> Eleanor Cook, ‘Geography III’, in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 204-48 (p. 241).

<sup>229</sup> Richard Verdi, ‘The Artist as a Naturalist’, in *Klee and Nature* (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd, 1984), pp. 1-32 (p. 18).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., ‘The Animal Kingdom’, p. 33.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., ‘The Animal Kingdom’, p. 33.

<sup>232</sup> Margaret Plant, ‘Comedian to Comedy’, in *Paul Klee: Figures and Faces* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 12-29 (p. 13).

impulses and emotions. Bishop makes a similar bond with the animals here and breaks the boundaries between human and other creatures, between earthly and celestial realms, and, therefore, between real and metaphysical experiences of existence. Like Klee's *Woman and Beast* or *Mother Dog*, she distorts her human plurality of 'we' into a celestial multitude, an intangible and purely visual form, which holds together big and small, faithful and cunning, or loving and ruthless. As a *painterly* mass movement, Bishop's lines of foot-prints represent the uneven lines of fate, which all living organisms inevitably tread on and become aware of being bounded by the hands of divine power.

The landscape, which started with tide-lines, bird-lines and foot-prints continues to maintain openness with 'lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string'| 'looping up to the tide-line' (*PPL*, p. 167) as if in Baroque curves. There is an abrupt change of perspective when the repeated twists of string amass like 'a thick white snarl, man-size, awash| rising on every wave, a sodden ghost' (*PPL*, p. 167).

The string is recurrently woven into water, like painting strokes on a wet background. Bishop's 'faithful' rendering of the relationship between string and water makes way for Baroque 'naturalism', which 'reveal[s] the spiritual through the medium of the senses'.<sup>233</sup>

The real string now appears to be an unreal and unconscious experience of a figure. Like Klee's, Bishop's baroque geometry distorts forms, rather than giving them a solid shape: as a transcendental figure, a deformation of human being in between real and unreal, the ghost is at once a surreal image, which shows the *painterly* 'beauty of the incorporeal' (*PAH*, p. 27).

Since Bishop started her journey like a saint wandering off in search of her desires, the ghost can be seen as a reinforcement of this stance. In her notebook observations, Bishop compares 'washing the face with snow – a saintly process' with 'white masked saints'.<sup>234</sup> Since the start of her journey here, Bishop endures a similar snowy numbness on her face; therefore, her ghostly revelation can be seen as her saintly self, which faces the suffering caused by her unfulfilled desires, as suggested by the omission in the form of the *ellipse*. However, they give her the

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<sup>233</sup> John Rupert Martin, 'The Transcendental View of Realty and the Allegorical Tradition', in *Baroque* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 119-153 (p. 119).

<sup>234</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'Notes to pages 184-193', in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 72-100 (p. 244).

conviction to derive pleasure from their visual meditation, which happens when the ghost is transformed into the string and its absent kite.

The meditative mood of the landscape and Bishop's fluid ghost recalls Klee's famous painting *Angelus Novus* (Figure 15). The angel is an irregular figure of lines, presenting a distortion of a human being, transgressing formal bounds in order to express the in-between state of an artist. This metaphysical figure of free lines and strings presents an ambiguous and indeterminate Baroque figure living between human desires and fulfilment.

Walter Benjamin owned this painting and his comments are apt for the discussion here:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past...which keeps piling wreckage...The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; [...] This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>235</sup>

In line with Benjamin's interpretation of the 'angel' who is aggrieved by the past, Bishop's ethereal self interrogates her missing kite and the possibility of living in her cherished house. The 'sodden ghost' moves in-between past and future: a past piled up like the thought of the absent kite and the 'crooked box' [dream-house], which is 'set up on pilings' (*PPL*, p. 168). Bishop's introspective move towards it is hindered by the wind already thrusting everything backwards and inwards. The advancing wind of the future makes the eerie self of the poet witness the gap of time and space between herself and her wishes. Like Klee's angel, Bishop's ghost of a string is unable to locate her absent kite, or sustain the illusion of her dream house as being real. The ghost desires to meditate on the absent kite, in order to mar her grieves, and achieve satiation of her desires. However, instead of the absent kite, we come across the unaccomplished kite-like house:

I wanted to get as far as my proto-dream-house,  
my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box  
set up on pilings, shingled green,  
a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener  
(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?),

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<sup>235</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. & intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (NY: Schocken Books Inc., 1969), pp. 253-64 (pp. 257-58).

protected from spring tides by a palisade  
of--are they railroad ties?

(Many things about this place are dubious.)

[...]

A light to read by--perfect! But--impossible.

And that day the wind was much too cold

even to get that far,

and of course the house was boarded up.

(*PPL*, p. 168)

The search for the lost kite takes Bishop back to her kite-like dream house. Like a box-kite, the ‘crooked box’-like house is affected by the lines of fate, which appear like a ‘palisade’ or ‘railroad ties’ anticipating an onslaught of ‘spring tides’. This asymmetrical house has a *painterly* appearance: its twisted dimensions are ‘set up on pilings’, but upon looking at its green roof it is visualised as an ‘artichoke’. As a ‘proto-dream-house’, a ‘crypto-dream-house’, a ‘crooked box’, and ‘a sort of artichoke’, the house remains ‘dubious’.

Bishop’s ‘perfectly useless concentration’ on the crooked lines of the house makes it an ‘surrealism of everyday life’ (*PPL*, p. 861): its dimensions appear to be an ‘artichoke of a house’, an uncanny experience of an absent and therefore intangible place given the illusion of being real to the eye. In line with the *painterly*, Bishop finds the beauty of the immaterial through the surrealistic image of the house. But unlike surrealism, her house is not dissociated from its familiar surroundings. The imaginary house is grounded in natural materials of an ‘artichoke’ plant, ‘protected’ by man-made fences or ‘railroad ties’, and well-lit with electric ‘wires’ (*PPL*, p. 168). As distinctive of a receding plane in a *painterly* mode, a near look of the house shows that it is guarded by the vertical lines of ‘palisade’ (*PPL*, p. 168), but as the place remains a distant dream, its vertical lines appear to be a rail track. Thus, the close and distant views do not coincide.

This real and fictive space becomes *painterly* as Bishop values the house for looking like an artichoke: as a plant, the visual form does conform to the tectonic nature of a house. Nevertheless, its visual semblance as a dream house conveys that art and life share space, but are not same.<sup>236</sup> However, the idea of the house is strange for being like a plant made edible by boiling it with sodium bicarbonate. Considering its palatable quality, the imaginary house is meant to be consumed in real and poetic space, both by the imagination of the poet and its fate in actual

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<sup>236</sup> John Rupert Martin, ‘Space’, in *Baroque* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), pp. 155-96 (p. 161).



nature.

Bishop's dream house holds Klee's plants' 'fruitfulness, their secretiveness and their sexuality.'<sup>237</sup> This box-like house with the curvaceous dimensions of an 'artichoke' visually serves as 'closets, more closets'<sup>238</sup> for Bishop's invisible and absent desires. It is not a divine miracle, but earthly nature which nurtures Bishop's emotions as chlorophyll gives life to this more 'greener' 'artichoke' (*PPL*, p. 168). Like Klee, Bishop expresses her 'deepest feelings and emotions'<sup>239</sup> for her cherished house, giving space to her passions for reading, drinking, and companionship suggested through the plurality of rooms in the home, and social comments such as 'boring books' and 'useless notes.' Bishop satiates her urges by igniting the 'diaphanous blue flame' of fire and drinking 'grog à l'américaine' (*PPL*, p. 168).

The house draws a parallel with Pablo Neruda's 'Ode to the Artichoke', whose artichoke shows similar unpretentious and warm feelings for being 'tender-hearted'. Yet Neruda's artichoke also does not sustain for long. Like Bishop's artichoke, Neruda's artichoke shows a defensive stance by remaining humbly stoic against the fatalistic forces of nature: 'dressed in its armor' it looks forward to 'life as a soldier'<sup>240</sup>. Nevertheless, like Pablo Picasso's painting, *Woman with Artichoke*, Bishop's representation of her weapon of determination – her 'artichoke of a house' (*PPL*, p. 168) – also reflects her fragility and sense of helplessness in the hands of fate. This opposing force will not allow her to live up to her fortitude. It is 'impossible' to reach the house due to the strong winds. She comes to realise that her wishes are not willed by the lines she treads on; the house is boarded up by others. Sending this poem to the owners of the Duxbury house, she states that her wish was to own this 'green shack'.<sup>241</sup> However, she feels disappointed that it was soiled by the modern infrastructure around it<sup>242</sup> and therefore could not serve as a house for her secretive pleasures.

Like Klee's fragile *Conqueror*, which holds its voluminous box-kite in the

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<sup>237</sup> Richard Verdi, 'The World of Plants', in *Klee and Nature* (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd, 1984), pp. 78-118 (p. 78).

<sup>238</sup> Megan Marshall, 'Sun', in *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle at Breakfast* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 239-97 (p. 294).

<sup>239</sup> Richard Verdi, 'The Artist as a Naturalist', in *Klee and Nature* (London: A. Zwemmer Ltd, 1984), pp. 78-118 (p. 81).

<sup>240</sup> Pablo Neruda, 'Ode to Artichoke', in *Selected Odes of Pablo Neruda*, trans. and intro. by Margaret Sayers Paden (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 19-22.

<sup>241</sup> Brett Millier, 'ON THE WAY BACK: 1973-1976', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 480-526 (p. 492).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

air, Bishop wishes to lift her absent box-kite like ‘crooked box’ (*PPL*, p. 168) of a house, despite being heavy and expansive with its paraphernalia. However, she is unable to lift this load of her imagination. Her ‘artichoke’-like resilience to her fate can be visualised for moments, but cannot be sustained for long. Bishop’s helplessness shows her limitations as a humble artist. Her ideas of a secret house have been stranded before even being given motion in her poetic space. The weather does not permit her to transport the house from the fictive space to her believable space. Therefore, she returns comprehending that nature and art, real and fictive spaces can visually coexist, but cannot be replaced. In acknowledging her point of return, Bishop liberates her heart and mind from being affected by her lines of fate. She looks forward to the passage of time as winter makes way for spring.

Comprehending the pressure of wind and her fate, Bishop returns towards an unknown future holding many more moments of awe and surprise for her. The sudden glare of the ‘lion sun’ (*PPL*, p. 169) illuminates parts of the beach, as if divinity has descended down to earth to relish the dramatic play of light and shadow, making the ‘drab, damp, scattered stones’ ‘multi-colored’ (*PPL*, p. 168). This divinity shatters many more of the poet’s unaccomplished aspirations, like the stranded kite somewhere on the beach. The changes in nature recall Klee’s drawing *Human Weaknesses*, where human figures are the distorted forms of box-kites whose strings are attached to the sun. Like Bishop’s unseen fate, the sun displaces human desires – the missing kite – or forces the abandonment of them – as with her dream house. The divine can loosen our strings and make us thrive in the warmth of the sun, but can also disrupt our flights of desires with its chilling winds. However, amidst this helplessness for divinity, Bishop keeps the cosmic unity intact: on one hand, her imagination transforms an ordinary string into a metaphysical figure and a plant into a house of visible dreams. On the other, a fluttered kite brings the heavens down onto the beach. Thus, Bishop’s *painterly* eye presents the heavens and earth as interconnected parts of infinity, which keep on arranging and rearranging their dimensions in accord with the changing relationship between them.

Bishop’s interest in Baroque geometry of lines as indeterminate dimensions of spaces and her poetic form enables her to reorder and readjust her visual fields, delight in their diagonal motions and keep their contours oscillating between one thing and another. In this way, the *painterly* in Bishop’s landscape poems presents sudden perspectives fluctuating between art and life, real and unreal, and finite and

infinite dimensions of spaces. This tableau offers varied approaches for reading the poems in the manner of a *painterly* painting. In the next chapter, I will consider Bishop's affinity with Severo Sarduy and his neo-Baroque interpretation of Johannes Kepler's planetary geometry of the *ellipse*, with its linguistic equivalent, the *ellipsis*.



Figure 8: Elizabeth Bishop, photograph taken during travels in Brazil, 1960s. From Special Collections, Vassar College Library.



Figure 9: Elizabeth Bishop, photograph taken in the Amazon, February 1960. From Special Collections, Vassar College Library.



Figure 10: Elizabeth Bishop, *Nova Scotia Landscape*, watercolour and gouache, Vassar College Library, Special Collections



Figure 11: Elizabeth Bishop, *Brazilian Landscape*, watercolour and gouache, Vassar College Library, Special Collections



Figure 12: Elizabeth Bishop, photograph taken during travels in Brazil, 1960s. From Special Collections, Vassar College Library.



Figure 13: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, oil paint, Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Figure 14: Johannes Vermeer, *View of Delft*, The Hague.



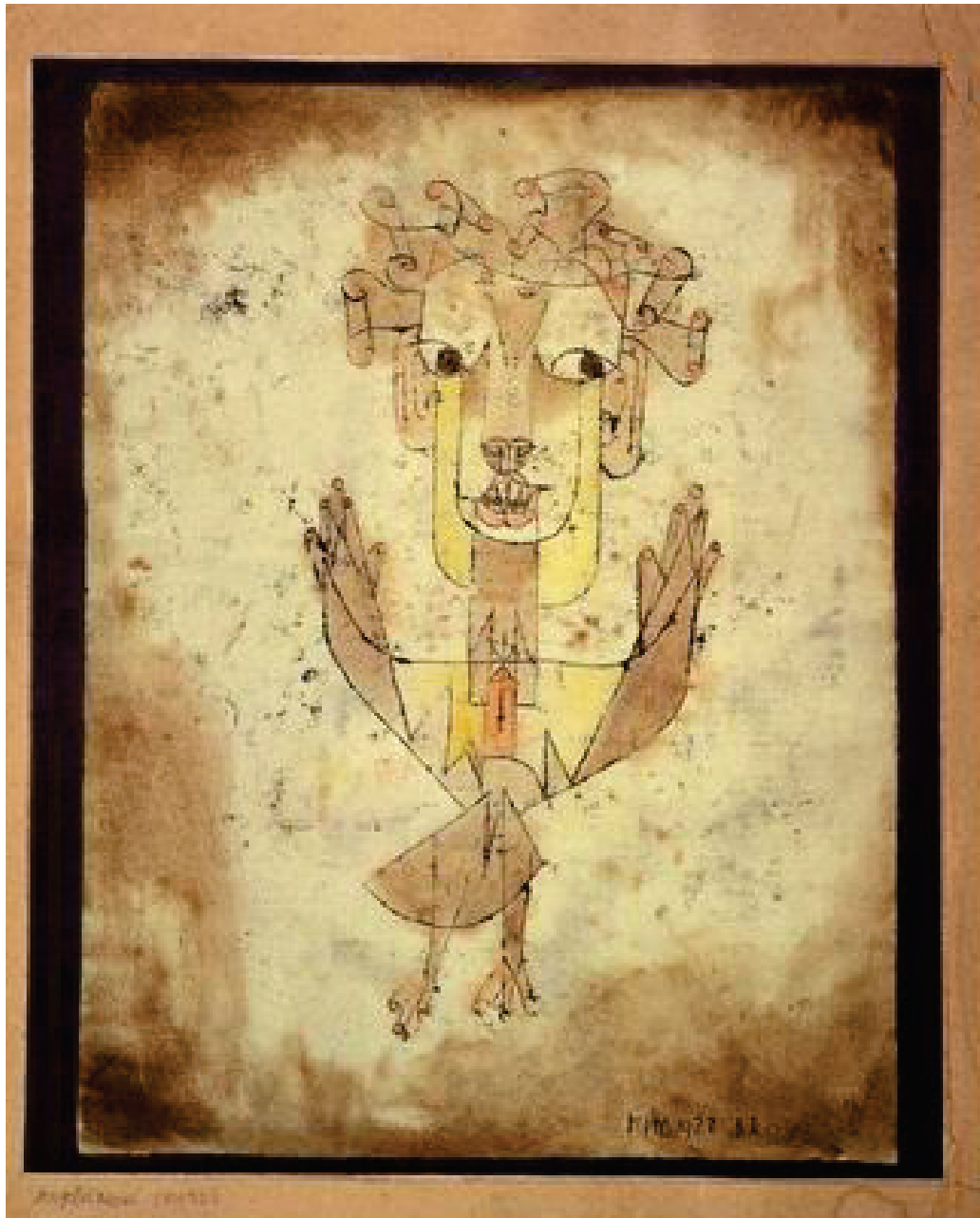


Figure 15: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920, oil and watercolour, Israel Museum.

## Chapter Four

### Bishop and Kepler: *Ellipse* and *Ellipsis*

Notwithstanding Bishop's modest viewpoint that 'the uses of mathematics, algebra & geometry [...] occasionally come in useful [...] in one's elderly years' (*OA*, p. 479), this chapter argues that, like the geometry of lines, the geometry of imperfect circle or *ellipse* has been implicitly or explicitly part of Bishop's unstable impressions about life and her art.

Contrary to Galileo Galilei's circular design of a religiously harmonious Renaissance universe, the Baroque mathematician and astronomer Johannes Kepler's planetary 'laws' of motion (*Sarduy*, p. 313) proposed that, due to the variable motion and position of the sun, the 'heavenly spheres move in elliptical and not circular orbits.'<sup>243</sup> According to the Cuban poet and critic Severo Sarduy's 'Neobaroque'<sup>244</sup> understanding of Kepler's planetary design of motion, the 'ellips(e/is), parabola, and hyperbol(a/e) correspond to the two spaces, geometrical and rhetorical', and two periods, the seventeenth century and the twentieth century (*Sarduy*, p. 293).

Therefore, I trace Sarduy's decoding of Kepler's *ellipse*, through its characteristic geometric and linguistic shapes, in Bishop's published poems. I focus on *ellipse* as a decentred form of art, self and world, and *ellipsis* as linguistic decentring of the subject under discussion in the poems, 'In a Waiting Room', 'The Bight' and 'One Art'. The visual images such as the bending coastline in 'The Bight', the wobbly motion in 'In the Waiting Room' and the open curves of parenthesis in 'One Art' visualise the geometric *ellipse* and point at the figuratively elliptical form of these poems. Linguistically, *ellipsis* functions in these poems through the omission, repression and excess of signifiers, the use of hyperbolic language, of parenthetical information and of dots and dashes, creating varied gaps between language and signification. Further, *ellipsis* evinces the hidden other self of the poet by placing her between constant transgression of meanings.

By exercising these characteristics in her poems, I argue that Bishop filters *ellips(e/is)* as another facet of her baroque poetry. Firstly, through this geometric design of her poems Bishop demonstrates that the relationship between thought and

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<sup>243</sup> Murray Rostan, 'Introduction', in *Milton and Baroque* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), pp. 1-49 (p. 23).

<sup>244</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, 'Introduction', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1-35 (p. 10).

feeling, word and image is oblique rather than direct. Second, she exhibits her elliptical bent of mind, her imperfect vision of things, her sense of surprise for the unexpected other, and her perception of an elliptical contemporaneity, which comprises plurality of spaces and art forms.

Before looking at the working of *ellipse/is* in Bishop's poems, I will first shed light on Sarduy's reading of Kepler and Bishop's affinity with his cosmic design. Sarduy's re-evaluation of Kepler argues that as 'God no longer seems to be a central, unique, given' (*Sarduy*, p. 271) maker, the universe does not champion a circular perfection. Rather, it displays an elliptical imperfection:

Something is decentering itself, or rather, duplicating, dividing its centre; now, the dominant figure is not the circle, with its single, radiating, luminous, paternal centre, but the ellipse, which opposes this visible focal point with another, equally functional, equally real, albeit closed off, dead, nocturnal, the blind centre, the other side of the Sun's generative yang, that which is absent.

(*Sarduy*, p. 292)

In this dilation of a circle, doubling its visible centre to 'absent' centre, Sarduy finds a move from a classical unity to Baroque heterogeneity in being dispersed around more than one centre. Therefore, Sarduy is of the view that the spatial plurality of the geometric *ellipse* corresponds to the linguistic plurality of its expression:

An ellipse in its two versions, appear to be drawn around two centres: one of them visible (the marked signifier/the sun) shining in the Baroque phrase; the other occluded (the hidden signifier/ the virtual centre of the planets' ellipse), elided, excluded, obscure.

(*Sarduy*, p. 302)

Sarduy's re-evaluation of Kepler's *ellipse* enables me to place Bishop in an elliptical modernity whose urban environment bears a plurality of centres within a curvaceous expanse – shaped as a parabola (an open curve of conic section), hyperbola (a widely open curve of a conic section), or as a spiral (widening curve, coil) – inhabiting equally disoriented beings. This is because by deforming the 'image of perfection symbolised by the circle' 'distortion became a characteristic of nature itself.'<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Gonzalo Celorio, 'From Baroque to the Neobaroque', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 487-507 (p. 490).

Therefore, as decentred beings we remain unsettled and always only partially known, in the space we exert and the language we express in. Since the metaphysical centre is absent, the poet is unable to signify the signified object in art or fix a centre of thought within an appropriate linguistic pattern. In this respect, the poet exercises *ellipsis* in language, which Sarduy characterises as the omission, repression and decentring of signifiers, and use of hyperbole – ‘extravagance’, ‘excess’<sup>246</sup> – to mark the absence of the signified.

Interestingly, Bishop rarely uses the words *ellipse* or *ellipsis* in her letters, diaries and poetry, apart from ‘The Imaginary Iceberg’ where she intends to ‘correct elliptics in the sky’ (*PPL*, p. 4). She has commonly referred to the image and motion of the circle in her poems and notebook observations. However, the symmetry of the circle suffocates her; in a letter to Frani Blough she recalls her great grandmother’s floral quilt, in which the homogenous repetition of circular pattern gave her the feeling of a ‘padded cell’:

The other day I got myself out of the attic a patchwork quilt, one that my great-grandmother made. It’s the Sunflower Pattern – big orange wheels on the white ground, and so many thousands of little white stitches [...] I’d love to hang it on the wall of my room at school [...] - but then I’m afraid it might make it rather like a padded cell.

(*OA*, p. 5)

Here the perfection of circles seems to give a defined perspective to Bishop, limited by a confinement of space and fixity of time that have no room for change. Such a symmetry gives her a sense of rest, rather than motion, which is contrary to her poetic nature. In contrast, in her prose work ‘Primer Class’, Bishop shows an elliptical bent of mind in her failure to trace perfection. Bishop ‘tried to copy the round cancellation marks from envelopes’ carrying addresses, ‘but they did not turn out well, a set of lopsided crumbling wheels’ (*PPL*, p. 403). Bishop’s drawing of imperfect and imbalanced circles does not seem to be a naïve attempt. It is more of a distorted consciousness of places which have lost referential capacity for Bishop. Perhaps, the addresses give her a sense of incomplete information, and therefore cause waywardness in the form of ‘lopsided’ circle called *ellipse*.

Bishop’s unstable and distorted geometry of places stays with her throughout

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<sup>246</sup>OED online < <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hyperbole/>> [accessed 07 July 2017].

her life. In the prelude to her last collection, *Geography III*, she interrogates her knowing of both sides of the equator, as ‘here’ becomes ‘what’ and where. In ‘Lesson X’, all is not centred around one, therefore, Bishop enquires about what is left to be seen from other focal points in vast spaces:

In what direction from the centre of the picture is the Island?  
North. In what direction is the Volcano? The Cape? The Bay? The  
Lake? The Strait? The Mountains? The Isthmus? What is in the East? In  
the West? In the South? In the North? In the Northwest? In the  
Southeast? In the Northeast? In the Southwest?

(*PPL*, p. 148).

The lesson describes the earth as an imperfect circle called an *ellipse*, as all places are not accessible from its centre. The lesson’s visual map demonstrates that elliptical contours of places make them elliptical in nature: the ‘Volcano’ and the ‘Mountains’ recall an inverted cone, a cross-section of an *ellipse*, and the ‘Bay’ recalls the contours of a hyperbola or parabola. Considering these elliptical dimensions, the map here exhibits the unstable vision of the poet in an unstable space, where subject and object are both disoriented. Although the text mentions the Island being in the North, its modest reiteration of ‘what is there in the North?’ (*PPL*, p. 148) makes us think of *ellipsis*: language that has lost its referential nature and shows a gap between word and meaning.

Possibly, Bishop’s living off-centre, ‘in the air’ (*OA*, p. 383) in her loved studio in Samambia, or her experiencing the decentred new capital, Brasilia, where “‘superblocks’ of apartments being built [...] very high and very close together’ had ‘infinite space in all directions’ (*CPr*, p. 382) enabled her to revisit her consciousness of an unstable space in a decentred world through ‘Lesson X’ and other poems in *Geography III*.

This experience of instability of space and the language that expresses it runs quite deep in Bishop’s perception of modernity. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, geometry, like geography, has been equally important for Bishop’s vision of life in art. Looking back at her first journey to Europe, Bishop seems to be describing her ideas about motion in space much like Sarduy’s reading of Kepler’s planetary motions. While travelling to Europe on a ship in 1934, Bishop wrote about the interesting patterns of imperfect circles or *ellipses* at sea in an unpublished work, ‘The Man on the Raft’. The circles transform into elliptical motion of celestial

bodies, ensuring the transition from elliptical circles to celestial bodies remains incomplete and ever becoming:

The horizon seems to be boat shaped – the shape of whatever you're on [. . .]. There were large round bodies, orbs, of phosphorescence in the water, whirling up from under the ship and slowly fading out in the smothering foam. They circled on themselves. They looked removed from us, a true leap in the dark, like spirits – The water was perfectly dark [...] quickly spreading, quickly gone, white patches, set with the phosphorescence: clouds & moons – of the lower order.<sup>247</sup>

Bishop later adds to this: 'great "Baroque" circles' with 'poor wretches clinging to a board or a tin [...] shouting and shouting to the ship's lights [...] a white body, or the glitter of their eye-balls rolled toward us' (*LOC*, p. 34). Convincingly, Linda Anderson suggests that the word 'Baroque' used in this context suggests that 'Bishop may also have been filtering her experiences through already established interests in style and form' (*LOC*, p. 34). I agree with Anderson that Bishop was thinking about Baroque here, however, she is filtering the elliptical motion in Baroque style. Bishop's motion on ship enables her to see an affinity between earthly and cosmic sphere: modernity motions on a cosmic *ellipse* and consequently affects human demeanour, as found in Sarduy above.

Bishop's observation of the motion of fluid circles in sea does not exhibit perfection. They are 'stretched or squeezed-deformed circle [s]'<sup>248</sup>, which characterise Sarduy's understanding of an *ellipse*. Rolando Perez's reading of Sarduy further adds that 'the ellipse will always occur, more or less, alongside of its figural cohort, or nemesis, the circle.'<sup>249</sup> Considering this approach, these watery circles, which Bishop herself calls 'Baroque', refer to the imperfect form of *ellipse*. Their fluidity makes them restless and their constant circular motion dilates them into the foamy water and compresses them back into their whirling motion. These circles, bearing white light in 'dark' waters, are constantly undergoing variation and no sooner they dilate into celestial *ellipses*: 'spirits' of 'clouds & moons – of the lower

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<sup>247</sup> Brett C. Millier, 'EVERYTHING CONNECTED ONLY BY "AND" AND "AND": 1935-1936', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 86-111 (pp. 86-87).

<sup>248</sup> Monika Kaup, 'Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 5 (2005), 107-49 (p. 16)  
<<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188615>>[accessed 31, January 2017]

<sup>249</sup> Rolando Perez, 'Sarduy as Critic of the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque Figure in Science and Art', in *Severo Sarduy and the Neo-Baroque Image of Thought in the Visual Arts* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2012), pp. 11-58 (p. 27).

order'<sup>250</sup> in the darkness of the universe.

This movement from circle to celestial *ellipse* marks the 'anamorphosis' (*Sarduy*, p. 300) of the figure of the perfect circle: the distortion of earthly *ellipse* into cosmic, and of cosmic bodies into human bodies. The white circles as a 'white body' (*LOC*, p. 34) exhibit human emotions in their wordy racket: with repeated 'shouting' and eye contact with those on board. This perception comes close to Kepler's negation of Galileo's argument that 'All human or animal movements' are 'circular'<sup>251</sup>, and thus represent God's perfect mind; instead Kepler argues that:

if the celestial movements were the work of the mind, it could be validly concluded that the orbits of the planets are perfect circles; the celestial movements, however, are not the work of the mind but the work of nature, that is to say, of the natural faculty of bodies or of the soul that acts in full accord with these corporeal faculties; in order to produce movement, there would also be necessary, in addition to the mind, the natural and animal faculties,. They would not do everything according to the dictates of the mind [...] but would do much according to natural necessity.<sup>252</sup>

In the light of Kepler's understanding of celestial motion as an imperfection of nature at large, Bishop's translation of elliptical water bodies into cosmic bodies and then human souls shows that the planetary and human bodies tend to lose their centrality, hierarchy, identity and meaning. In this sense, human beings constantly undergo variation in perception and motion, and deviate from any referentiality in an off-centred modernity. Thus, this plurality of vision of foamy water marks the spatial ellipse and linguistic ellipsis that borders on otherness.

Bishop's relationship to Kepler is further reinforced when once again Bishop wrote at sea that 'I twist like a button on a string, stretched between N.Y & somewhere in Europe.'<sup>253</sup> The commonly circular 'button' does not evoke an image of symmetry. Due to being twisted in opposing directions, it evokes deformity of the circle, of the symbolised poet's body and the space it exerts. Thus, Bishop visualises her self motioning away from New York as an elliptical body stretched between two centres. Therefore, Bishop feels herself being divided and distracted by different

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<sup>250</sup> Brett Millier, 'EVERYTHING CONNECTED ONLY BY "AND" AND "AND": 1935-1936', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 86-111 (pp. 86-87).

<sup>251</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'Galileo as the Critic of Arts', *Isis*, 47 (1956), 3-15 (p. 13) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/227542>> [accessed 26 February 2017].

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>253</sup> Brett Millier, 'EVERYTHING CONNECTED ONLY BY "AND" AND "AND": 1935-1936', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 86-111 (p. 87).

points of focus, which cannot be accessed at the same time. This consciousness of a destabilised modern space allows Bishop's gaze to lose its place, in a crowded and materialistic life: College, school, this ship all awful places where one slips backwards into corners day after day, and the people who have a "good time" walk on one more and more' (*LOC*, p. 32).

Dwelling further on her perceptions on board, Bishop observes that the elliptical world has elliptical institutions and means of motion, like the curvaceous boat, which enables her to see her cornered self. Distancing from her choicest place, or in Sarduy's sense, the luminous centre of New York, Bishop experiences a sense of indirection, deviation from her indulgences, and changing social status, which diminishes her to the extent of being absent to others. This spatial and social imbalance felt within the ship is also felt as personal slippage due to being left alone:

It is as if one is whirled off from all the world & the interests of the world [...]. I suppose it is caused actually by the motion of the ship away from N.Y. -- it may affect one's centre of balance some way; the feelings seem to centre in the middle of the chest.

(*LOC*, p. 32)

It seems that she felt this whirling modernity inclines human beings towards odd positions and perspectives, anticipating their social and rhetorical descent due to their imbalance and absence from the centre.

For Bishop, isolation comes from being away from her heartfelt centre. In the late 1940s she expresses her disorientation by recalling Margaret Miller's description of Key West as 'fl[y]ing off the state like the arm of a spiral nebula', which 'makes one feel just as remote' (*OA*, p. 79). The cosmic *ellipse* helps Bishop define distances in relation to her own absence from places.

Such elliptical absences are demonstrated in Bishop's art works as well. Bishop fondly brings decentred perspectives, which give a sense of otherness to places and things, as if never seen before. Lorrie Goldensohn has highlighted Bishop's leaning and hunched perspectives in paintings such as *Gray Church*, *County Courthouse*, *Palais du Senat*. Such paintings show the absence of a centre and centrality in human beings. Goldensohn curiously questions: 'Where is the



painter standing or sitting to do this picture?’<sup>254</sup> Goldensohn further adds that Bishop’s paintings are ‘just evacuated containers of human activity’ for ‘she preferred painting their absence.’<sup>255</sup>

Bishop’s undetermined posture as an artist, and the absence of human figures from her paintings exemplifies Sarduy’s decentred human body, without any ‘symbolic inscription’ (*Sarduy*, p. 297). Bishop’s paintings show how everything is not visible from a standpoint because the modern urban environment itself is ‘not referable to a privileged signifier’ (*Sarduy*, p. 296). Also, this absence points at the linguistic *ellipsis* by either indirectly approaching the subject, or marking its inexpressibility in language. *Ellipsis* seems to be present in Bishop’s habitual evasion of the first person in her poetry. The ‘I’ is most of the time camouflaged behind ‘we’. Perhaps, Bishop dislocates herself in order to diminish her subjective influence within her poems. Mary McCarthy supports this view by opining that ‘I envy the mind hiding in her words, like an “I” counting up to a hundred waiting to be found.’<sup>256</sup>

In such an elliptical world, Language and signification remained crucial to the modernists. The twentieth-century art and literature expressed the consciousness of the absence of God, loss of symmetry in structure of space, growing urbanisation and commodification leading to the disillusionment of reality. Poets, such as Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams stressed on ‘no ideas, but in things’<sup>257</sup>; T. S. Eliot suggested that a poet should ‘dislocate [...] language into his meaning’<sup>258</sup> in order to counter the ‘disassociation of sensibility’,<sup>259</sup> and art historian like Erwin Panofsky highlighted the classical ‘ironclad arrangement of meanings’ in art (the ‘locking together of meaning and image as akin to a visual diagram’).<sup>260</sup> Noting down this phrase from Panofsky’s lectures on meaning in visual arts, and in line with the modernist’s concern with the proximity between word and meaning, Bishop reinforced that ‘bright idea [...] is that of the thing itself’ (*PPL*, p. 671).

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<sup>254</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, ‘Written Pictures, Painted Poems’, in *“In Worcester, Massachusetts”: Essays on Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. by Laura Jehn Menides and Angela G. Dorenkamp, Worcester Polytechnic Studies, 18 (NY: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999), pp. 167-76 (p. 167).

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>256</sup> Mary McCarthy, ‘I would like to have written...’, in *Elizabeth Bishop and her Art*, ed. by Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil P. Estess (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 267.

<sup>257</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, ed. by Christopher McGowan (NY: New Directions, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>258</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951), pp. 281-291 (p. 289).

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>260</sup> Peggy Samuels, ‘Modulation’, in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Arts* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 87-136 (p. 127).

However, in the early 1930s Bishop reckoned that ‘God is for in, image within image, metaphor of metaphor’ and relationship to the divine involved getting ‘out of our figurativeness’<sup>261</sup>, which would be a challenge for the artist. Bishop identifies the gap between this loss of meaning and the language that identifies the loss. Therefore, she anticipates that the task of expressing her ideas – material and immaterial – in an equally invigorated language would be difficult to sustain.

*Ellipse* makes way for *ellipsis* since Bishop visualises writing in a roundabout fashion. In ‘The Sea and its Shore’ Edwin Boomer lives and thinks in a ‘one-eyed room, all in night’ where language is ‘streaming around him [...] like Pigeons flying’ (*PPL*, p. 577). The eye has an elliptical perception of language, orbiting around it in darkness, as if another cosmic *ellipse* is tracing a linguistic sphere. Language too, is plural, a disoriented elliptical orbit of signifiers pointing out to more than one idea, thought or meaning. For Bishop writing itself is decentred; it is not directly approachable but reached through dilation or compression of circular paths.

No wonder Bishop remained fond of Alexander Calder’s designs of motion in space based ‘on the motion of planets and constellations’, rather than the school of geometric abstraction popular in the 1940s.<sup>262</sup> Bishop had known Calder since the 1930s and kept on recalling his artworks even in the early 1960s. Her poem ‘Gypsophilia’ is named after Calder’s mobile, which according to Peggy Samuels, is an asymmetrical arrangement of varied circles and its ‘centre is off balance.’<sup>263</sup>

Like the pigeons in ‘The Sea and its Shore’, the migrating birds in ‘Time Andromedas’ further develop Bishop’s elliptical form of poetry in conjunction with cosmic irregularities. Understanding the idea of timing in poetry, Bishop noted it to be about ‘migrations’ of birds ‘all closely related, all minutely varied’. The birds coexist ‘as if there were an invisible thread joining all the outside birds and within the fragile network they possessed the sky. The interspaces moved in pulsation too’ as ‘mathematically regular as the planets’ (*PPL*, p. 642).

In the varied, imperfect circular movements of migrating birds, Bishop finds an elliptical form for rearranging events in her poetry. Since she associates birds

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<sup>261</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights and Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (pp. 97-98).

<sup>262</sup> Peggy Samuels, ‘Composing Motions’, in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Arts* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 176-201 (pp. 179-80).

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

with letters and punctuation (as in case of the sandpiper), the ‘rhythmic irregularity’ (*PPL*, p. 642) of the motion of birds suggest varied and contrary ideas, thoughts and feelings strung together in an imperfect form of *ellipse* pointing at the linguistic *ellipsis*. The birds’ variable movement envision multiple signifiers coming together to approach a signified.

Bishop’s interest in the imperfection of *ellipse* and *ellipsis* can also be seen as her preference for giving supremacy to ideas, like Eliot who believes ‘ideas are felt and feelings are transformed by ideas.’<sup>264</sup> Bishop disagreed with Donald Stanford about having perfect rhymes, as she could not ‘pervert meaning for the sake of smoothness’ (*OA*, p. 11 ) or perfection of rhymes: ‘However, I think that an equally great accumulative effect might be built up by a series of irregularities. Instead of beginning with the “uninterrupted mood” what I want to do is to get the moods themselves into the rhythm’ (*OA*, p. 11).

The imperfect *ellipse* accommodates imperfect rhymes, to give oblique meanings to her poetry. Bishop’s understanding of the literal and figurative *ellipse*, and linguistic *ellipsis* is a deviation from the centrality of the perceived object. It aims at accuracy through an indirect or imbalanced relationship between thought and feeling in an equally decentred language. Therefore, it can be said that *ellipse/is* gives Bishop the freedom to write imperfect poems, prepared for readjustment of angles and centres of vision.

### **‘In the Waiting Room’: Dilation of the World and Self**

For Bishop, ‘geography must be more mysterious than we realise, even’ finding it to be ‘funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia’ (*OA*, p. 249). Bishop mentions in her letters that the south makes her experience herself in north, and even sometimes makes her desire to be in east, in some parts of Europe. This geometry of Brazil, where ‘lack of planning is being repeated all over’ (*CPr*, p. 220), destabilises Bishop’s perspective of distance and proximity. From living for long in Brazil, Bishop becomes conscious of the instability of its urban environment which decentres her focus from here to there, from south to north and makes her think about her life in elliptical terms. For Bishop ‘the important fact is

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<sup>264</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘Toward a Definition of Metaphysical Poetry’, in *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry: The Clark Lectures and The Turnbull Lectures*, ed. and intro. by Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1993), pp. 249-63 (p. 257).

not the original loss so much as the circumstances of the new surroundings which succeeded in letting the loss through to my [her] consciousness' (*PPL*, p. 677). In this respect, the geometry of Brazil brings into perspective other lost centres of Bishop's thought about places and times and seems relevant to the writing of 'In the Waiting Room'.

The poem is written in New York after returning from Brazil, when Bishop frequently corresponded with her dear Brazilian friend, the architect Lota de Macedo Soares.<sup>265</sup> With this in mind, 'In the Waiting Room' transmits Brazil's decentred geometry as the distances become 'inverted or distorted', or 'distorted and revealed' (*PPL*, p. 14) in the poem. Considering the loose geometry of Brazil, I propose that the place, which made her feel at home, also nourished her thoughts of resituating herself elsewhere, such as in Worcester, Massachusetts. Sarduy is convincing when he says that 'if one wanted to get at the truth, one had to situate oneself off-centre.'<sup>266</sup> Therefore, I argue that in this much acclaimed poem Bishop felt the need to question and reassert her sense of space, having been made unstable in an elliptical world where changing perspectives keep on transforming spatial identities and social contexts.

In the existing criticism, Jonathan Ellis hints at the elliptical connections of this poem and suggests that 'it is possible to interpret this space as the place within writing, linked to literal and figurative ellipses, where Bishop allows silence or suggestion room on the page [...] or as the hyphen or parenthesis that prepares the way for releasing emotions.'<sup>267</sup> Expanding the elliptical scope of Bishop's poems, Kathleen Spivack considers her poetry 'deliberately reticent and elliptical'<sup>268</sup> where 'much was unsaid, left out, alluded to. What is most important is what is not said.'<sup>269</sup> Considering these critics' statements, here I explore in detail the geometrical and linguistic *ellipse/is* in 'In the Waiting Room' as a form which expresses the inexpressible and untranslatable silences, and says much more than just a story of a

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<sup>265</sup> Megan Marshall, 'Miracle', in *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle at Breakfast* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 195-231 (pp. 210-11).

<sup>266</sup> Rolando Perez, 'Sarduy as Critic of the Baroque and the Neo-Baroque Figure in Science and Art', in *Severo Sarduy and the Neo-Baroque Image of Thought in the Visual Arts* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2012), pp. 11-58 (p. 30).

<sup>267</sup> Jonathan Ellis, 'Ice and Snow', in *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 21-53 (p. 52).

<sup>268</sup> Kathleen Spivack, 'Conceal/Reveal: Passion and Restrain in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop', *The Massachusetts Review*, 46 (2005), 496-510 (p.496). < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25091017> > [accessed 22 October 2016].

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

little girl's experience of turning seven. I will demonstrate it as an example of Sarduy's post-modern approach to *ellipse/is* as marking a heterogeneous contemporaneity. Through *ellipse/is* Bishop identifies the non-homogeneity between self and other, us and them, and the distance between language and signification. Moreover, she addresses this contrariness by constructing an oblique relationship between self and other, thought and feeling, which contemporaneously creates a distinct as well as a plural concept of selfhood for Bishop.

In 'In the Waiting Room', the time, date and space of Bishop's aunt's visit to the dentist, her reading of *National Geographic* magazine, her experience of being seven years old, the political war outside and personal protest inside, all come together in the poem's space as a geometric *ellipse* orbiting around the visible space of the waiting room and the virtual space of the *National Geographic* images. Like the constellation of planets, these spatial and temporal events are 'mathematically regular' (*PPL*, p. 642), as 'everything become theirs' (*PPL*, p. 644) in the space of the poem. I propose that the poem's decentred space and its elliptical pattern of time allows Bishop to dilate her self and the world around her in order to understand her spatiality in relation to other human beings and the spaces they exist in.

The poem begins with a modern urban space, which is not kept elusive as in some of her poems, such as 'A Miracle at Breakfast' or 'Sestina'. Since the waiting room carries the finite dimensions of a city in a finitely big world, Eleanor Cook convincingly describes it as a 'postal address' where Bishop 'is trying to accustom herself to a new and strange place.'<sup>270</sup> I find this 'new' place 'strange' because it redirects questions of affinity between the young Bishop and the people in the waiting room from the perspective of contemporaneity:

In Worcester, Massachusetts,  
I went with Aunt Consuelo  
To keep her dentist's appointment  
And sat and waited for her  
In the dentist's waiting room.

(*PPL*, p. 149)

According to Cook, the poem begins with the 'inside'<sup>271</sup> places and gives a

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<sup>270</sup> Eleanor Cook, 'Geography III', in *Elizabeth Bishop at Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 204-48 (p. 209).

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

circular form to the poem as Bishop ends the poem with ‘I was back in it.’<sup>272</sup> As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Bishop’s primer class interest of circling the postal addresses on posts turned out to be an elliptical tracing. Here too, I suggest that Bishop’s poem begins with the circling motion, but soon turns into an *ellipse*. The circle is dilated into a geometric *ellipse* duplicating her space and language.

‘In Worcester’ and ‘in the dentist’s waiting room’ (*PPL*, p. 149) shows that Bishop’s focal point within the bounds of Worcester is the dentist’s place. This single centre inside Worcester gives the city circular dimensions. However, with time – ‘what seemed like a long wait’ – Bishop’s centre of focus estranges her as she realises that the waiting room does not relate her to her aunt anymore; she is no more visible to Bishop, being further ‘inside’ (*PPL*, p. 149) with the dentist. This consciousness of disorientation of her focus shifts her gaze towards the inside of the *National Geographic* magazine and makes it another centre of focus for her.

The inside has been duplicated: the waiting room has been dilated into two focal points – the waiting room as the ‘bright’ place with well-lit ‘lamps’ (*PPL*, p. 149), like Sarduy’s radiant centre of the sun, and the *National Geographic* issue as the ‘virtual’ and ‘nocturnal’ centre (*Sarduy*, p. 302) introduced by the ‘black’ inverted cone of the ‘volcano’. The magazine’s central image of the elliptical volcano is ‘equally functional’ (*Sarduy*, p. 292) as its ‘spilling over| in rivulets of fire’ (*PPL*, p. 149) initiates a trail of virtually elliptical images that further reinforce the transformation of the waiting room into a geometrical *ellipse*.

The spatial centrality of Worcester is now transformed into elliptically decentred space, that is however still finite amidst finitely infinite universe. Throughout the poem Bishop moves from the ‘bright’ and ‘hot’ waiting room into the ‘cold, blue-black space’ (*PPL*, p. 150) or ‘big black wave’ of the absent centre of the *National Geographic* magazine and vice versa:

The waiting room was bright  
And too hot. It was sliding beneath a big black  
wave,  
Another and another.

Then I was back in it.

(*PPL*, p. 151)

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<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

Through this motion from the actual space of the ‘bright’ room to the virtual space of the ‘big black wave’ Bishop demonstrates Sarduy’s definition of the transformation of circle into an *ellipse*, the breakdown of the symmetrical space into a decentred space:

Whereas a circle is produced by tracing a line around a single centre to a constant distance, an ellipse can be constructed by splitting the centre into two poles, attaching the ends of a string to both points, and drawing a line at the end of the loop thus formed.<sup>273</sup>

The waiting room, *National Geographic* magazine and Worcester make up a prototype of cosmic *ellipse*. Worcester, which initially orbits around its single centre, is pushed outside its circular path, as its single centre of the waiting room divides into another, the virtual space of the *National Geographic* magazine. The end of the poem refers to ‘outside| in Worcester’ (*PPL*, p. 151) to reinforce the transition of this space from circle to an *ellipse*. This is why Bishop mentions ‘then I was back in it’ (*PPL*, p. 151) without pinning down the centre - the waiting room or the virtual space of the magazine. Bishop is ‘inside’ an *ellipse*, and, therefore, unstable between double focal points. At the close of the poem Bishop can be inside the actual space of the waiting room, or the virtual centre of the magazine as and when she desires.

These choices have occurred to her very early in the poem. The young Bishop seems to be intimidated by the distorted bodies of ‘grown-ups’ with their magazines and ‘arctics and overcoats’ (*PPL*, p. 149) in the spotlight. She is overshadowed by the overwhelming, yet obscure existence of the elders, which diminish her presence in the room and distance her from any familiarity or centre. Therefore, Bishop’s destabilised gaze takes her away from her illusion of a single centre; like Crusoe’s island in ‘Crusoe in England’ she goes ‘off-centre’<sup>274</sup>. But before introducing the *National Geographic* as the other centre, she mentions her ability to read the magazine, to give weight to her vivid description, rather than to be misunderstood as a child’s whiling away of time.

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<sup>273</sup> Monika Kaup, ‘Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier’, *CR: The Centennial Review*, 5 (2005), 107-49 (p. 122) < <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188615> > [accessed 31 January 2017].

<sup>274</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights, Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (p.117).

The inside of a volcano,  
 Black, and full of ashes;  
 Then it was spilling over  
 In rivulets of fire.  
 Osa and Martin Johnson  
 Dressed in riding breeches,  
 Laced boots, and pith helmets.  
 A dead man slung on a pole  
 ---‘Long Pig’, the caption said.  
 Babies with pointed heads  
 Wound round and round with string;  
 Black, naked women with necks  
 Wound round and round with wire  
 Like the necks of light bulbs.  
 Their breasts were horrifying.  
 I read it right straight through.

(PPL, p. 159)

The centrality of the waiting room is destroyed through the ‘anamorphosis’ (*Sarduy*, p. 300) of its circular space; the circle is made elastic through the inverted cone shape of the dark volcano as the occluded centre. Contrary to Bonnie Costello’s understanding of this volcano as an ‘abyss’,<sup>275</sup> a ‘void’<sup>276</sup>, its elliptical shape spirals up Bishop’s emotions and oozes out, like ‘fire’, a frantic wave of signifiers operating on the absent, signified thought of a world torn apart with fragmented identities. The semi-circular helmets of an English couple, the twisted body of a dead man, the spiralling of the wires and strings around heads and necks of African children and women, and their paraboloid breasts visualise the continuity of her decentred thought in the waiting room through these varied elliptical identities in the magazine.

Bishop seems to hold the magazine to stabilise her displaced self in the waiting room. However, in order to do away with this estranged self through looking at the pictures, the magazine becomes Bishop’s naïve craft. *National Geographic*’s February issue documented the image of the volcano only; other images mentioned here do not exist in this issue. Bishop agrees that ‘my memory had confused two 1918 issues of the Geographic’ (*Conversations*, p. 87). Interestingly, the pictures of Africans do not appear in the February and March issue of the magazine.<sup>277</sup> Even the American couple Osa and Martin Johnson’s pictures do not exist in the two February 1918 issues of *National Geographic*, nor the actual similar picture in Osa’s

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>277</sup> Lee Edelman, ‘The Geography of Gender: Elizabeth Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room”’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender*, ed. by Marilyn May Lombardi (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 91-107 (p. 95).



autobiography, *I Married Adventure*, shows them in the same attire.<sup>278</sup> It seems that in enlarging her sensibility about selfhood, Bishop reconstructs the magazine issue, focusing less on the temporality of facts and more on spatialising her feelings for corresponding thoughts in the waiting room.

Bishop holding the magazine in her hands within the confines of the waiting room can be read in conjunction with the Baroque artist Tintoretto's *The Vision of Saint Peter*. Christine Buci-Glucksmann's explanation of Saint Peter draws a parallel with Bishop's studying of the magazine. Buci-Glucksmann describes Saint Peter

looking sideways, recoiling backward, holding a book, and staring as if dumbfounded, dazzled? Surely it is a supernatural apparition: this great spiraling column of angels carry the cross. It is an extracting space, a confusion of space, a pure qualitative site that displaces and unseats him.<sup>279</sup>

Like Saint Peter, Bishop expresses her innocence when staring at the magazine pictures distinct from the waiting room environment and her awe for its conjured images, such as the sudden activation of the volcano and 'horrifying' 'breasts' (*PPL*, p. 149) of African women. The magazine presents an 'extracting space' from within the waiting room, duplicating this centre into a 'figure of [...] displacement' (*Sarduy*, p. 271), an *ellipse*. The magazine constructs an immaterial, virtual, if not supernatural, space which allows Bishop to look at the spectacle of bodies in the waiting room from another spatial position.

The American adventurers, Osa and Martin, the African women and children, and the dead man on the pole evoke a set of signifiers skirting around the signified, rather than directly naming Bishop's fragmented identity and her distorted individuality in the waiting room. In Sarduy's terms, these varied images are

obliterating the signifier of a given signified without replacing it with another [...] but rather by a chain of signifiers [...] circumscribing the absent signifier, tracing an orbit whose reading – which we could call a radial reading – enable us to infer it.

(*Sarduy*, p. 271)

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<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>279</sup> Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 'The Work of the Gaze', in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 140-56 (p. 141).

These images are not related to each other and generally present social and cultural differences between the reader and them, the coloniser and colonised. However, considering that Bishop ‘carefully | studied’ (*PPL*, p. 149) these social bodies, they present a non-hierarchical heterogeneity of absent signifiers. They obliquely coincide with the non-centrality of Bishop’s voice and her instability of vision in the waiting room. In this sense, through this other centre Bishop brings together contrasting media – poetry and journalism, thought and feeling – in an elliptical unified sensibility. According to Sarduy, ‘the mixture of genres, the intrusion of one type of discourse into another [...] celebrates Baroque carnivalization’ (*Sarduy*, p. 281). This becomes evident from the magazine, as the images set upon images hint at the ‘superabundant and wasteful’ (*Sarduy*, p. 287) nature of carnivalization in an *ellipse/is*. The journalistic show puts together Bishop’s tendency to duplicate her feelings for the thought of selfhood, which occurred to her in the waiting room. The sudden oozing out of the dead volcanic eruption, the dead man’s identity as a “‘long Pig’”, the emphasis on ‘round and round’ ‘string’/‘wire’ wounded around the heads and necks of African bodies and the ‘horrifying’ ‘breasts’ (*PPL*, p. 149) of African women, in contrast to the sameness of the American couple’s social garb, duplicates her feelings about an undetermined selfhood. In such a mediation between different discourses meanings tend to go beyond signification.

In this sense, the photographs visualise Sarduy’s baroque language, which ‘delights in surplus, in excess’ (*Sarduy*, p. 287). The magazine rejoices in ‘excess’ through its repetition of elliptical images and the roundness of African’s bodily accessories. The dead man’s state cannot be articulated by the child. His loss is as equally inexpressible as Bishop’s own; the use of dash visualises this gap, this loss of signification, and points at its indirect signifier - ‘long Pig’. Even the lookalike description of the social dress of the American couple camouflages any direct expression of their bodily identity. These variedly incomplete and distorted bodies visualise the absent feelings for the twisted and imperfect spatiality of people in the waiting room whom she recognises as ‘trousers and skirts’, ‘knees’, and ‘hands’ (*PPL*, p. 150).

However, the sight of the Africans disorients her. The Africans’ spiralling necks and heads make her shy away from them. The sense of awe for the Africans shows her awareness of belonging to the dominating society, but also her consciousness of these bodies as belonging to her world. The imperfect African

bodies remind Bishop of her feeling of otherness that she experienced among tall and elusive (read elliptical) grown-ups. Hidden behind social garbs and manners make her unable to see their bodies in relation to her own. However, this otherness has gone beyond the difference between self and other, us and them, or coloniser and colonised within the context of the magazine. She is torn apart between heterogeneous identity and the myth of individuality. Bishop voices this tension in an interview that ‘living among people of a completely different culture [Brazil] has changed a lot of my old stereotyped ideas.’ But she agrees that ‘I am a completely American poet, nevertheless’ (*Conversations*, p. 19).

So, instead of finding her ‘un-rediscovered, un-renamable’ (*PPL*, p. 151) island of selfhood, she ‘recoils backward’<sup>280</sup> like Saint Peter in a self-conscious withdrawal from this new thought of an elliptical body carrying the African sensuousness, or Kepler’s ‘natural faculty of bodies or of the soul that acts in full accord with these corporeal faculties.’<sup>281</sup> This doubling of bodily centres and sharing otherness with ‘them’ reminds of the Deleuzian *fold*, discussed in an earlier chapter, which continuously merges all cultures. Nevertheless, in order to do away with such deliberations Bishop looks at the cover of the magazine indicating her intention of motion to her erstwhile thought of distorted identities and social estrangement. This moment of transition is actualised with the ‘pain’ (*PPL*, p. 149) in her Aunt Consuelo’s voice from inside the dentist’s room.

The magazine, which made Bishop feel for her thought about selfhood in the waiting room, now becomes a breeding ground for this new thought of heterogeneous self: unified rather than homogenised. Moving to the waiting room, Bishop ‘didn’t know any [word for it [new thought] – how “unlikely”...’ (*PPL*, p. 151); alternatively, she could only feel it in her aunt’s cry and the strange oneness of people in the waiting room.

The use of dots and dashes here and elsewhere in the poem visualises the linguistic and figurative fall through an elliptical space of two centres. It shows the linguistic aslant between this language and that image: between magazine images and the spectacle in the waiting room; between self and other: ‘I – we – were

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<sup>280</sup> Christine, Buci-Gluksmann, ‘The Work of the Gaze’, in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 140-56 (p. 141).

<sup>281</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ‘Galileo as the Critic of Arts’, *Isis*, 47 (1956), 3-15 (p. 14)  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/227542>> [accessed 26 February 2017].

falling,’ and ‘How had I come to be here, | Like them, and overhear’ (*PPL*, p. 151); between varied bodies: knees, hands, boots and the awful ‘hanging breasts’ (*PPL*, p. 150).

This motion from magazine back to the waiting room is not stable. The dashes before and after ‘-- Aunt Consuelo’s voice --’ (*PPL*, p. 150) reinstate the decentred space of the waiting room by demonstrating Bishop’s wobbly self in these dashes. Bishop motions from a new thought, held in the magazine before, towards its feeling, expressed after the aunt’s voice, in the waiting room.

Consequently, Bishop, like the Baroque artist, becomes fully aware of the loose relationship between word and meaning. Therefore, she struggles to keep it from falling apart, no matter indirectly, through sliding between one centre and another. The two centres look at each other from the space of the other and indirectly become a thought for the feeling of the other and vice versa.

Each time she motions from circle to *ellipse*, from the single centre of the waiting room to the absent other of the magazine. Bishop’s duplication of one centre to plurality, one space extracting another, one point in time pointing to another event in a different space and time is suddenly brought together: ‘what seemed like a long time’, the sudden ‘spilling over’ of volcano, or the voice of the aunt ‘not very loud or long’ (*PPL*, pp. 149-150) describe Bishop’s suspension in time and space for motioning imbalanced thoughts into an elliptical heterogeneity.

The ‘foolish, timid’ (*PPL*, p. 150) aunt’s voice, which at first reaffirms Bishop’s otherness to her, soon makes her realise her singularity merged with her aunt’s subjectivity as her ‘foolish’ voice becomes Bishop’s own. There is no dominant voice here; the aunt’s voice is also ‘not very loud or long’, ‘a cry of pain that could have | got loud and worse but hadn’t’ (*PPL*, p. 151). This is because Bishop is approaching an awareness of being other, of being multi-centred in identity, which views social bodies beyond established meanings.

Therefore, her sense of superiority for being different from her aunt dissolves here. It sheds light on Bishop’s physical growth as she notices through the magazine cover that it is ‘fifth | of February’ (*PPL*, p. 151), and she will be seven years old in another three days’ time. This pattern of 5, 3, 7 de-arranges the linearity of time and events into an elliptical feeling, which further pushes away Bishop’s thoughts about maintaining singularity or individual identity. The arrangement of 5, 3, 7 shapes the linear progression of the numerals into a curvature by moving from the 5<sup>th</sup> of

February to the thought of 3 days left to reach the age of 7. Her aunt's 'foolish' (*PPL*, p. 150) cry fails to rescue her from her elliptical 'impulse to deform, to metamorphosis, to assimilate the alien, in the absence of "proper" being and thereby produce new identities.'<sup>282</sup>

The sensation of falling off  
 The round, turning world  
 Into cold, blue-black space.  
 But I felt: you are an I,  
 You are an Elizabeth,  
 You are one of them.

(*PPL*, p. 150)

Bishop demonstrates her transformation in the waiting room. The feeling of surprise for growing up like her aunt adds to her instability and she finds herself whirling off-centre. This 'sensation of falling-off' indirectly points at the transformation of her existing beliefs leaning towards deterritorialising the cultural space of the magazine. This disequilibrium and gap between that thought in the magazine and this feeling in the waiting room continues when she further expands her feelings of being 'one of them' [people in the waiting room] between dashes: '-- I couldn't look any higher --' (*PPL*, p. 150).

This is why the room, which presented Paul Klee's artwork *The Man of Confusion* with distorted faces, severed body parts and belongings, now strangely pieces together contrary identities by questioning notions of the fixity of identity: 'why should you be one, too?' or 'why should I be my aunt, or me | or anyone?' (*PPL*, 150). Being oneself, or like others, black or white, child or adult, unifies us as a multipolar society, where our identities and bodies are always bordering on *ellipse*. Keeping a multipolar world in view, Bishop looks forward to a continuous process of transformation of identities, which confronts selfhood as an ever-changing and uncertain process of becoming.

Bishop experiences that in a dialectical relation between identities boundaries remain in shades and shadows and, therefore, always acquire some qualities of the other. Like the *ellipse*, identities are never completely known as they are constantly evolving: the semi-circular helmets of Osa and Martin continue their elliptical

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<sup>282</sup> Monika Kaup, 'Becoming –Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 5 (2005), 107-49 (p.128) < <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188615> > [accessed 31 January 2017].

characteristics in the ‘wire’ and ‘string’ and ‘hanging breasts’ of African bodies and in the ‘grey knees’, ‘trousers, and skirts and boots | and different pairs of hands’ (*PPL*, pp. 149-150) inside the waiting room. Thus, Bishop’s *ellipse* is interested in creating a fluid relationship between the real centre of the waiting room and the virtual centre of the magazine, between people in the waiting room and those in the magazine who give disparate perspectives of looking at each other’s distinct identities and commonalities. Bishop’s geometric construction of two centres of an *ellipse* keeps deforming identities in the magazine and the waiting room to unify them through continuous modification of meanings for each other.

By looking at the cultural plenitude of the magazine, Bishop envisions a new perspective of selfhood. The virtual space of the magazine demonstrates the notion of becoming, keeping the process of identification undetermined. Instead of pondering over the figures of Americans, she feels intently for the Africans. Through the position of the other, Bishop experiences an elliptical relationship with other social beings, which are as incomplete and imperfect as her selfhood:

What similarities –  
 Boots, hands, the family voice  
 I felt in my throat, or even  
 The National Geographic  
 And those awful hanging breasts –  
 Held us all together  
 Or made us all just one?

(*PPL*, p. 151)

By questioning the contrariness of social bodies, Bishop answers the question itself: it is the contrariness that makes us all ‘just one’? It is through the off-centred standpoint of the other that the *ellipse* allows Bishop to perceive selfhood as a counter-modernity.

Bonnie Costello is of the view that the poem ‘is an experience of oneness, but not metaphysical’; it is the ‘shared contingency’ which ‘make us all just one.’<sup>283</sup> Agreeing with Costello, I find that it is also the social process of becoming which makes her an individual, but also folding up to the other bodies.

Bishop comes to understand her selfhood as ‘a freshly creative mode of

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<sup>283</sup> Bonnie Costello, ‘Imaginary Heights, Invisible Depths’, in *Questions of Mastery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 90-213 (p. 126).

becoming, of producing new assemblages of people, social forms, and identities.’<sup>284</sup> Since Bishop shares the heterogeneity rather than the homogeneity of a contemporary society, we keep changing according to Kepler’s natural reasoning and, therefore, continuously become ourselves and some other self.

### **‘The Bight’: A Language ‘Out of Orbit’**

In ‘In the Waiting Room’ the wobbly space of the decentred *ellipse/is* creates an aslant relationship between language and signification to demonstrate Bishop’s consciousness of her contemporary selfhood. In ‘The Bight’, however, the transformation of an *ellipse* to a hyperbola demonstrates the exaggerated distance between writing and signification. Bishop’s hyperbolic language, in Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria’s words, ‘rotates around itself and its own limited though vast universe of allusion, like a plane that has gone out of orbit’ pointing to a gap between the poet and the world, and between the poet and his creation.’<sup>285</sup>

‘The Bight’, written in Key West on Bishop’s thirty-seventh birthday, reflects the poet’s hyperbolic endeavours of writing poetry and experiencing its falling apart, within the space of her writing desk, ‘when language exceeds its cause’ (*PPL*, p. 3).

According to Oxford dictionary, the ‘bight’ originates from ‘a bend or angle’, and means ‘a curve or recess in a coastline’ or ‘loop of rope.’<sup>286</sup> Considering this definition, I propose that the bight in the poem, as a ‘bend’ or ‘curve’ in the widening coastline, carries the characteristics of the open curves of the conic sections, parabola and hyperbola. However, I argue that due to the use of hyperbole in Bishop’s poetic language, also evident from the subtitle of the poem – ‘thirty-seven and far from heaven’ – the bight is closer to the hyperbola shape. As a geometrical deviation of a curve, the hyperbola motions towards openness, and linguistically distances from the literal meaning by demonstrating exaggeration and excess.

According to Sarduy ‘ellipse, parabola, and hyperbol(a/e)’ are both

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<sup>284</sup>Monika Kaup, ‘Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 5 (2005), 107-49 (p. 115). <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188615> [accessed 31 January 2017].

<sup>285</sup>Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, trans. by Maarten van Delden, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 554-570 (p. 559).

<sup>286</sup>OED online, ‘Bight’ < <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bight> > [accessed 23 August 2017].

‘geometrical and rhetorical’ (*Sarduy*, p. 293) spaces. Therefore, Bishop’s hyperbolic bent of mind demonstrates hyperbole in poetic language, which overestimates and magnifies descriptions creating a gap between thought and feeling, word and image, and signifier and signified. There are many examples of hyperbole in the poetic similes and non-literal descriptions in the poem, such as ‘birds are outsize’, ‘pelicans crash’ ‘like pickaxes’; ‘man-of-war birds’ have tails like ‘scissors on the curves’, or trembling ‘wishbones’; ‘frowsy sponge boats keep coming in | with the obliging air of retrievers’; ‘blue-grey shark tails are hung up’ ‘like little plowshares’; ‘little white boats’ ‘stove in’ ‘like torn-up unanswered letters’ and dredge is ‘dripping jawful of marl’ (*PPL*, p. 46-47).

Since Sarduy notes that the *ellipse* can convert itself into other conic figures, the hyperbolic shape of the bight can be seen as a similar choice of Bishop’s impulses, which, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Kepler considers as natural reasoning or elliptical conditioning of the body apart from the mental faculties. As a decomposition of an *ellipse*, the hyperbola distorts the symmetry of a circle and complements the eccentricity of the corporeal faculties of the body exerting a decentred space.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Kepler describes the human body to be elliptically imperfect as the universe itself. Defying any cosmic symmetry, or Godly perfection, Kepler argues that ‘in order to produce movement, there would be also necessary [...] the natural and animal faculties’<sup>287</sup> of bodies. Such ‘natural and animal faculties’ can be read as bordering on Dionysian emotions expressing an intensity of sensuous experiences and contrary energies which can be constructive and destructive. The bight shows Bishop’s mind overwhelmed by Dionysian emotions in an effort to create her verse. It represents her hyperbolic eccentricity in her over-estimation of her poetic materials and over-emphasis on the sensitivities of her verse form. Bishop’s emotions deviate her from her usual self, like the hyperbolic bend deviates further towards imperfection. This hyperbolic bent affects Bishop’s quality of being reticent and, as a result, her poetics of restraint in ‘The Bight’.

At her thirty-seventh birthday, the eccentricity of her behaviour reflects the

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<sup>287</sup> Erwin Panofsky, ‘Galileo as the Critics of Arts’, *Isis*, 47 (1956), 3-15 (p.14).  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/227542> [accessed 26 February 2017].



hyperbolic experience of her poetic language in ‘The Bight’. Christine Buci-Gluksmann has reason for Bishop’s hyperbolic deviation:

whether a circle becomes a hyperbola or a parabola, whether it becomes at the same time finite and infinite, the same or different, this traces the baroque restlessness wandering in the absence of a centre that cannot [...] be determined other than by God.<sup>288</sup>

The subtitle of the poem given in her notebook – ‘thirty-seven and far from heaven’ – represents the hyperbolic nature of the bight, both in nature and art, nurturing Bishop’s restless ‘wandering’ in the ‘absence’ of a metaphysical centre, God, the signified other. In this regard, the subtitle is not just an exercise in internal rhyme or a Herbertian sense of guilt for being distanced from God; it is Bishop’s use of hyperbole to highlight the wide gap between her poetic waywardness and a metaphysical perfection, her imperfect and deviated language in contrast to the metaphysical directness of thought and feeling, signifier and signified.

Coupled with her feelings of remoteness at Key West (*OA*, p. 79), the distance from God and from meaningful signification, is acutely felt in the scene at ‘The Bight’: the harbour remains dry and distant along the water in the bight. In ‘The Map’, the land and sea open to each other and engage in reflections, an interdependence of language and signification in art and nature. However, ‘The Bight’ is unable to establish this relation, even obliquely, between the harbour and the water in the bight. This is because the extravagance of signifiers indicating the objects on the dry harbour are deflected from their path of signification by the water in the bight. This shows the gap between hyperbolic language and signification, and poetic eccentricity and Godly perfection.

Interestingly, this connection between the bend of the bight in ‘The Bight’ and Bishop’s bent of writing has not been the subject of criticism on this poem. Critics such as David Kalstone, Bonnie Costello, Francis Leviston, Megan Marshall, Mariana Machova and Linda Anderson have acknowledged Bishop’s analogy between the landscape at Garrison Bight, Key West and her writing desk. Bishop mentions this in her letter to Robert Lowell in January 1948, months before the poem was written:

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<sup>288</sup> Christine, Buci-Gluksmann, ‘The Work of the Gaze’, in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 140-56 (pp. 149-150).

The water looks like blue gas – the harbour is always a mess, here, junky little boats all piled up, some hung with sponges and bobbles and always a few sunk or splintered up from the most recent hurricane – it reminds me a little of my desk.<sup>289</sup>

Using this letter, critics have identified ‘The Bight’ as a writing of personal memory: Francis Leviston is of the view that ‘The Bight’ constellates alcoholism, maternal loss, and the re-emergence of maternal remains,<sup>290</sup> and Megan Marshall marks ‘The Bight’ as a ‘lonely birthday’ in February 1948 when she ‘despaired of both the year past and the one ahead.’<sup>291</sup> Moreover, Linda Anderson makes a fleeting reference of Bishop’s ‘topography of writing desk’ (*LOC*, p. 7) in relation to ‘The Bight’. Whereas, Mariana Machova indirectly identifies Bishop’s problems of translating her perceptual field in relation to the bight through the landscape’s resistance to any meaningful signification.<sup>292</sup>

In largely discussing ‘The Bight’ as a correspondence with the landscape, the critics have overlooked the relationship between the ‘harbour’, the ‘bight’, and the water in its recesses. Hence, a vivid connection between the bight at Garrison Bight and Bishop’s writing activity at her desk. Therefore, I wish to explore an equation between the bight, harbour and water, and Bishop’s process of writing poetry at her desk. I want to show that the bight in ‘The Bight’ is a hyperbolic curve, which metaphorically shows Bishop’s hyperbolic bent of the mind affecting the relationship between her poetic material and the writing page, like the disintegrated objects at the harbour and the impenetrable water in the bight.

To establish this relationship between ‘The Bight and Bishop’s writing activity at her desk, the title of the poem is an interesting point to begin with. Following Sarduy, the ‘projection’ of the bight and ‘repression’ (*Sarduy*, p. 303) of the writing desk indicates the working of *ellipsis*, which ‘operates as the refusal of one element and the metonymic concentration of the light on the other’ (*Sarduy*, p. 301). The bight is geometrically a curvy line, but when read as a metonym it relates to the harbour and the water in its recesses. Similarly, in the context of the poem, the

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<sup>289</sup> Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton, eds., *Words in the Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>290</sup> Francis Leviston, ‘Mothers and Marimbas in “The Bight”’: *Danse Macabre*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 61 (2015), 436-59 (p. 452) < <http://doi.org/10.1215/0041462X-3343541> > [accessed 20 June 2017].

<sup>291</sup> Megan Marshall, ‘Coffee’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle at Breakfast* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 98-134 (p. 114).

<sup>292</sup> Mariana Machova, ‘The Familiar’ in *Elizabeth Bishop and Translation* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 115-135 (pp.133-134).

curvaceous bight figuratively sheds light on the hyperbolic mind and body of the poet, and metonymically extends to her writing activity at her desk. By focusing on the bight, as a hyperbola, it is an elliptical ‘figure of [...] displacement’ (*Sarduy*, p. 271) where its distance from its associated meaning of the writing desk seems natural. In Sarduy’s terms Bishop introduces:

An opening, a fault line between namer and named and the emergence of another namer, that is, metaphor? An exaggerated distance, the entire Baroque is merely hyperbole [...] wastefulness.

(*Sarduy*, p. 273)

The bight is linguistically remote from its signification of a writing desk; it is not an appropriate signifier for this connection. It shows a gap between the landscape and the writing space. Due to the ‘masking’ (*Sarduy*, p. 272) of a pertinent signifier, the metaphoric relationship between the Garrison Bight and Bishop’s writing activities at her desk appears to be far-fetched.

Even the reference to ‘unanswered letters’ and ‘old correspondences’ does not directly point at Bishop’s process of writing poetry at her desk. However, metonymically the reference to letters and correspondences expands to Bishop’s engagement with words. The pun on the word ‘letters’ draws attention to Bishop’s words, phrases or sentences recorded as observations and comments at varied times and places in her life. Sally Ellis notes that Bishop’s writing desk presents ‘scraps of paper’: ‘a stray sentence here, a word picked up there, a phrase that comes suddenly to her mind’ for ‘merely wrestling with the Muse in her own unique way’ (*Conversations*, p. 3). Bishop’s bight spatialises her writing activity at her desk, as Edwin Boomer does in ‘The Sea and its Shore’. Envisioning a connection between the shore and Bishop’s writing desk, which is cluttered with different sorts of written and blank papers, Boomer transfixes ‘one worthless or unprinted paper after another on the nail’ which ‘resembled one of those pieces of office equipment that used to be seen on the desks of careless business men and doctors’ (*PPL*, p. 575). As Boomer’s poem tries to clear the shore by collecting and assembling scraps of written and blank papers into some meaningful relationship, Bishop’s ‘The Bight’ presents such an effort in assembling a mess of linguistic signs at the harbour to engage them with the fluid space of water, or her writing paper.

Keeping up with this spirit, Bishop begins the poem with the water in the

bight at 'low tide', which enables the marl to 'protrude and glare' from its shallow depths.

At low tide like this how sheer the water is.  
White, crumbling ribs of marl protrude and glare.

(*PPL*, p. 46)

The 'sheer' water indicates its transparent nature like the water 'At the Fishhouses', which is 'absolutely clear' (*PPL*, p. 51). The water presents Bishop's ideas about her verse form, which 'is clear and pale that you were seeing into it at the same time that you were looking at its surface.'<sup>293</sup> It seems that by looking at the water Bishop is reflecting on the surface and depth of her verse page.

However, rather than reflecting a poetic rendition, the transparent surface of water enables Bishop to look at the marl beneath it. The 'white, crumbling ribs of marl' make an interesting connection with Bishop's 'Cootchie' who 'lies [dead] in marl' (*PPL*, p. 35). Reading in conjunction with it, the 'crumbling ribs of marl' evoke an imperfect, curvaceous body of the poet reflected through the watery space of the verse. The fact that it 'protrudes and glares' (*PPL*, p. 46) reinforces its relationship to the hyperbolic bend of the bight and poet's hyperbolic nature and body, which appears to extend beyond the surface of water on account of its exaggerated reflection magnified to the point of becoming a glare. In this way, the marl shows Bishop's own mental and bodily reflection. Anne Colwell is convincing when she identifies Bishop's feelings for 'the landscape as a projection of herself, of her own body.'<sup>294</sup>

This hyperbolic posture of the marl indicates the distraction of Bishop's mind cluttered with an excess of signifiers, which mar the transparency of her verse and causes its disorientation. The disoriented spatiality of the poet, bight and the marl cause an exaggerated distance between the harbour and the water along with it, poetic material and page, and image and word in the process of making a verse.

Reading Peggy Samuels 'Verse as a Deep Surface', the 'glassy surface' of Bishop's verse raises the expectations of the reader to witness a relationship of 'absorption, reflection, modulation [...] with the objects at the harbour, as in

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<sup>293</sup> Peggy Samuels, 'Verse as a Deep Surface', in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Arts* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), pp. 29-55 (p. 37).

<sup>294</sup> Anne Colwell, 'A Cold Spring', in *Inscrutable Houses: Metaphors of Body in the Poems of Elizabeth Bishop* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1997), pp. 71-122 (p.110).

Bishop's "Pleasure Seas" and "At the Fishhouses".<sup>295</sup> However, the water here is not a 'moderator', which 'modulates' the dryness of the harbour or the poetic material at Bishop's desk. The unbridled movement between land and sea in 'The Map' appears to be obstructed in 'The Bight'. This is because the water in the bight is 'absorbing', rather than being absorbed: it 'doesn't wet anything' (PPL, p. 46). The water behaves contrary to its nature: it does not open its surface to establish relationship with its harbour for a smooth sailing of objects/ desiring signification. The 'dry' boats, 'pilings dry as matches', 'dry' 'shark tails' draw attention to the pun on the word 'wet' (PPL, p. 46), as the coastal land, like Bishop's poetic material, is left high and dry. It is as if the varied scraps of written words or sentences resting on her table, like the objects at the harbour, have not been vetted for the desired poem. They are in a state of perpetual waiting despite repeated efforts of correspondence with the watery surface.

Like the protruding marl, Bishop's exceeding sensations towards her poetic materials anticipates an unbridled language gone beyond signification. Bishop's emotions stray her mind away from any meaningful contact between harbour and water; her sensitivity to her poetic textures exhausts the water's resistance to 'being absorbed' to the extent that it becomes 'the color of the gas flame', where 'one can smell it turning to gas' (PPL, p. 46). This transformation of water does not serve as an innovation in verse form. Rather, it indicates the distortion of the verse form distancing it from any meaningful shape.

As a result, Bishop's fluid writing surface seems to have lost its ability to vet her ideas into a potential form of poetry. That is why, like Edwin Boomer, she is unable to see whether her writing page 'if really sea-soaked [...] could be made into balls or other shapes' (PPL, p. 576) and whether 'then what was printed' on it 'were the "hundred shapes"' (PPL, p. 579). Unlike Edwin Boomer's shore, the dryness of the harbour confronts Bishop's waywardness with the challenge to transform her watery discourse into a possible verse form.

In such a situation where water has acquired the colour and smell of gas, Bishop desires to be like Baudelaire, and 'hear it turning to marimba music.' Baudelaire was among the top 'two of [Bishop's] favorite poets' (CPr, p. 415), and she wants to establish his synesthetic relationship between harbour and water, sights

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<sup>295</sup> Peggy Samuels, 'Verse as Deep Surface: Elizabeth Bishop's New Poetics, 1938-39', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 52 (2006), 306-29 (p. 306) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20479774> > [accesses 14 April, 2016].

and sounds, like where the two wooden sticks improvise marimba music. In this effort, the dredge plays the ‘dry’ ‘off-beat clave’ (an improvisation of wooden sticks struck together), an off-centred music for the disintegrated poet, while excavating the marl from the water and bringing it to the harbour. However, the eccentricity of this music does not bring the two spaces – harbour/desk and water/writing paper – into a synesthetic reciprocity. The variation of water in the bight, its colour and its smell fail to create a unity between things heard and seen. Unlike Baudelaire’s ‘Correspondances’, ‘The Bight’ introduces a non-conductive atmosphere, which lacks Baudelaire’s intimacy where ‘sound calls to fragrance’ and ‘color calls to sound’.<sup>296</sup> Instead, Bishop’s off-beat self evokes jarring sounds in the poem, such as ‘crash’, ‘tremble’ and ‘click’, which do not excite the low-keyed nature of the gaseous writing page to improvise a rhythmic flow between sounds and images. This absent affinity between linguistic signs makes the curvaceous bight an interstitial space. In her 1948 notebook, Bishop describes her experience of *ellipsis* or ‘interstitial’ space as a general characteristic of twentieth-century writing:

I see a hammer, over at Toppino’s, (or saw him chopping wood at Lockeport) then hear the sound, see him, then hear him, etc. The eye & ear compete, trying to draw them together, to a ‘photo finish’ so to speak ... ‘interstitial’. A feeling that everything is unavoidably interstitial.

(LOC, p. 67)

The bight as an ‘interstitial’ gap does not create motion between two things, harbour/water, sight/sound, or sound/smell. Even the poem’s alliterative pattern – seen in ‘pelicans/peculiar/pickaxes’, ‘water/wet’, ‘marimba music’, ‘sides/stove in’, ‘salvaged/storm’, and ‘tense/tremble’ (*PPL*, p. pp. 46-47) – rotates language around its own self, rather than finding a meaningful signification in verse form.

The harbour in ‘The Bight’ experiences halts, retreats and disorientation in its movement toward the water. The signifiers keep coming back to the surface of the harbour, skirting around their own selves, without naming the signified in the poetic space. The ‘pelicans’ show a futile effort as they ‘crash as pickaxes’, and move away with ‘humorous elbowings’, realising their incapacity to soften the hardness of the

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<sup>296</sup> Charles Baudelaire, ‘Correspondances’, in *Flowers of Evil*, trans. by Lewis Piaget Shanks (NY: Ives Washburn, 1931) < <https://fleursdumal.org/poem/103> > [accessed 8 May 2017].

water in order to penetrate beneath its surface. The ‘man-of-war birds’ also fly on ‘impalpable drafts’ (*PPL*, p. 46), as if the air currents contribute to the deflection of thoughts away from their signification in the water. The bight does not allow Bishop to create poetry as ‘air’ ‘hovering like a bird’; ‘poetry as if water spoke, as if air thought.’<sup>297</sup>

The water in the bight makes the unity of thought and feeling, word and image a distant reality. Like Edwin Boomer, Bishop cannot envision the birds at the bight signifying ‘punctuation’ marks or ‘letters’. This is because their futile interaction with the water breaks them into mere signifiers.

The unaccomplished flights of birds and boats bring about their deformation. These ‘objects lose their stable identity’ and acquire anamorphic meanings: ‘shark tails’ as ‘plowshares’; pelicans as ‘pickaxes’, boats as ‘retrievers’. The shark tails ‘glinting’ are ‘plowshares’, and even the ‘piled up’ ‘little white boats’ are ‘torn-up unanswered letters’, showing the inner and outer disintegration of Bishop’s poetic vision. Her disoriented perception renders parts of her visual field ambiguous: the ‘outsized’ birds, ‘impalpable drafts’, white boats ‘piled up’ or ‘stove in’ point at her decentred position in her field of vision. The spatial disorientation at the bight contributes to an unstable point of view in situations such as ‘going off’, ‘coming in’, ‘goes’ down and ‘brings up’ (*PPL*, p. 46-47). It demonstrates the indirection of language, which leads nowhere but to itself.

In Wallace Stevens’ ‘The Idea of Order at Key West’, the singer establishes a song that gives a sense of order to the disorderly nature and art: ‘When she sang, the sea | whatever self it had, became the self | that was her song, for she was the maker.’<sup>298</sup> Unlike Stevens’ singer, Bishop keeps struggling in ‘The Bight’ to initiate a song that could attract objects into a continuous rhythmic coordination. There is no rhythm between things, and thus no improvised pattern of meanings.

The images of ‘pickaxes’, ‘scissors’, ‘gaffs’ and ‘hooks’, and ‘plowshares’ (*PPL*, pp. 46-47) show the sharpness of contact between the harbour and water. At the harbour, the objects as linguistic signs excavate the surface of water/verse with the acuteness of cutting tools. They recall Seamus Heaney’s ‘Digging’, where his

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<sup>297</sup> Octavio Paz, ‘Elizabeth Bishop, or the Power of Reticence’, *World Literature Today: Homage to Elizabeth Bishop, Our 1976 Laureate*, 51 (1977) 15-16 (p.15) < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40090381> > [accessed 9 October 2015].

<sup>298</sup> Wallace Stevens, ‘Ideas of Order At Key West’, in Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose (NY: The Library of America, 1997), pp. 105-06 (p. 106).

pen digs meaning like a spade. However, Bishop's pen is more violent than Heaney's. It excavates with sharp blades to create inlets deep into the verse and chisel it to a form, no matter with little success. Such violent language seems to be facilitated by the setting of the poem, Key West. This provides Bishop with its unusually 'violent names' (*OA*, p. 67) of plants and trees, corresponding to the 'violence everywhere in the poem' (*LOC*, p. 79).

Like Edwin Boomer, Bishop is a 'hunter' more than a 'collector' (*PPL*, p. 576) searching for meanings in language. However, her boats, as 'retrievers', come back hunted rather than celebrating their success in hunting proper signifiers in the poetic space. The 'frowsy sponge boats' (*PPL*, p. 47) and shipwrecked boats intimate their disorientation in the stormy encounter with the water in the bight. Despite efforts, the water does not allow them to float on its surface and discover meaningful connections for a poem. This watery surface of the mind and verse does not agree with the poet's usual method of composition:

[...] A group of words, a phrase, may find its way into my head like something floating in the sea, and presently it attracts other things to it. I do tend to 'feel' my way into a poem [...] One's mind works in unexpected ways.

(Conversations, p. 25)

According to Paz, Bishop writes 'poetry that is heard as water is heard: murmur of syllables among stones and grass, verbal waves'<sup>299</sup> However, 'The Bight' is diametrically opposite to Paz's observation. Here, the fluidity of verse opposes its own nature and fails to put its syllables into motion; its 'letters'/poetic ideas (a pun on the word) remain 'unanswered' (*PPL*, p. 47), unreciprocated and stranded on the harbour/desk as the water/verse page resists a form. Bishop accepts that sometimes a poem refuses to get written like the surface of water here, which has become 'hard' (*PPL*, p. 46) for its usual corresponding activities.

Bishop is unable to 'feel' her way in the poem. The boats tell the tale of unaccomplished journeys. They return as 'piled up', or 'stove in' 'junky' boats (*PPL*, p. 47), recalling those worn-out materials which have decayed on her desk in the process of exploring new relationships in her poetry. They express the poet's

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<sup>299</sup> Octavio Paz, 'Elizabeth Bishop, or the Power of Reticence, *World Literature Today: Homage to Elizabeth Bishop, Our 1976 Laureate*, 51 (1977) 15-16 (p. 15) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40090381>> [accessed 9 October 2015]



disorderly journey of shaping a poem through messed up materials, which have been exposed to conflicting situations and prolonged deliberations. Probably, this messy process of writing is the reason why Bishop felt the pressure of not writing enough poetry nor meeting her deadlines with publishers, despite her recognising the importance of grants and earnings to her life.

Nevertheless, with the determination to rescue her verse from falling apart, Bishop is physically at work through the dredge to remove the marl. She indulges in this ‘awful but cheerful’ (*PPL*, p. 47) exercise of excavating the abundance of signifiers from the fluid depth of her verse or the water in the bight, like the excess of marl which makes the water dull and muddy. The marl is a language of mere abundance, which like Sarduy’s *ellipsis*, expels the actual signifiers from the ‘symbolic universe’ (*Sarduy*, p. 302), like the objects and creatures which return to the harbour after being disintegrated and deflected by the coarse surface of water/verse.

The dredge demonstrates Bishop’s belief that ‘writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural’ (*PPL*, p. 702). Bishop’s verse does not occur like a “solemn thought” (*OA*, p. 17) or an automated vision of surrealistic imagination. Her poetry reflects the messy activity of her striving mind continuously engaging with her material to motion meanings and connections between different things.

Brett Millier is convincing in arguing that ‘The Bight’ demonstrates the relationship between ‘the disorder without and the disorder within.’<sup>300</sup> However, where Millier makes Bishop’s drinking and the resultant ‘guilt and shame’ responsible for this disorder, I find it to be the Keplerian spirit of an elliptical age, which exercises itself in Bishop’s perceptual deflection within a hyperbolic space and hyperbole in language.

### **‘One Art’ of the Other**

In ‘The Bight’, the hyperbolic form of the *ellipse/is* fails to mark the loss of the other/signified in the process of signification in its poetry. ‘One Art’, on the other hand, gives space to this ‘lost other’ – the absent centre of Bishop’s elliptical nature, her displaced other self in relation to her displaced losses. In ‘In the Waiting Room’

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<sup>300</sup> Brett Millier, ‘The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol’, *Contemporary Literature*, 39 (1998) 54-76 (p. 68) <[www.http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208921](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208921)> [accessed 2 December 2014].

the geometrical *ellipse* serves to expand her spatial position and her bodily self to her social and bodily otherness that is shared with the world. Figuratively, in 'One Art' the *ellipse* motions her from her celebrated poetic self to her hidden other self in order to 'cancel each other out' for the 'dispersion of meaning' (*Sarduy*, p. 276) of Bishop's losses. In this way, the plurality of the *ellipse* allows Bishop to move on to a new other self, which is different from her erstwhile poetic and personal self, representing another contrary construct of Bishop's baroque contemporaneity.

'One Art' is one of the most acclaimed poems among Elizabeth Bishop's critics for being 'overtly autobiographical'<sup>301</sup> through its villanelle considered by them most suitable for her self-expression. On account of its literal meaning, the villanelle celebrates a 'circular pattern of peasant dance' form.<sup>302</sup> Its five tercets and a quatrain consist of 'repetitive words and refrains', which 'circle around and around losses' with their aba rhyme scheme 'refusing to march forward.'<sup>303</sup> The first line of the first tercet is repeated as the last line of the second and fourth stanzas; the third line of the first tercet is repeated as the last line of the third and fifth stanzas. Moreover, these refrains are repeated in last two lines of the quatrain.<sup>304</sup>

While discussing the villanelle of 'One Art', Jonathan Post notes that its 'root association with the "practice" of ritualized preparations for loss [...] in which the sense of ritual is assumed by the burden of the form itself, with its strict rules of repetition, and then eventually by the speaker --- in parenthetical fashion, as it happens.'<sup>305</sup>

Susan McCabe sees in the form the intimate losses of Bishop's family and friends making 'entry into language' through the 'presence of absence.'<sup>306</sup> For McCabe, 'One Art' is 'imitative of the obsessional behavior of mourners with their need for repetition and ritual as resistance to moving on'.<sup>307</sup>

I agree with Post and McCabe that 'One Art' celebrates a ritualised form of loss, which necessitates repetition. However, Bishop is not burdened with the

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<sup>301</sup> Lorrie Goldensohn, 'The Body's Roses', in Elizabeth Bishop: *The Biography of a Poet* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 53-79. (p. 59).

<sup>302</sup> 'Versification: Forms', in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo. Salter and Jon Stalworthy, 5th edn. (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005) pp. 2039-50 (p. 2045).

<sup>303</sup> 'Verse Forms: The Villanelle', in *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 3-20 (p. 8).

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>305</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p.129).

<sup>306</sup> Susan McCabe, 'Writing Loss', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 1-36 (p. 28).

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

restraints of a repetitive circularity of retrieving losses and refraining from looking forward. Claudia Roth observes the villanelle's descent from 'French baroque',<sup>308</sup> and I see Bishop's deviation from a circular ritual in her use of the form. Her declarative statements of loss undergo transformation in both their magnitude and time; even her personae related to her losses keeps changing. Moving away from the tradition of using masculine rhymes in a villanelle, such as in Dylan Thomas's 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night', Bishop practices feminine rhymes. Bishop's choice of feminine rhymes complements her projection and suppression of her poetic and private self in the stanzas. Moreover, Bishop inserts an imperfect rhyme into her poem through the consonance 'or/er' (*PPL*, p. 167) in the fourth tercet. Thus, she prepares us for her villanelle's baroque imperfections of form.

Structurally Bishop negates the traditional villanelle. Unlike Dylan Thomas' perfect repetitive pattern in 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night', the repetition of the third line of the opening tercet comes with variations in tense in the third and fifth tercets; the refrain once again varies the repetitive pattern of first and third line of the opening tercet in the quatrain. This variation in the quatrain anticipates Bishop's poetic and personal self-embracing the other, a contrary self, through the dismissal of her losses. Therefore, unlike the traditional villanelle, Bishop intends to move ahead from her losses by rejecting what appears to be 'like disaster' and live in her present, whatever is here and now. Considering this manipulation of form, I argue that Bishop's villanelle stretches its circular form to an imperfect *ellipse*. By motioning her relationship to loss from poetic to personal, and historical to the modern, 'One Art' is not a confessional poem, but a repudiation of the confessional tradition in order to embrace the heterogeneous otherness of contemporaneity. I argue that Bishop constructs a modern American villanelle by transcending from self-indulging rhetoric of loss to an elliptical discourse of changing temporal and spatial relationship to losses, which culminates in her rejection of them for a changed self.

Through this construction of similar modernity in 'One Art', the repetition of losses is less an act of perpetual grievance and more of a motion of the decentred Baroque mind. It speeds up Bishop's movement between varied temporal and spatial losses, and between her poetic/public and personal self, in order to create a changed

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<sup>308</sup> Claudia Roth Pierpont, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Art of Losing', *The New Yorker* < <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/elizabeth-bishops-art-of-losing> > [accessed 06 March 2017].

self. Monika Kaup's observes that 'the ellipse is best understood not as a finished form, but as an operation modifying another (the circle)'<sup>309</sup> which suitably describes Bishop's approach to her villanelle.

Critics like Jonathan Post, Brett Millier, Susan McCabe, Jonathan Ellis, Jay Prosser, and Cheryl Walker find Bishop's art of losing is 'not to overcome, but to come to terms with loss.'<sup>310</sup> Nevertheless, 'One Art' is Bishop's art of dismissing her losses and her erstwhile divided self in relation to these losses for a different self.

I agree with Seamus Heaney that biography contributes to the occasions of loss in 'One Art', but it 'can be read without any special knowledge of the facts of Bishop's life.'<sup>311</sup> Therefore, I intend to read the poem through Heaney's non-biographical statement and take it as another projection of geometric *ellipse* and linguistic *ellipsis* utilising Bishop's losses in a manner which makes her poetic and private experience an expression of contemporary contrariness.

Reading the title as Bishop's preoccupation with her form rather than self-projection, 'One Art' does not carry in its repetitive verse pattern the circular perfection of its initial letter 'O'. In the title 'One' specifies countably a single and finite form, yet 'Art' as a common noun dilates the perfect circularity of 'One' into a plurality of geometrical *ellipse*. Figuratively its oneness becomes a heterogeneous space of contraries. By refraining from naming the 'Art' as a particular kind of loss, 'the art of losing', of 'mastering', or of coming to terms with, Bishop exercises ellipsis through linguistic compression: projecting a common noun by suppressing the proper in place. In this case, the centre of focus on 'one' art form is displaced into multiple centres of losses. The title is figuratively and linguistically incomplete and introduces an imperfect space of the poem expressed in a decentred language. The elliptical space does not perfect the losses but displaces them. *Ellipsis* maintains Bishop's projection and suppression of public and private self of the poet.

The villanelle begins with general declarations about mastering loss with the assertion that misfortune is inherent in all things. However, if things are meant to be displaced, then their loss comes naturally to us. In this case, it is this art of

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<sup>309</sup> Monika Kaup, 'Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 5 (2005), 107-49 (p. 122) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/188615>> [accessed 31 January 2017].

<sup>310</sup> Jay Prosser, 'Elizabeth Bishop's Art of Losing', in *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 123-62 (p. 160).

<sup>311</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), pp. 42-59 (p. 46).

naturalness that the poem aims at learning, rather than the mastering of loss.

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.

(*PPL*, p. 166)

Through this matter-of-fact tone about the generality of losses, the first tercet figuratively introduces an elliptical worldview where the spatial displacement of universal centre points at the worldly displacement of our spatial relationship with things that exert our space. In opposition to Linda Anderson's observation that Bishop makes 'the repetitions of poetry mimic the circular and circumscribed movement of clockwork' (*LOC*, p. 62), the 'Art of Losing' repeats Baroque imperfection. Things 'filled with the intent | to be lost' are transient and not permanent artefacts of memory. They are instead changing losses of a life proliferated with imperfections. We live in such a world where waywardness comes natural to us, our nature and relationships are unstable like our urban environments.

Bishop's second tercet identifies her point of focus in the elliptical space of losses she has introduced. The dynamism of experience, which opens the poem, is narrowed down by the poet's sense of restrained intimacy as losses cause the 'fluster of lost door keys' or disappointment for an 'hour badly spent':

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
Of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

(*PPL*, p. 166)

This art is not about perfecting losses by redeeming them, or naively accepting their repercussions, but rather coming in a dialogic relationship with them in the present. Therefore, Bishop continues to bring them into sight; however, she remains careful to not bring them into proximity with her own spatial self.

Once again, in the third tercet, the poetic self carefully forgoes this familiarity with the losses expressed in stanza two, motioning the mind away from them. To maintain tentativeness and distance from them, Bishop uses the plural form of the pronoun 'you' in 'losing farther, losing faster: | places, and names' (*PPL*, p. 166). By stretching her elliptical form 'farther' and 'faster' Bishop distorts the centrality of her poetic/public voice.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
 Places, and names, and where it was you meant  
 To travel. None of these will bring disaster.

(*PPL*, p. 166)

It is in this poetic restraint towards the confessional that I find the projection of Bishop's suppressed other of the *ellipse* and her plural self, creating further displacement of loss. This effort towards poetic aloofness makes language lose its referential capacity, lending it to the non-referential other self of the poet in the following stanzas. Sarduy describes this decentering of modern self as:

Baroque urban space, a phrase of decentering as repetition and rupture, is also semantic; on receiving man into succession and monotony, it does not guarantee him a symbolic inscription; on the contrary, it dislocates him, makes him stumble, deprives him of all reference to a unique and authoritarian signifier, points out to him his absence in this order

(Sarduy, p. 297).

Considering Sarduy's urban decentering of man, Bishop's variation in the repetition and continuity of urban losses decentralise her poetic thought from pinning the exact losses through pertinent signifiers. This dislocates her poetic self from any meaningful signification in relation to her losses. Bishop's agitation of lost keys expands to more displaced losses, which prepare the dilation of the elliptical villanelle to the other self of the poet and the many other dispersed losses. Moreover, this duplication of the elliptical centre of loss is anticipated by the future tense, a variation in the repeated pattern of the third line of the first tercet, which affirms that 'none of these will bring disaster' (*PPL*, p. 166).

The repetition of the art of losing varies from its general perspective in the first stanza to Bishop's habitual restraint in the second, and then the third stanza prepares, once again, for a change to a personal viewpoint in the following stanzas. Such an instability of vision makes the displacement of self and loss a continuous process as Bishop's self is distorted among general, poetic and personal signifiers.

I lost my mother's watch. And Look! My last, or  
 Next-to-last, of three loved 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.

(*PPL*, p. 167)

Contrary to Bishop's poetic style of writing, a succession of 17 drafts of 'One Art' show her intent of introducing herself: 'I really want to introduce myself', as being 'good at losing things', and 'everyone shd. profit from my experience' (draft 1).<sup>312</sup> As a reader of Bishop, one expects her revisions in drafts to be exercises in bedimming an overtly personal self to an occasional use of pronoun 'I'. Nevertheless, Bishop surprises us with her spatialised and elided self, which is Sarduy's 'absent' centre, 'dark' and repudiated (*Sarduy*, p. 302). Here, this elided self of the poet steps out of the dark due to *ellipsis*, which suppresses the previously projected centre of the poetic self. Even the exclamatory 'look!' (*PPL*, p. 167) extends an open invitation to the reader to witness a list of losses personalised like never before in her poetics.

Demonstrating *ellipsis* through the evading from the absent signifiers, which describe the loss itself, Bishop creates a gap between language and signification through substitution of the actual signifiers of loss. However, by embracing a wider expanse and greater magnitude of losses – from her 'mother's watch' to losing a 'continent' (*PPL*, p. 167) – Bishop points at her own absence, her absent other self. The poet's celebrated tentativeness of perspective is dislocated in her efforts to repress her signifiers of loss. Since Bishop avoids a primary signifier to mark her losses and her relationship to them, she gives space to the absent other, hidden centre of the ellipse. As Lorrie Goldensohn writes, the personal occurs in Bishop's use of 'extreme compression and ellipsis'.<sup>313</sup> It reinforces a different and emotive response to disparate losses through her proud use of the pronoun 'I' and 'my'.

This absent self of the poet is not an abstract idea. It is made tangible by her giving finitude to the amount and magnitude of losses around her: one of the 'three' 'loved houses', 'two' 'cities' and 'rivers', and a 'continent' (*PPL*, p. 167) spatialise Bishop's repressed self somewhere within these large geographic bounds.

The losses accumulated here are polyphonic, no matter how silent. Bishop's personal choice of the verb 'miss' and adverb 'lovely' (*PPL*, p. 167) speak of their silence as a reciprocal act of marking her absent relationship with them, which is now in a moment of passing. 'One Art' is not an artefact of 'losses', indulging in self-pity for her losses, but an *ellipse* of changing spatial and temporal relationships

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<sup>312</sup>Elizabeth Bishop, 'One Art', in *Edgar Allen Poe and the Juke Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts and Fragments*, ed. by Alice Quinn (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 225.

<sup>313</sup>Lorrie Goldensohn, 'Geography III', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poet* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 242-68 (p. 261).

artfully mapping Bishop's absent other.

However, the losses are expressed as common nouns, instead of proper nouns – 'keys', 'house', 'cities', 'river' and 'continent'. Although Bishop's personal association with her 'mother's watch' is expressed, it carries only a generic meaning as it is not capitalised in the poem. This expression creates a universal geography of personal and social displacement. The 'keys', 'mother's watch', house, 'rivers', 'cities', 'continent' and later 'the joking voice' (*PPL*, pp. 166-167) do not contribute to the signification of a particular loss. They are contrary and disconnected losses, which fail to complement each other or give a complete thought about loss; as signifiers they are 'concealed and replaced by another' (*Sarduy*, p. 279) in order to displace signification of personal loss by mapping it in physical and human geography. In Sarduy's words, it is this 'contradiction between signifiers, which instead of completing each other, negate and cancel each other out' (*Sarduy*, p. 276) and cause diffusion of meaning of loss. This absent other centre further displaces the losses.

Bishop's 'One Art' holds a multiplicity of voices – general, poetic and the elided personally – in surprising alterations within each stanza. However, the biggest surprise awaits in the quatrain, which reconciles the personal and the poetic voices in order to part with them and look forward to a new voice. The poem remains thus a non-homogenised experience of disparate and irreconcilable losses within the elliptical space of the poem. The perpetual movement of thought in the poem, from one loss to another, one signifier to another, contrasts with Kyle Booten's view that only the drafts of the poem refer to the 'vertiginous dilation of thought' monumentalised in the final version of the poem 'like a lava chilling into rock.'<sup>314</sup>

The Baroque rapidity of thought is evident from the proliferation of losses motioning from trivial things such as 'keys' to those more vulnerable to deformity: her mother's belongings, geographic identities and the people inhabiting those boundaries. Therefore, Bishop's Baroque villanelle does not celebrate the accumulation of losses, but their contrariness as a reflection of Sarduy's heterogeneous contemporaneity which exists in being different.

Bishop's fondness for bringing things both near and far, big and small into incongruent spaces under a similar mood or atmosphere of loss shows her interest in

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<sup>314</sup> Kyle Booten, 'Two Arts and what it leaves behind', *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 19 (2012) pp. 23-32 (p. 23) <DOI:10.1080/1358684X.2012.649138>



taking up a course in The New School on the geometry of weathers - 'Isobars and Isotherms' in thirties.<sup>315</sup> It is as if she is making a pattern of her losses similar to the patterns of weather.

Other than distancing and substituting the signifiers, the villanelle stretches the circle into an ellipse through its linguistic omissions or cropped vocabulary. The compression in language such as in 'is'nt', was'nt' and later 'shan't' (*PPL*, pp. 166-167) exercises *ellipsis* by omitting the complete form of adverbs and reducing distance between losing and mastering, missing and bearing, and losing and lying. Such a compression strings these losses together; it brings them in proximity of the space and time of the spatial dynamism of the poem. Like the Metaphysical poets, her instability of vision keeps her moving among losses great and small and changes her emotive bonding with them without stationing it at one loss spatially or linguistically.

The thought expressed in the first line of each tercet corresponds with the rhyming emotion in the third line, and the refrain in the quatrain: 'master/disaster', 'fluster/master', 'faster/disaster', 'vaster/disaster' and the odd rhyme 'or/master' (*PPL*, p. 166-167) exhibit an oblique sensibility motioning between opposing words and meanings, thoughts and feelings, contributing to the heterogeneity of *ellipse/is*.

Contrary to the continuity of rhymes, the use of dash in the quatrain functions as an *ellipsis* between the preceding tercets and following quatrain. The dash indicates the gap between earlier thought and the last stanza. Words are eschewed between what was said before and after to break down the inventory of losses and make the transition of thought more abrupt for the reader:

– 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!) like disaster.

(*PPL*, p. 167)

The gap prepares Bishop's divided self and the reader to the changes in both tone and the nature of loss in the poem. Here, Bishop's opposing self supports her

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<sup>315</sup> Eric Lindstorm, 'How to Write that Poem: Notes on Scansion and Timing in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry', *Thinking Verse*, III (2013), 15-50 (p. 19)  
<[http://www.thinkingverse.org/issue03/EricLindstorm\\_Howtowritethatpoem.pdf](http://www.thinkingverse.org/issue03/EricLindstorm_Howtowritethatpoem.pdf)> [accessed 21 April 2015].

poetic other in negating the greater magnitude of this loved one's loss compared to those mentioned before. Unlike the stanzas before, the quatrain brings together the dialogic relationship between the poetic and personal voice: the repetition of 'I' and 'like' unite the contraries within the stanza.

'Even losing you' brings back the poetic voice of stanza two, where Bishop's poetic self distances herself with 'you' (*PPL*, p. 167) to address many. Here too, 'you' becomes characteristic of Bishop's style and can be read as loss of one and many loved ones. The parenthetical instance, '(the joking voice, a gesture I love)' (*PPL*, p. 167), can be taken as a literal manifestation of the poem's figurative *ellipse*. The 'I' inside differentiates the absent voice from the poetic personae in the first and last part of her first verse sentence in the quatrain. The language of the elided other inside the parenthesis dilates the poetic thought of losing somebody personally.

By envisioning the parenthesis as an open *ellipse*, it does look like Post's understanding of it as a 'globe reflecting outward'.<sup>316</sup> The parenthetical writing marks the space of the other, which provokes Bishop's poetic self to move out of her guarded space and spatialise the truth about her intimacies in the outside: in her elliptical space of the poem and through that in her social environment in the present.

Bishop struggles in her drafts of this poem with not 'writing lies' (Draft 10).<sup>317</sup> It takes 17 drafts to sieve her inhibitions that 'All that I write is false' (Draft 9-10)<sup>318</sup> to the progressive compression in the final poem 'I shan't have lied' (*PPL*, p. 167), reinforced by her parenthetical other self that anticipates a quick seal for bearing future losses. As mentioned before, Bishop strongly disagreed with the confessional trend:

I am so sick of poems about the students' mothers & fathers and sex  
lives and so on. All that can be done – but at the same time one surely

should have a feeling that one can trust the writer – not to distort, tell  
lies, etc.<sup>319</sup>

The elliptical form of the villanelle gives Bishop the freedom to let her

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<sup>316</sup> Jonathan Post, 'The Baroque and Elizabeth Bishop,' *John Donne Journal: Studies in the Age of Donne*, 21 (2002), 101-33 (p. 128).

<sup>317</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, 'One Art', in *Edgar Allen Poe and the Juke Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts and Fragments*, ed. by Alice Quinn (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), p. 234.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233 – 234.

<sup>319</sup> Brett Millier, 'HALF GROAN, HALF ACCEPTANCE: 1972', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) pp. 459-79 (p. 462).

otherness of losses shape her truthful other self, presenting a non-linear narrative of unexpected closure. In ‘One Art’ Bishop tries to build her trust with the readers by bringing together her contrary perceptions of varied losses. This lesson is evident in the refrain in the quatrain: ‘the art of losing’s not too hard to master | though it may look like (write it!) like disaster’ (*PPL*, p. 167). The variation through the compression of ‘is’ and addition of the adverb ‘too’ (*PPL*, p. 167) in the refrain shows the poet’s transitory state.

The second parenthetical *ellipse*, ‘(write it!)’, once again activates the elided self. It lends support to the poet growing out of her reticence and inhibitions elucidated by her inclusion, ‘though it may look like’ (*PPL*, p. 167). The absent self provides a passage to Bishop for departing from her emotional bonding with the loved one, which could cause further disaster in her life ahead. The phrase ‘like disaster’ repeats ‘like’ as a conjunction to differentiate it from its use as an adverb before the parenthesis.

Distinctly Baroque, Bishop’s poetic and elided self ‘never offers us perfection or fulfilment, or the static calm of being, only the unrest of change and the tension of transience.’<sup>320</sup> The uncertainty of the poet undergoes transformation with the aid of the parenthetical other self; the conjunctive phrase ‘like disaster’ (*PPL*, p. 167) brings close ‘like’ and ‘disaster’ to hasten the poet to her elided catastrophe, as if to break free from it within the present tense of the second line of the refrain. For Bishop ‘the subject and the language which conveys it should surprise you. You should be surprised at seeing something new and strangely alive’ (*Conversations*, p. 104). Bishop’s poetic and personal self surprises the reader, ‘like disaster’, with her rushing through her greatest loss beyond our probabilities. By the end of the villanelle Bishop does not complete the cycle of celebrated losses by repeating them. Rather she disrupts their continuity for something different, and the poem furnishes an unexpected closure.

The art of losing is about breaking with the continuity of losing something now and then. In doing so, Bishop negates the continuity of losses by moving on to yet another otherness: a new temporal self, elliptically imperfect, and therefore, prone to change. Thus, ‘One Art’ as a geometrical *ellipse* and an exercise in *ellipsis* succeeds in demonstrating a transformation of the poet and her relationships, which

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<sup>320</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Introduction’, in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp.11-28 (p.14).

makes this villanelle a contemporary art form. What appears to be ‘like disaster’ is in truth another natural displacement and disassociation of connection due to the deviation of the nature and position of the poet.

The closure of ‘One Art’ recalls Bishop’s note-book experiences of being ‘inadequate’ and ‘flawed’ while living in New York in 1935.<sup>321</sup> Bishop’s losses give her a sense of her incomplete self, amidst an elliptically imperfect and plural contemporaneity, which always borders on the other. Therefore, she looks forward to embracing an alteration of her nature and spatial position so as to be different in her perception and approach towards both life and art.

Sarduy’s *ellipse/is* allows Bishop to spatialise the heterogeneity of her losses through their contrariness. She introduces her own plurality to cancel out the displaced losses and embrace a different self in contemporary times. By situating herself off-centred, Bishop understands the equilibrium between self and other, and of being distinct and plural. The spatiality of *ellipse/is* describes Bishop’s destabilised ideas about her own spatiality in relation to the places she has been living in. This cosmic and linguistic design allows her to show the decentred space of poetry and the gap between language and signification. Moreover, through *ellipse/is*, Bishop addresses the problem of signification in poetic language by celebrating oblique or indirect relationship between her words and images, and signifiers and signified. Bishop’s contemporary baroque poetics does not occur as an idealised form, but as an assemblage of decentred and dispersed ideas which are elliptically arranged from many centres of thought and spatial positions. In this way, *ellipse/is* makes her poems more fresh and immediate, rather than giving a standardised approach to her seemingly ordinary subject-matter.

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<sup>321</sup> Victoria Harrison, ‘Writing Intimacy’, in *Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 42-54 (p. 59).



### **Section Three**

#### **Elizabeth Bishop and the Baroque Etymology**

##### ***Imperfect Pearl vs. Monument***

*In the previous two sections, I have reflected on some of the connotative meanings of the seventeenth-century Baroque style and its associative meanings in the twentieth-century discussions in art and literature.*

*This section includes a comprehensive chapter, which further looks at Bishop's intimacy with the Baroque style through her closeness to the etymological meaning of the word Baroque. It focuses on presenting a literal connection between the poet and her contemporary baroque style of poetry through her proximity to the denotative imperfection and smallness of the word Baroque. Since the word literal is problematic for being generally misunderstood as a figurative expression, I wish to refer to the online Oxford dictionary, where the adjective 'literal' means 'of visual representation', which is 'exactly copied' so that it gives a 'realistic' meaning.<sup>322</sup> In this sense, the word literal is used to refer to the explicit and truthful meaning of an expression in language and its visual depiction. Therefore, when I say that Bishop's poems literally represent the denotative meaning of the term Baroque - an imperfect pearl, without any exaggeration, I draw attention to Bishop's visual approach to her art form as irregularly shaped, small size ornamental objects of modestly monumental value in contrast to Bishop's twentieth-century views about the monumentality of art forms as being large-scale, loud in expression and seeking professional reputation.*

*In order to show Bishop's poetics as a visual representation of a Baroque pearl, this section first establishes a faithful connection between Bishop and Baroque as a non-period term. It then traces its characteristic form in Bishop's Baroque approach to translations, and her interest in small and unpretentious things and artworks. Later, it elaborates on Bishop's modest form of poetry, an imperfect pearl of monumental value to her, through a close reading of her poem 'The Monument'. The poem presents the artefact as an unfixed Baroque work of art, which is timeless as well as temporal, past as well as present. In doing so, Bishop's baroque monument stands contrary to the fixity and definite meanings of art in*

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<sup>322</sup> OED online <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/literal>> [accessed 20 December 2017].

*modern times. Bishop's monumental art expresses the heterogeneity of modern art forms as it spatially and temporally remains open to engagements and transformations to maintain a self-effacing form of expression.*

*By establishing Bishop's contemporary poetry as a modest form of Baroque art, this section shows that her poems do not spatialise like the fresco works of Pietro da Cortona and Andrea Pozzo. Rather, as Randall Jarrell notes, they come close to Vermeer's paintings for being 'minutely observant' and because they 'exist on a small scale.'*<sup>323</sup>

*Usually, the literal meaning of a term is discussed before exploring its figurative meanings. The reason for inverting this order and discussing the literal meanings in this closing chapter is precisely to coincide with the non-linear and irregular stylistic features of the Baroque style and the belated reception of the term 'Baroque' in America.*



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<sup>323</sup> Randall Jarrell, "From Fifty Years of American Poetry", in *Elizabeth Bishop and her Art*, ed. by Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil P. Estess (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983), p. 198.

## Chapter Five

### Elizabeth Bishop: A 'literal' Baroque Poet

As discussed in previous chapters, the heterogeneity of the Baroque ways of seeing and unfolding has earned the term *Baroque* many associative meanings over successive centuries. Such a term, which has remained alive due to its broad spectrum of meanings, excites me to reflect on its origin. In this chapter, I argue that Bishop adopted the Baroque style not only because of its diverse connotative meanings, but also because of its denotative value. Bishop is interested in the 'literal' (*PPL*, p. 856), when it comes to translation of works, or looking up words in the dictionary. She is remembered by her students for encouraging them 'to see poems, not ideas; one did not interpret poetry, one experienced it' (*OA*, p. 154).

Bishop is valued by her students for her faithfulness to the materiality of words, in seeing their literal meanings above any critical thoughts about the poems at large. Therefore, it seems relevant to discuss the etymology of the term *Baroque* in order to more fully describe a poet who gave more weight to the meaning of words in order to spatialise their visual coordinates more solemnly and intimately. Therefore, instead of reading Bishop poems with a profound sense of critical statements, Bishop's association with *Baroque* allows me to visualise how Bishop wants us to see the material reality of her poetic form.

Therefore, to elucidate Bishop's like-mindedness with the *Baroque* aesthetics of the small and imperfect, I will articulate Bishop's literal associations with the word, rather than elaborating on its historical continuity and the chronology of its diverse meanings. The purpose is not to baffle the reader with the word's semantic and cultural variations over centuries, but to discuss it as an adjective, which literally describes Bishop's *Baroque* form of poetry, and as a noun presents Bishop as a *Baroque* poet.

In Bishop scholarship, Susan Rosenbaum substantially elaborates Bishop's association to the miniature in a number of ways. She sees Bishop's perception of the miniature as a 'small-scale copy' of nature or art,<sup>324</sup> and aligns Bishop's small thematic concerns and poetic collections with the twentieth-century American and

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<sup>324</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, 'Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum', *Journal of Modern literature*, 28 (2005), 61-99 (p. 76) < <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/184565> > [accessed 1 February 2016].

French artists Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp's 'pocket museums' against the large-scale museum industry in America.<sup>325</sup>

I agree with Rosanbaum's perception of Bishop's small and vividly detailed poems as mobile artworks of Cornell and Duchamp. However, I do not see Bishop's poetry as 'small-scale copy'. Rather, I see Bishop's small art form as her perception of an inadequately shaped *Baroque pearl*, which serves to be a subordinate part, or section of an ever-receding space.

Although critics have said much about Bishop's attachment with the small, I wish to refresh this connection in Bishop's poetic life and art through her literal association with the word *Baroque*. This association, which has not been explored so far, allows me to qualify the small and see the visual shape of Bishop's poems as imperfect objects of beauty.

Therefore, I will begin with the etymology of the word *Baroque* to discuss how the term literally matters to Bishop in her interests in all things, which carry its visual characteristics: her vision of imperfect objects of ornamental value, her imperfect approach to translations of a small body of poetry and prose, and her humble vision of other artworks, architecture, and short pieces of music as unpretentious small ornaments, which carry qualities of spontaneity and surprise, as being an incomplete part of a stretching space. Since Bishop likes all things that carry the denotative meanings of *Baroque*, I argue that the word has contributed in shaping her contemporary baroque style of poetry.

### **Etymology of *Baroque***

While tracing the bewildering history of the term *Baroque*, Rene Wellek realises the difficulty of returning any term to 'any of its original meanings.' Besides, he does not believe 'that the history of any term needs to be decisive for its present-day use.'<sup>326</sup> I agree with Wellek that the word *Baroque* has a baffling chronology and since its origin, its figurative meanings have branched out in many different forms of art and in varied cultural spaces. However, I make a humble attempt to go backwards to identify the origin of the term and its meanings, as I find them significant, if not 'decisive' in their usage in Bishop's contemporary aesthetics.

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>326</sup> Rene Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship', *Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism: Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 78) <[http:// www.jstor.org/stable/425797](http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797)> [accessed 26 March 2014].



My purpose is to limit myself to the origin of the term and more literally describe how Bishop wants us to see her poetic form. Rather than generalising in this last chapter, I wish to leave a deeper impression of Bishop's poetics as a jewel set within the expansive and non-chronological pattern of the Baroque tradition.

The original abode of the word *Baroque* is still completely undetermined by the dictionaries and art critics. However, the following phonetic variations and meanings have been mentioned in the works of Rene Wellek, Erwin Panofsky and Severo Sarduy discussed in this research. According to the dictionary of Etymology, the word comes from French 'baroque' – "'irregular'" ('pearl of irregular shape' in the Oxford dictionary)<sup>327</sup>, from the Portuguese *barroco* – "'imperfect pearl'" ('a rough or imperfect pearl' in The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature)<sup>328</sup> and from the Spanish word *berruca* – "'a wart'"<sup>329</sup>. Such phonetic variations in the word show a variety of cultural, linguistic and spatial proliferation of meanings. The different origins of the term *Baroque* define its multidimensionality, but conversely, keep its definition inexact and its origin uncertain. Hence, the term remains unpegged, harbouring contrasting meanings and plural spatiality.

The spatial form and linguistic meanings - 'irregular', 'imperfect pearl' or 'wart' show a contradictory relationship between each other and largely maintain the term *Baroque* as an incomplete and imperfect object, as it literally undergoes phonetic, semantic and visual transformation when shifted from one place to another.

However, for discussion here, I wish to stay with *Baroque* as an *imperfect pearl*, whose incomplete and unpolished dimensions carry the characteristics of being 'irregular' as an asymmetrical shape; as a *pearl*, like in the shell of a pearl oyster, it shares its small size with the generally small growth of a 'wart'. Although, the twentieth-century Baroque style finds beauty in the term's grotesque meanings as well, here the focus is only on the imperfect beauty of *Baroque* as a *pearl*.

As an irregular stone, *Baroque* visualises a small ornamental object, whose flawed shape defies a perfect geometry. This imperfect and irregular ornament does not suggest conventional standards of perfection and commercial value of beauty. As a three-dimensional spatial form, it can have multiple dimensions of unequal and

<sup>327</sup> OED online <<https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/baroque>> [accessed 9 November 2015].

<sup>328</sup> Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, eds., *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4 edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) < DOI: 10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001 >

<sup>329</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/baroque>> [accessed 9 November 2015].

unrefined lengths and breadths. Thus, the term *Baroque* visually carries indeterminate boundaries, which complement its indeterminate origin, and give it an illusion of movement and spatial diversity, which is championed by the seventeenth-century Baroque style in art.

Bishop's association with the term *Baroque* as an *imperfect pearl* goes back to her reading of M. W. Croll's essay on 'The Baroque style of Prose', where he describes the 'curt style' of seventeenth-century Baroque prose structured like a 'jewel' or a 'prism'<sup>330</sup>. The jewel-like prose first presents the fact of the idea and then the same idea is exhausted through varied perspectives showing the labour of the mind striving to give a faithful account on the subject, which is susceptible to revisions and adjustments with each new look. As already discussed in the first section of this research, Bishop was fascinated with such historical Baroque forms as ways to compress her expansive and variable vision in the small and irregular dimensions of this prism-like 'jewel'. Bishop remembered these qualities of this historical Baroque prose and in 1930s quoted it in her letter to Donald Stanford while discussing ideas of motion in poetry and her intention to explore a similar form for herself (*OA*, p. 12). Rather than perfecting her form of poetry by adopting any modern models, Bishop began with fashioning her motion of ideas as Croll described it in the seventeenth-century Baroque prose.

Through incorporating such Baroque ideas of motion, Bishop was also interested in their small and quiet form of a multi-perspective 'jewel', which could be used to address the contemporary trends of writing meaningless poetry, whose words did not give space to the efforts of the mind in developing ideas but focussed mostly on self-projection through explicitly loud expression in poems. Bishop told Donald Stanford how much she valued the Baroque way of expressing the truth of her ideas in words and allowing them to shape her poems rather than consciously perfecting the 'irregularities' of her poetic form to create perfect rhymes to impress others (*OA*, p. 11).

Like Croll's baroque 'jewel', Bishop's poems present an irregular spatiality of perspectives, which she contracts in her poetic space in the manner and arrangement in which Croll describes the seventeenth-century prose form intimately shaped like the *Baroque* 'jewel'. So far, we have seen in previous chapters how

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<sup>330</sup> M. W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style of Prose', in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), 422-456 (p. 433).

Bishop delights in the bends and curves of perception and prefers to see its poetic objects or spaces through non-linear geometric relationships with other objects and spaces. Therefore, I propose that *Baroque* allows us to see Bishop's spatially plural poetry within its irregular and small-sized dimensions of a *Baroque pearl*.

This shows that Bishop saw her poetry as a modest form of an *imperfect pearl*, which is not imposed from outside, therefore it is not perfected prior to experiencing it. Bishop's poems take their form from within; her poetic material determines her unsmooth and irregular form and allows us to see her poems as humble objects, closely detailed by self-effacing hands.

It is precisely for the imperfection of the 'jewel' that she chooses to stay and see the spontaneity of the iceberg in 'The Imaginary Iceberg', rather than carry on with her travels. The form of the 'iceberg' like the *Baroque* 'jewel' 'cut[s] its facets from within' and 'behooves the soul' (*PPP*, p. 4) of the poet for not being tailored to the 'false idea of what appeals a "tourist"' (*CPr*, p. 216). Like *Baroque*, Bishop's 'iceberg' is not geometrically perfect as it gives in to the demands of its material and hones its irregular form accordingly. The jewel-like 'iceberg' unassumingly gives body to Bishop's *Baroque* reflections. Such a process of creation is not definite, it is spontaneous. Such surprising perspectives, which give meaning to Bishop's art can take a painfully long time, rather than being fast paced like the modern industry of art and literature.

I argue that Bishop's poetry is shaped like an imperfect pearl for its choice of deviation from mainstream commercialism and schools of thought, which endangered Bishop as being a 'poet by default' (*WIA*, p. 89) who gets into a mechanical exercise of writing and publishing work. In comparison to modernists, such as William Carlos Williams or Wallace Stevens, Bishop's published work is also small in number and her last collection *Geography III* carries the smallest portion consisting of ten poems.

It is due to this *Baroque* way of relishing the motion of ideas in mind and expressing them before they are fully exhausted, which keep the process of shaping poems as tentative and therefore, imperfect. Such imperfection of form shows the work of the humble hands, which do not indulge in a mechanical haste of finishing and polishing an object to be introduced in the market. Bishop delights in perpetually shaping her poems like an *imperfect pearl*, rather than arriving at them. Since a pearl will take years to grow in a shell of a pearl-oyster so does Bishop's poems, which are

nourished and developed over long stretches of times. Bishop agrees that ‘I write very, very slowly.’<sup>331</sup> This is evident from the fact that it took Bishop 26 years to finish the final draft of ‘The Moose’. Even her friend, Robert Lowell noticed her writing process to be of ‘an inchworm crawl[ing] on a leaf’ (*WIA*, p. vii).

As a jewel, Bishop’s poetry seems to be a quiet little object whose spatiality speaks of its intimate relationship and modest value to the unpretentious. Bishop did not like her professional duties of being a poet at the Library of Congress and therefore being an armchair academician (*WIA*, p. 89). Such self-effacing quality of poetry allows Bishop to keep her poetic form indeterminately accessible and open to more spatial and temporal engagements. In twentieth-century discussions on the Baroque style, Wellek highlights the neutrality and vitality of the term *Baroque* for having ‘meanings which its users have decided to give it’<sup>332</sup>. In Bishop’s case, she sees the term as a small object of imperfect beauty, which suits her modest conceptions in art and poetry and her low-key self as a poet. The *Baroque pearl* offers a form, which can give an indeterminate time to spatialise ideas and preserve an incomplete sense to her poems, for a poet who ‘never felt’ the ‘ego’ needed to write poems (*Conversations*, p. 130).

Due to Bishop’s small collection of poetry and thematic concerns amidst gigantic productions and loud theories in twentieth-century art and literature, William Meredith uses a similar visual expression to describe Bishop’s status as a poet who cuts “‘small jewels” along with the large.”<sup>333</sup> I agree with Meredith that Bishop sustains this attitude of humility towards her art and her perception of her choicest artworks throughout her life. Since Bishop was never consistently influenced by popular art movements, surrealism, cubism, transcendentalism, impressionism or particular poets, but poetry at large, she wishes to make a small, jewel-like valuable space for her modest art amidst popular artists and influential artworks.

Bishop’s attachment to the stones remained there until her death reflecting her intimacy with its small size and varied dimensions. Near her death, Bishop drew

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<sup>331</sup> Wesley Wehr, ‘Elizabeth Bishop in Seattle’, in *The Eighth Lively Art: Conversations with Painters, Poets, Musicians, and the Wicked Witch of the West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), pp. 157-84 (p. 177).

<sup>332</sup> Rene Wellek, ‘The Concept of Baroque in Literary scholarship,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 86) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797>> [accessed 26 March 2014].

<sup>333</sup> William Meredith, ‘Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore’, in *Elizabeth Bishop and her Art*, ed. by Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil P. Estess (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983), pp. 216-18 (p. 217).

her left-hand ring finger with a ‘bright stone’ labelled “Imaginary”, which Joelle Biele describes as ‘playful and open, the hand of the poet, choosing details, shaping images and crafting lines’.<sup>334</sup> The relationship between the creative hand, which hones its poetic object, and the stone is evident from Bishop’s drawing of her hand. Bishop saw her poetic temperament in the *Baroque pearl*, which could not only give her ways to express motion in her poetry, but ways to present her contemporary art form as an act of perseverance of the mind giving motion to ideas and connecting them with her enduring hands. In this way, Bishop values the essence of creativity, which cannot be achieved in haste, and in meaningless work presented under the guise of art.

### **Imperfect Translation of *Baroque* in Twentieth-Century America**

The term *Baroque* was initiated in the discussions on twentieth-century art and literature in varied places and cultures; from Germany and other parts of Europe it reached American soil as a word, which did not give a sense of belonging to the place it reached. Thus, *Baroque* received a small reception in America against its monumental fervour in Germany and other parts of Europe. The Baroque as an *imperfect pearl* was imperfectly translated in America. It remained a flawed object not being adequately understood in terms of its present use in the contemporary movements in art and literature; it was discarded as an exhausted and worn-out object that does not seem to have any value for addressing modernity. Therefore, its presence was diminished in scale and usage.

According to Rene Wellek and Jane O Newman, unlike in Europe, the word *Baroque* witnessed a belated arrival in America as it came into discussion in 1930s and was later spread by immigrant scholars. In discussions on the usage of the term, Wellek, Newman, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup highlight the fact that it resonated within the limited sphere of discussions on metaphysical poetry in universities. Jane Newman is of the view that by the 1970s, the term disappeared from American academics, and was only taken up as post-modern aesthetics in Latin-American literature.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Joelle Biele, ed., ‘Introduction’, in *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), pp. vii-lx (p. lv).

<sup>335</sup> Jane O. Newman, ‘Introduction: Benjamin’s Baroque: A Lost Object?’ in *Benjamin’s Library: Modernity, Nation, and the Baroque* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp.1-76 (p.2).

Newman is of the view that since Baroque was celebrated as a style of modern nationhood in Europe, and particularly in Germany in the context of the World Wars, it underwent change due to its encounter with another culture, which failed to relate to the European spirit of developing ‘modern nation-state’. Among such an inadequate display of knowledge, the term was only understood by ‘a handful of Americans.’<sup>336</sup>

Jane Newman’s view becomes particularly interesting in this context when she points out that the term reached America through ‘translations’, which gave it a ‘new vocabulary’ and a ‘new home’. According to Newman, contrary to Europe, the term lost its popularity in America because of being ‘misunderstood’ as a bygone style of the ‘age of absolutism’.<sup>337</sup> Therefore, the term must have burdened some modern Americans with its thoughts of Counter-Reformation in times, which mocked religious ideals.

Among the immigrant scholars, who discussed the word *Baroque* and its related style in America, was the German art historian Erwin Panofsky, who delivered a paper on ‘What is Baroque?’ in Bishop’s college in 1935. Panofsky never published the essay because he thought the subject had already become obsolete and therefore the essay was ‘out of date’<sup>338</sup>. Panofsky found *Baroque* to be of little value in the literary scene due to being already exhausted and worn-out by art historians. Hence, Panofsky’s low-key perception of *Baroque* in twentieth-century America coincides with the humble and unassuming meaning of the term, as the *imperfect pearl*, which has been imperfectly understood in America.

Agreeing with Newman and Panofsky, I believe that since the term reached another space and culture through the medium of translation the distortion of meanings is likely. In this transference of meanings, from one register to another, I find the reasons for the term being decentred from the popular American aesthetics. Whether it was the academic discussion on metaphysical poetry or rethinking of Counter-Reformation art, the term *Baroque* was misconstrued for its absolute and inadequate meanings associated with a fixed period in history.

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>338</sup> Irving Lavin, ed., ‘Notes’, in *Erwin Panofsky: Three Essays on Style* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 199-220 (p. 202).

Nevertheless, Panofsky's remarks in 1940s that the essay is a 'superficial characterisation of the style but might stimulate further reflection'<sup>339</sup> anticipates the potential usefulness of *Baroque* as a non-period term in the twentieth-century arts and literature for those artists or poets who thought of the word and its associated style beyond any absolute meanings related to period, culture or nation. Since Bishop's poetics distances from absolute meanings in art, she could have been part of that small number of people who were attracted to this imperfectly and inadequately translated term in America.

The fact that the essay moved out of its limited sphere of the lecture audience at Vassar College into the public through an anonymous Vassar girl's mimeographed text of the essay<sup>340</sup> indicates that there were Americans who had an interest in the obsolete style. There can be a possibility of this girl being Bishop, since she was in New York at that time, and the event took place in the month of May before Bishop embarked on her first trip to Europe in July the same year. This connection can be further reinforced by the fact that Bishop audited Panofsky's lecture course on Baroque style between her trips to Europe. Bishop told Moore in a letter in September 1936, that 'I am coming back on the 20<sup>th</sup> Sep. I think – because I have decided to take Mr. Panofsky's course in the Baroque, at the Metropolitan, beginning around then.'<sup>341</sup> As discussed in section two, Bishop thought about the Baroque style at various occasions during her journey to Europe.

Keeping in view Bishop's auditing of Panofsky's lecture course on *Baroque* and its associated style, her attraction to the term can be seen due to its being obsolete and out of fashion in the mainstream literary and artistic preoccupations. Bishop's choice reflects her attitude as a modest poet, who was not impressed with popular art forms. As discussed before, Bishop's interest in a pearl-like form suited her unassuming nature, which delighted in an intimate environment for herself and the slow nurturing of her poetic form. This is why Bishop rejected public appearances and poetry reading events to avoid being celebrated as an established poet in academia. In an interview, she told that 'I've never really sat down and said to myself, "I'm going to be a poet". Never in my life. I'm still surprised that people think I am...'. 'There's nothing more embarrassing than being a poet, really'

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid, 'Notes', p. 201.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>341</sup> Victoria Harrison, 'Notes', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 212-31 (p. 224).

(*Conversations*, p. 129). Therefore, a poet who did not live up to her public stature could be attracted to a term so underrated in her country.

There is another reason, which reinforces Bishop's noticing of the term *Baroque*. As discussed in the previous section, Bishop is fond of wearied surfaces and objects, as in *painterly* Baroque. It is the picturesque quality of worn out surfaces that give her an illusion of movement by transforming these wearied textures into meaningful significance in relation to present space and time. Hence, the obsolete appearance of *Baroque* in America could have attracted her as being an object of picturesque quality, which made her see its incomplete and worn-out dimensions in a relationship with the present: a connection between past and present. In her 1930s notebook Bishop mentions her desire to have an 'attic room' of small and imperfect old things. It showed their literal value for her from very early in her writing career:

Sometimes I wish I had a junk room, store-room, or attic, where I could keep and had kept, all my life the odds & ends that took my fancy. The buffalo robe with the moth-bitten scalloped red-flannel edges, my Aunt's doll with the limp neck, buttons, china, towels stolen from the hotels, stones, pieces of wood.<sup>342</sup>

These small and ragged objects, 'buttons', 'stones' and wooden things have found place in her poetry. Their uneven spatial dimensions suggest their flawed beauty and it is their inadequacy that allows them to be engaged with many different spatial and temporal objects in Bishop's poetics. Bishop delights in spatialising her relationship with these old and disparate things. In doing so, Bishop gives the old and wearied objects a spontaneity that keeps them alive. Nevertheless, Bishop's attraction to the term *Baroque* as an imperfect translation, and an imperfect and obsolete thing seems plausible for her unself-conscious art form. Bishop is interested in ordinary objects as she values them for their ability to excite her imagination and give her possibilities of motion in her poetics. She is interested in objects, which are not glossy or perfect in shape and meaning. Hence, Bishop could have looked at *Baroque* as another wearied small stone, an *imperfect pearl* in her attic collection, which has the potential to be transformed for her present use in her contemporary

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<sup>342</sup> Victoria Harrison, 'Gathering in a Childhood', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 107-42 (p. 121).



baroque poetics. For instance, Bishop's baroque approach to her translations visualise the term as a space of transformation of linguistic and spatial forms of original meanings into imperfect translations.

### **The *Imperfect Baroque* and Bishop's Imperfect Translations**

As *Baroque* fascinates Bishop for its literal characteristics, translation also attracts Bishop due to its literal meanings. Firstly, the *Baroque* shows her literal attitude as a “poet-translator”<sup>343</sup> who translates poems or texts for her fondness for words and their meanings and not for showing any professional superiority. In the process of preserving the literal meanings in translation, Bishop sees her translation as an *imperfect pearl*, which linguistically and spatially transforms the reality of the original text as Bishop is aware that ‘probably at least 50% of original is always lost, in another language’ (*PPL*, p. 888). However, Bishop's translation as *imperfect pearl* reflects her unassertive nature as a poet and a humble translator who does not claim an absolute authority over her translations of twentieth-century French, Portuguese and Spanish poetry and prose. Despite her temporary and long sojourn in places representing the texts she translated, Bishop realised the difficulties with being well-versed in other languages and therefore, the cultures they expressed.

Second, Bishop's eagerness to create imperfect shapes of original texts and cultures for the sake of valuing literal meanings of words implicates her interest in relationships between cultures and their transformation through the process of transculturation, which happens for her without any socio-political goal in mind. In this sense, Bishop's *Baroque* translations are transcultural spaces, which celebrate the spatial plurality of the term *Baroque*, its liminal boundaries and its continuously self-effacing nature due to undergoing linguistic and visual transformations. Like the term *Baroque*, Bishop's translation as an *imperfect pearl* visually and linguistically exhibits an imperfect home for the original poem or text. Translation gives liminal boundaries to the original text or poem which is seen as having multiple belongings.

Although *Baroque* was discarded for being unfit for present works of art in America, Bishop's literal translations of modern poetry and prose fits well within the modest dimensions of an *imperfect pearl* as a transcultural space. Before delving into Bishop's concepts of literal *Baroque* translations, I will first establish the ‘imperfect

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<sup>343</sup> Magdalena Edwards, ‘Introduction: Why Study Elizabeth Bishop's Literary Translations,’ in *The Translator's Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007), pp. 1-32 (p. 17).

pearl' as a transcultural space. The term 'transcultural' has been coined by the Cuban writer, Fernando Ortiz and he describes it as:

The word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon, which could be called neoculturation.<sup>344</sup>

In the light of Ortiz' definition of the transcultural experience, the literal meaning of *Baroque* focussed on in this chapter, serves as a transcultural space: the *imperfect pearl's* imperfection is contributed by its inadequate and incomplete place of origin. Its spatial form indicates the cultural and linguistic interaction between other cultures. In this process, the literal meaning of 'Baroque' undergoes 'deculturation' through phonetic variations from 'baroque' to '*barocco*' and then '*barueco*'. In this manner, the previous cultural and linguistic meanings witness transformation and gain new cultural meanings – the form changes from 'irregular' to 'imperfect pearl' and then 'wart'-like. In addition, the convergence of different cultural forms of 'Baroque' make it a liminal space of becoming, with each literal meaning giving 'a new cultural phenomenon' i.e. the inexact and incomplete shape of 'Baroque', which is not completely French, Portuguese or Spanish, but has connections with them. Such a multidimensional form offers Bishop's translations an open space for other cultural and linguistic proliferations, which constantly transform the original poem or text in imperfect dimensions of a *Baroque pearl*.

Having said that Bishop's literal translations make them a *Baroque* transcultural space, I now return to describe Bishop's literal ways of reading and translating as a "poet-translator". As a poetry instructor, one of Bishop's students recalls her suggestion for reading a poem: 'she enjoyed pointing out the particulars of each poem, not generalizing about it, and she insisted that we understood every individual word, even if we have no idea what the poem was about as a whole.' Bishop insisted to 'use the dictionary, it's better than the critics' (*Conversations*, p. 142).

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<sup>344</sup> Fernando Ortiz, 'The Social Phenomena of "Transculturation" and its Importance,' in *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1955), pp. 97-102 (p.102).

This literal approach of focussing on the peculiarity of words, rather than creating general impressions about the poem, or focussing on its cultural or linguistic contexts, finds its way in Bishop's translations as well. Bishop claims that her 'translations are almost as literal as [...] [she] can make them' (*PPL*, p. 856). Bishop's baroque approach to translations allows her to see the original work as a small object whose words can be closely observed. After 'noticing the detail at hand'<sup>345</sup>, the truthfulness of the meaning of words determines the text or poem's ability to be translated and transported into another cultural space and language. In an interview with Beatriz Schiller, Bishop said that 'as for myself I translate a poem only when I feel that it can work in English' (*Conversations*, p. 77). Bishop agrees that all this happens by 'luck' (*PPL*, p. 696) as the 'poet-translator' is not well-versed in language of the other and makes a humble beginning with the awareness that 'it is impossible to translate poetry' (*PPL*, p. 696). Bishop's translations practice 'the art of losing' (*PPL*, p. 166) the previous linguistic and cultural meanings for the new ones. In this loss, Bishop finds translation to be a satiating experience as a reader: after all, it 'gets one going through dictionaries and that is a helpful activity' (*OA*, p. 501).

In *Bishop Scholarship*, Susan Rosenbaum, David Kalstone, Marilyn May Lombardi, Magdalena Edwards, and Mariana Machova have had considerable discussions on Bishop's translations being creatively parallel to her original poems. Therefore, my purpose here is not to make an in-depth analysis of Bishop's individual translations, but to highlight her baroque approach to the subject itself – how it appears as a *Baroque pearl*, both in visually imperfect dimensions and as a transcultural space to Bishop. Since critics have already found common aesthetics between Bishop's poems and her translations, I argue that she got them published along with her own baroque poems, because they represented another facet of Baroque spatiality as a multi-dimensional pearl exhibiting a transcultural space.

While discussing Bishop's translation of Octavio Paz's Spanish poem - 'Objetos y Apariciones' ('Objects and Apparitions'), Susan Rosenbaum looks at translation as a 'juxtaposition of scale and perspective'<sup>346</sup>, in which Bishop's

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<sup>345</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'Recording of Life: Elizabeth Bishop's Letter to Isle and Kit Barker', in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 215-32 (p. 227).

<sup>346</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, 'The Illegible signature: Elizabeth Bishop' in *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp.188 -213 (p. 213).

translation chooses a miniature perspective to enter into a ‘miniature’ ‘territory’ of art, where unlikely objects come in contact. I agree with Rosenbaum’s idea of Bishop’s translation as a miniature art form seeing the original text as a small, “‘found object’” or a “‘found text’”.<sup>347</sup>

Rosenbaum limits her perspective of Bishop’s translation to Paz’s poem. I wish to extend Rosenbaum’s idea of Bishop’s translation as a ‘miniature’ perspective of the ‘found object’, to her translation of poetry and prose in general. I argue that Bishop’s translations see the original poem or text as a “‘found object’” for being a small part of a large cultural and linguistic space. I see these “‘found object[s]’” as Bishop’s *baroque* approach of a non-egoistic ‘poet-translator’ wherein she humbly diminishes the scale of their perspectives in order to value their material – the literal words. Bishop’s keen observation of each small word enables her to see the poems or texts as mobile objects with fluid boundaries, which can be penetrated by another cultural and linguistic space. In this sense, translation brings the “‘found object’” in a transcultural space, where it is rearranged in shape and given spatial and linguistic plurality of an *imperfect pearl* having multiple belongings.

Bishop practices the same for her translations. The original poems or texts are given small recognition keeping aside any critical acclaim of their poets or writers, so that their cultural, linguistic and academic superiority does not distract the “‘poet-translator’” from her unassuming focus on small words in the poem or text. Bishop views foreign texts as small objects of value, which have an independent life of their poets, writers, place or nation. Hence, being independent of their particularity or origin, Bishop looks at the possibility of their belonging to other cultures and languages.

In 1963, Bishop wrote a letter to Carlos Drummond de Andrade, a well-known twentieth-century Brazilian poet, about taking ‘small liberties’ in her ‘quite literal’ translations of his poems (*PPL*, p. 850). Other than literal transformations of the contours of words in another linguistic space, Bishop’s *baroque* approach to her translations show her linguistic deficiencies and inadequacy of cultural knowledge as well, as she visually alters the dimensions of perceived reality as the *imperfect pearl* suggests. Thus, Bishop seeks imperfect beauty in translations by acknowledging her determination to translate.

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

Bishop desired Carlos Drummond de Andrade's consent in repeating the verb 'forbidden' and avoiding repetition of the adjective 'small' in his poem 'Travelling in the Family'<sup>348</sup>. The translation of '*pele tempo e pelos lugares | defendidos*' literally means 'into the forbidden time and space'.<sup>349</sup> Bishop sees it as 'forbidden | time, forbidden places'<sup>350</sup> Through the repetition of the verb 'forbidden', Bishop splits the single verse line into two phrases, to emphasise two visual experiences through literally one word. The 'Forbidden | time' spatialises the gap of time on the page, to express the poet's act of delay in reaching the time-line, which retrieved his temporal memory of his family life. Once this is done, it makes way for the 'forbidden places', which spatialises the dimensions of this temporal memory.

Further, the repetition of the adjective 'small' is avoided in '*na pequena area do quarto*' and '*A pequena area da vida*', which literally means 'in the small space of the room' and 'the small space of life' (my translation). Bishop changes them with 'in the little space of the room' and 'The narrow space of life'.<sup>351</sup> The replacements of adjectives are not far-fetched; they still give the literal meanings of 'small' and qualify it more vividly. The adjective 'little' in the first verse line closes the stanza on the visual insignificance of distance between the poet and his father. The next stanza takes on a contrary view of this small space of separation by describing its inadequacy as a reason for their closeness. These small proliferations of literal meanings alter and adjust the visual dimensions of the original poem.

Bishop's small additions, which gave imperfect value to her translations, were valued by their original poets and writers. The Brazilian poet, Carlos Drummond De Andrade appreciated Bishop for her 'sense of nuances' and 'tender respect' for the poem.<sup>352</sup> Bishop approached the poets and writers she translated in order to remain close to the experience of their words and expand them as her own reality and of others. In contrast to Bishop's 'painful literal way' of translations, Robert Lowell's translations 'look like mistakes' to her. Bishop thought of them as

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<sup>348</sup> Mariana Machova, 'An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Translation* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 51-78 (p. 61).

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>350</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, trans., 'Travelling in the Family', in *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, ed. and intro. by Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), pp. 56-61 (pp. 58-59).

<sup>351</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, trans., 'Travelling in the Family', in *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, ed. and intro. by Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), pp. 56-61 pp. 60-61.

<sup>352</sup> Mariana Machova, 'An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry', in *Elizabeth Bishop's Translation* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 51-78 (p. 61).

“free” translations and not being accurate to the literal meaning of the original French texts that he translated (*WIA*, p. 449). In her unpublished ‘Remarks on Translation’ she calls for ‘accuracy’ of meanings, which if not practiced can be ‘just plain carelessness – or is it egotism?’ ‘R. Lowell is a good example – here.’<sup>353</sup> In Lowell’s case, Bishop observes that his self-consciousness, as a translator, made him interpret the original poems and create a gap between the original word and its meanings.

While staying in Brazil, Bishop was tempted to translate the Portuguese classic autobiography of Alice Dayrell Caldeira Brant (Helena Morley) – *Minha Vida de Menina* (My Life as a Little Girl). In her ‘Introduction to the Diary of “Helena Morley”’, Bishop emphasises the profundity and diversity of Helena’s experience: ‘it really happened; everything did take place, day by day, minute by minute, once and only once, just the way Helena says it did’ (*PPL*, p. 357). In this sense, Bishop’s translation makes the experience of the “found object” fresh and immediate by being present to other cultures and spaces through other languages. By observing and reordering reality as it unfolds to Bishop, she is rearranging the other’s perspective in words having a first-hand experience of it. In the ‘Introduction to the Diary’, Bishop describes the events to be ‘fresh [...] and eternally true’, which is the actual ‘charm and the main point’ (*PPL*, p. 342) of Bishop’s translations. For Bishop, the accuracy of the text is validated when its actual words literally become alive in the present place and time by keeping their experience indefinite. This is why Bishop translated only those poems and texts whose experience of the literal could be maintained in her imperfect translations.

In a letter to Moore, Bishop told her about her purpose of translating Helena’s diary: ‘But I’ve had so many nice letters noticing all the things I wanted noticed that I’m very cheered up about the book. I’m satiable for the praise for it, I’m afraid. but that doesn’t necessarily mean sales, alas’ (*OA*, p. 357). Bishop translated the Diary for the inherent value of its experience, which attracted her as a reader, rather than presenting it as a synthetic object created on the demands of the readers. By translating Helena’s diary for its small details of experience, Bishop valued her faithfulness to her humble observations and her limitations of perspective

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<sup>353</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, ‘The Illegible signature: Elizabeth Bishop’ in *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp.188 -213 (p. 208).

as a human being. Bishop did not read and write poetry or prose with the aim to seek academic acclaim, or chiefly look forward to commercial purposes. Both, as a poet and a translator, Bishop did not wish to gain any official position, since she found the ‘academic atmosphere [...] suffocating’ for her and art forms being ‘aloof from life’. Therefore, she thought in arts, ‘official poetry [...] has simply become too respectable. And in the arts, respectability is a form of paralysis’ (*Conversations*, p. 37). It is this professionalism, which she disapproved of in Lowell’s translations.

Bishop read other poetry not for the poet’s stature or the professing of his/her philosophy and particular culture. In Helena’s case, her purpose was not to project Helena’s personal life; she wanted to highlight the accuracy of Helena’s experience, which gives a sense of immediacy to its vivid descriptions of how things appear to her and other readers. In a letter to Anne Stevenson, she said that ‘I can’t be considered a cultural go-between, nor do I want to be’ (*CPr.* pp. 444-445).

This is why Bishop told Beatrice Schiller in an interview in 1977 that translations ‘open our eyes to foreign cultures’ (*Conversations*, p. 77). Her translations were not meant to perfect her knowledge of one culture and language, but to be conscious of the sense of space a text or poem allows her to enter and engage its original experience with the expanse of other cultures and languages. Bishop’s translations do not see the poem or text as a fixed object with defined perspectives in space and time of a language and culture. Bishop remained eager to send a copy of her first collection *North & South* to the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda who wanted to translate some of her poems in Spanish. Bishop thought ‘a little South American publicity would be very interesting’ (*OA*, p. 138) for her own poems to be comprehended in wider dimensions of place, cultures and languages.

While discussing Bishop’s translations of poetry, Magdalena Edwards suggests that her translation ‘like ekphrasis’ is ‘both homage and imperfect portrait’<sup>354</sup>, and therefore, it ‘dislocates and dismembers the original work in terms of visual shape.’<sup>355</sup> Contrary to Edward’s view of Bishop’s translations as similar to ekphrastic work, I do not see Bishop’s approach to her translations as visual distortions of fixed works of art. Rather, I find them ‘imperfect portraits’ due to their spatial and linguistic engagement with the contrary spaces and languages of another

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<sup>354</sup> Magdalena Edwards, ‘Introduction: Why Study Elizabeth Bishop’s Literary Translations,’ in *The Translator’s Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007), pp. 216-65 (p. 223).

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

art form. Bishop acknowledged this imperfect representation of her translations in her 1960s notebook: ‘Translating poetry is like trying to put your feet into gloves.’<sup>356</sup> The analogy of putting ‘feet’ into ‘gloves’ indicates the imperfect mould or the irregular frame in which the original poem is fitted. I agree with Magdalena that translation transforms the visual dimensions of words on the page. However, Bishop is interested in the literal meanings of the words, even if her faithfulness to them visually and linguistically deforms them on the page.

In translating Octavio Paz’s ‘Objects & Apparitions’, Bishop shows that translation as an inexact form serves as a contrary expression, another non-linear dimension that breaks down the hierarchy of cultural and linguistic meanings in art. It alters previous perspectives by reconstructing reality there and then. By intervening into the space of the other and looking for linguistic alternatives, Bishop transposes the material to cherish it as part and parcel of her own environment. This is why she changes the position of stanza 13 with stanza 10,<sup>357</sup> as if she is changing the order of Paz’s poetic objects by rearranging the order of Cornell’s boxes in front of her. Through this shift, the penultimate stanza coincides with the last two lines. In this arrangement, the light weight objects presented as ‘apparitions’ in Cornell’s boxes dramatize the fleeting moments of Paz’s closing words, which ‘become visible for a moment’ within their box-like poetic frame.

In suggesting further changes to Paz’s poem, Bishop’s choice of the verb ‘commit’ literally comes close to ‘to do’. However, it graphically changes the perspective of presenting a work of art. The word spatialises the act of painting, or any art form, as an intimate performance, which secretly brings different objects in an unknowing relationship, as one secretly executes a heinous act without making it known. The verb ‘commit’ makes the analogy between contraries - art and crime - more convincing and the acts become spontaneous, which equally surprise the reader or the onlooker. In his 1974 letter to Bishop (translated from Spanish by Magdalena Edwards), Paz agrees with Bishop’s beauty in the imperfect, which he calls ‘perfect’:

Your translation is perfect. It is better than the original. For example, I write – translating literally, [...] “hacer un cuadro como se hace un

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<sup>356</sup> Elizabeth Bishop, ‘Notes’, in *Edgar Allen Poe and the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*, ed. by Alice Quinn (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), pp. 243-359 (p. 314).

<sup>357</sup> Magdalena Edwards, ‘Weaving and Unweaving the Echoes: Elizabeth Bishop and Octavio Paz as Poet-Translators,’ in *The Translator’s Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007), pp. 216-70 (p. 227).



crimen” [“to do a painting like one does a crime”] but you say “to commit a painting the way one commits a crime”. Magnificent! [...] I don’t know what I would give to have written that “to commit a painting.” Yes, you are very right – how did I miss it? – Stanza 10 should be 13, the penultimate one.<sup>358</sup>

Although Bishop’s translations have been read and acknowledged by their original poets, in her modesty Bishop never got overwhelmed with their remarks and expressed her humility as a translator. She wrote to Moore in 1935 about her knowledge of French: ‘I am very poor at it and feel my ignorance particularly in regard to modern French poetry’ (*OA*, p. 32). Staying the longest in Brazil with her Portuguese friend Lota, and compiling an anthology of Brazilian poetry, Bishop does not claim to have learned the language from the well-informed circle around her as she still ‘understood the language a little’ (*Conversations*, p. 77). Bishop reduces the scale of translations to match her perspective of humility and forbearance, which reflects the modest form of a multi-dimensional and spatially plural *Baroque pearl*. In expressing her modesty, Bishop presents her translations as humble art works, which remain alive through repeated acts of observing the literal meanings of the original poems.

The literal choices of the translator show an alteration in the pattern of words when textual reality is overlapped by the translator’s spatial apprehension of it. These literally small changes proliferate the reality of the previous experience of the poem and spatialise it into another space; it neither completely retrieves its previous cultural meanings nor wholly presents the translator’s perceived reality, rather it enlarges the comprehension of words in space and time through the crosshatching of their spatial and visual dimensions. In remaining close to the meaning of words, Bishop’s translations relish in imperfection.

Paz shared Bishop’s belief that ‘each poem needs several translations’ (*PPL*, p. 696). Both the poet-translators realised the importance of revisions in the creation of a poem, text and translations. In a letter to Bishop in 1979, Paz discusses publishing their translations of each other’s poems and agrees that ‘yes, I, too, have the same malady and I am condemned to revise, revise, revise ....’ He further says

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<sup>358</sup> Magdalena Edwards, “Weaving and Unweaving the Echoes: Elizabeth Bishop and Octavio Paz as Poet-Translators”, in *The Translator’s Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007), pp. 216-70 (pp. 226-27).

that ‘I don’t know if you will have the time and patience to revise your translation’.<sup>359</sup>

In her unpublished ‘Remarks on Translation’, Bishop presents the view that translation ‘Can NOT be judged’ ‘in one dimension’ by saying that it is ‘good – or bad.’<sup>360</sup> In this way, she draws attention towards its non-symmetrical and multi-dimensional form. Bishop acknowledges the beauty of imperfection in her literal translations, rather than asserting perfection of form and meaning through self-conceit or sympathy towards ‘feeling right or wrong – that one does know what the poem says.’<sup>361</sup> Bishop’s translation as transcultural form heightens the inadequacy and inexactness of the term *Baroque*, which champions transformation, and diametrically informs her readers and onlookers to see Bishop’s translations as imperfect revisions of a spatialized art form.

### **All Things *Baroque***

Throughout her life, Bishop remained affiliated with people and places that have shared her liking for *Baroque* in terms of cherishing small stones and objects exhibiting variety of dimensions, things attracting attention for not being fully exhausted in observation, for suggesting intimacy and a feeling of vastness of space, where they belong. Since Bishop values these small objects for their indefinite and irregular shapes and textures, they visualise the *Baroque pearl* in being imperfect and inadequately known.

While living in Brazil Bishop made a close observation of its varied historical cities to help her appreciate their ornamental qualities. In her prose work on ‘Brazil’, Bishop reduces the scale of her perceptual dimensions of the Brazilian cities, valuing them as ‘miniature cities’ (*CPr*, p. 183) being rich in precious stones. Directing attention to her *Baroque* perception of stones – exhibiting variety of textures, irregular dimensions, and curvaceous patterns within the inherent roughness of natural stones, she introduces us to *Ouro Preto* (Black Gold), Diamantina (‘Diamond centre of the world’), *Gios*, which makes rosaries with ‘baroque pearls’

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<sup>359</sup> Magdalena Edwards, ‘Weaving and Unweaving the Echoes: Elizabeth Bishop and Octavio Paz as Poet-Translators,’ in *The Translator’s Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2007), pp. 216-70 (p. 255).

<sup>360</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, ‘The Illegible signature: Elizabeth Bishop’ in *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp.188 -213 (p. 208).

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

(*CPr.* p. 213) and *Minas Gerais* (General Mines), which presents the goldsmith's designs having 'filigrees and arabesques' and 'the stones set in these pieces are usually rough diamonds, [...] semi-precious stones: aquamarines, topazes, amethysts, and tourmalines' (*CPr.*, p. 212). These small towns show the diversity of natural materials given intimate value by the creativity of the hands of the artists. Bishop noticed them for their small imperfections, which show the humble efforts of the artists who carved them.

In her 'Introduction to the Diary of "Helena Morley"', Bishop differentiates her choice of small irregular shapes, which she had noticed in Brazil. For instance, she brings in contrast description of churches in Helena Morley's town of Diamantina with her observations in *Ouro Preto* to give us more reasons for showing her closeness to the small irregularities of *Baroque*:

The famous churches of the gold mining town of Ouro Preto are small, too, with their Baroque facades trimmed with green soap-stone, their heavy curves and swirls and twin mustard-pot towers, they are opulent and sophisticated, while the little churches of Diamantina are shabby, silent, and wistful.

(PPL, p. 348).

Bishop's preference for small churches of *Ouro Preto* shows her liking for the details of 'curves' and 'swirls' of stones showing the bends and turns of perception in bringing irregularity of motion to the otherwise static materials. As against the small and mobile churches of *Ouro Preto*, in Diamantina the little churches' 'clock towers and belfries are square' (*PPL*, pp. 348-349). Due to their geometric symmetry, Bishop finds them dull and lifeless in their fixed forms. This is why, by more than a coincidence, it is the characteristic of spontaneity in Baroque art, which could have attracted her to buy a house in the colonial heritage town of *Ouro Preto*, whose 'front porch' was 'in view of seven baroque churches. (*Conversations*, p. 73).

Bishop particularly mentioned in one of her interviews that *Ouro Preto* is 'a city of truth and vitality. I like its architecture very much, I like its churches. There is something in this city's character that agrees with me' (*Conversations*, p. 48). The values that Bishop attaches with the architecture - 'truth and vitality' - are expressed in the faithful rendering of materials of small stones, which exhibit the challenges of the Baroque artist in bringing about motion in heavy textures and keeping their form spatiality indeterminate for further improvisations. Thus, Bishop likes the city's

Baroque style of architecture for its indefiniteness, like the origin and meaning of the term *Baroque*, which keeps it alive with many perspectival changes in the present.

Like Bishop's affection for *Baroque* ornamental stones, her mentor, Marianne Moore, remained fond of 'jewels'. Valuing Moore's interests, Bishop gifted her a 'modest brooch of the semi-precious stones of Brazil' (*PPL*, p. 482). Apart from Moore's love for intricate jewels, she equally cherished her collection of delicate small objects, such as specimens of small creatures, shells, postcards, fragments of texts and 'delicate sketches' (*PPL*, p. 478). Like a *Baroque pearl*, Moore liked these varied things for their intrinsic value of craftsmanship – their details and spontaneity of perspectives. This is why, while travelling to different places, Bishop sent Moore an 'unbeautiful bracelet', 'specimen of the deadly coral snake' (*PPL*, p. 482), papaya seeds, croton leaves etc.

Moore paid meticulous attention to small parts of things - colours, shapes and dimensions, which bring about surprising perspectives to her and she shared them in her letters to Bishop. In 1942, telling her about the gifted papaya fruit seeds Moore noticed the 'amethyst color', which made them look like 'seed-pearls'<sup>362</sup>. In another letter to Bishop in 1943, she shared her observations of the gifted croton leaves whose 'vein-system whereby each vein has a fork of hair fine ends, amaze and amaze us.'<sup>363</sup>

Moore's interest in colours, textures and dimensions of small things gives primacy to peculiar observations of her small subject-matter. Bishop acknowledges that reading Moore's poetry 'opened up my eyes to the possibility of the subject-matter I could use and might never have thought of using if it hadn't been for you [Moore].' Like Moore's small-scale, but prized perspectives in poems from her collection *Observations*, such as 'To a Chameleon', 'The fish', 'Peter', 'To a Steam Roller', Bishop presents us with her ordinary subject-matter through her meticulous observations in 'The Imaginary Iceberg', 'The Fish', 'The Weed', 'A Miracle for Breakfast' and so on so forth.

According to Linda Anderson, Moore enabled Bishop to observe objects in 'different perspectives and scales' 'to open areas of vision that were oblique or peripheral, not dominated by tradition or authority' (*LOC*, p. 14). I agree with Anderson and believe that it is because of these unconventional or *Baroque* ways of

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<sup>362</sup> Bonnie Costello, ed., *Marianne Moore, Selected Letters* (NY: Penguin, 1997), p. 423.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 441-42.

seeing, which brought Bishop close to Moore and value her life-long friendship with her. As seen in previous chapters, Bishop's act of seeing delights in oblique dimensions of vision and brings spontaneity of perspectives beyond the linearity of a picture-plane. However, Bishop explored such dimensions of perception very early in her writings, way before she met Moore. Bishop's early unpublished poem 'To a Tree' shows her inclination towards such non-linear angles of *Baroque* vision, which avoids the domination of any obvious viewpoints. The poem can be seen as her early efforts to explore Moore-like 'miracles of language and construction' (*PPL*, p. 472) in presenting the oblique bond between herself and the Baroque art, through the tree in the poem. The poet and the tree lean against the window and gaze in and out at each other's spatiality: 'To lean against the window and peer in |and watch me move about!', and 'to lean against the window and peer out, | admiring infinitesimal leaves' (*PPL*, p. 185). In this way, the poet and the tree as her poetic object share a spontaneous relationship of interdependency between differing things in this vast space: So, the poem offers no hierarchy of perspective, but plurality of humble exchanges of vision, which mattered to both Bishop and Moore; 'To a Tree' shows Bishop's ideas about shaping her poetry in oblique dimensions, such as of the *Baroque pearl*.

As another exchange of small perspectival changes between Bishop and Moore, Bishop sent her mentor some pictures of *Baroque* things in Valencia. Among them, Bishop seems to be overwhelmed with the details of the postcards having an embroidered bullfighter: 'I am enclosing a couple of pictures of Baroque things we admire in Valencia [...] I am torn between sending you [a postcard of] the bullfighter embroidered in silk and the bullfighter embroidered with sequins' (*OA*, p. 42).

Here, Bishop exhibits her *Baroque* approach of prioritising minute details, which help her to differentiate between things and the impressions they create. It is the texture of embroidery on the small postcard, which gives variable impressions to the bullfighter in silk and the other with sequins. Like the *imperfect pearl*, Bishop's act of seeing the postcards closely keeps the form of the bullfighter indeterminately attractive as it offers two different perspectives, which keep its form imperfect in either postcards and allows Bishop's perception to oscillate between one and another and distance herself from making a definite choice.

Other than cherishing small gifts of irregular objects, Bishop's and Moore's writing is also about irregular exchanges of small words and phrases. Both Bishop and Moore made spontaneous observations of their oral exchanges and indulged in small borrowings of precious words from their conversations to give them a new context in their writings. In Bishop's memoir 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore', she recalls how Moore used her casual utterance - 'the bellboy with the buoy-balls' in her poem 'Four Quartz Crystal Clocks' (*PPL*, p. 487). Similarly, Bishop shared in her letter to Moore about the burning of papers in her prose work 'The Sea and the Shore': 'I am suddenly afraid that at the end I have stolen something from "The Frigate Pelican". It was not until I began seeing pelicans that my true source occurred to me. I know you speak of the flight like "charred paper" and the use the word "maneuvers"' (*PPL*, p. 743). Like the *Baroque pearl*, these precious borrowings are treasured by both the poets for enriching their writings with pearl-like cherished moments of intimacy.

Having mentioned the *Baroque* bonding between Bishop and her friend it is interesting to observe how Bishop notices the subtle difference of their approach as well. Bishop mentions that for Moore 'the exact way in which anything was done, or made, or functioned, was poetry to her' (*PPL*, p. 493). Bishop shares with Moore the accuracy of first-hand knowledge of things in approaching her poetic object or field of vision. However, according to Bishop's perception of Moore, she perfects her accuracy of experience by exhausting her variable perceptions to know 'the exact way in which anything was done' (*PPL*, p. 493). In contrast, Bishop keeps her *Baroque* sense intact by focussing on how things appear to her differently at varied times and spaces, rather than 'exactly' in a place or time. Thus, Bishop practices Baroque imperfection in her art; she keeps her observations perpetually indeterminate and her knowledge of things imprecise like the incomplete dimensions of an *imperfect pearl*.

This is why Bishop is interested in small-scale subject matter, to closely see its irregularities and set its imperfect spatiality in multi-directional motion: 'like icebergs, or rocks or awkwardly placed pieces of furniture [...] it is as if nouns are there, but the verbs are missing' (*OA*, p. 94). Bishop looks at these uneven shapes as *imperfect pearl[s]*, which can be brought into motion through their merging and converging with other irregular objects in varied directions within a visual field. Through these small and variable motions between things Bishop establishes

convincing relationships between varied perceptual dimensions of her ideas. She builds the impression of an object through its juxtaposition with another object. Sometimes an animate object is placed beside the inanimate: The unbeliever in 'The Unbeliever' is seen in relation to the marble sea and clouds; a static with an active such as the 'impoverished' 'scenery' and the 'pond' in ripples (*PPL*, p. 17); a trivial with a serious, such as the 'huntress of the winter air' against the 'chalky birds' or 'stand still 'boats' (*PPL*, p. 5); the object comes in striking notice when it stands in opposing dimensions of another object, or field of vision.

Bishop develops intimacy with her field of vision by breaking it down in small parts and seeing it in relationships, which give her an expanded view of her visionary field. While desiring a prison life in her story 'In Prison', Bishop wishes to see a juxtaposition of small and multi-dimensional stones such as 'diamonds', 'cobble-stone fans', and 'lozenge design' stones (*PPL*, p. 587) in her courtyard outside her prison window to keep making poetry out of the assemblage of these multi-faceted stones.

In her student and artist Wesley Wehr's collection of 'agates, of all kinds of stones, pebbles, semi-precious jewels [...] shells', (*PPL*, p. 469) Bishop noticed a similar delight in seeing relationships between small and asymmetrical stones. Bishop found Wehr's hobby reflecting his 'small beautiful pictures' (*PPL*, p. 469), which paint detailed relationships of frontality and depth among varied parts of his visionary field. Other than Moore and Wehr, even the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda had 'a beautiful collection' of shells which reminded Bishop of Moore's poetry and she wished to make Neruda read it (*OA*, p. 109). In Neruda and Moore, she found a similarity of interests in scrutinising intricate objects. Neruda's poetry, like his assortment of shells, exhibits a collection of signifiers brought in varied relationships to each other and to the signified. In Moore, the habit of keen observation of small things makes way for exhausting descriptions of objects in focus, whereas in Neruda, this hobby reflects his method of composing poems through abundance of signifiers skirting around the signified object. This is why Bishop recalls Neruda's poem '*Alberto Rojas Jimenez comes flying*' while writing her 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore', discussed in the first section of this research. By recalling Neruda's poem, Bishop is making up for the shortage of signifiers for inviting her dearest friend Moore. It is as if Bishop is borrowing Neruda's small stones to fill in the spaces within her baroque pattern of poetry.

As opposed to ‘making poetry monstrous and boring’ through the pretentious criticism of the ‘highbrow magazines one doesn’t want to look at a poem for weeks, much less start writing’ (*PPL*, p. 687), Bishop is not interested in making poetry a ‘big business’ (*OA*, p. 202), but a small object of intrinsic value. Rather than turning her poetry into a business of publishing and reviewing, Bishop’s writing process, as a collection of written ‘scraps of paper like other people collect coins and matchbox covers’ (*Conversations*, p. 3) shows that she wants readers and critics to be attracted to her poems as we treasure small objects of interest.

Whether it is looking at her poetic object, her field of vision or her process of shaping ideas, Bishop expresses her dislike for large masses of things, such as mountains, which lack detail and hinder clarity of her vision. While staying in North Carolina, she complains ‘they’re all around us, big blue shapes, coming & going through the mist [...] all this Nature feels like a big wet sofa-pillow ugly face, I hate masses of things you can’t see the shape of’ (*LOC*, p. 73). Even from her comfortable and elevated Petropolis study, she found ‘the view of the mountains’ to be ‘too distracting!’ (*Conversations*, p. 18). The larger view matters to Bishop only when she is able to break it down in parts and sees every inch of it. This is because she is very much aware of the limitations of human vision. Therefore, she seems determined that small shapes embody intimacy and distances which larger masses of things fail to visualise in the humble eye of a poet.

### **Modest Art is *Baroque***

Like her interest in small things carrying *Baroque* characteristics, Bishop takes notice of small-scale art forms for she is ‘not interested in big-scale work as such. Something need’nt be large to be good’ (*Conversations*, p. 24). She found large-scale work to be ‘huge and roaring’ (*PPL*, p. 469) in terms of its explicitness of beliefs, myths or theories, which define the scope and boundaries of art, and do not leave room for close observations and extemporaneous perspectives. In contrast, small works of art exhibit modesty through their small size and detailed structure; they speak of the efforts of the mind and hand of the unpretentious poet or artist, rather than showcasing his or her philosophies or academic inclinations.

For Bishop, art becomes monumental when its small space is shared by other art works and artists, and when it adjusts itself to the perspectives of the other. She prefers art works similar to the size of Joseph Cornell’s ‘minimal’ boxes of ‘marbles,



buttons, thimbles, dice, pins stamps, and glass beads', which as Bishop translates from Octavio Paz's 'Objects & Apparitions', are 'monuments to every moment' (*PPL*, p. 169), as they commemorate the diversity of life in their small embodied visions. Due to being small in size the boxes exhibit plurality of space and are capable of holding everything in earth and sky. In their temporary appearances, the objects share a modest vision of an ever-changing world.

Joseph Cornell's intricate collage boxes inspired Bishop to paint a similar *Feather box* and make a collage from varied facets of a drowning girl in her painting *Anjinhos*.<sup>364</sup> Like Paz and Cornell, Bishop delights in small objects of art, as they give the sense of the expanse of which they are inevitably a part. In a dream task of painting 'huge abstract paintings', Bishop tells a stranger to deal with it in parts, 'to paint wither [sic] a diptych, a tryptich, and not as a big artwork.'<sup>365</sup> The dream throws light on Bishop's attitude to large perspectives, which she prefers to see in a set of relationships between varied small dimensions of experience, which give accuracy to the vision.

Bishop believed in a form of art that belies a fixed spatiality and constantly remains open to perspectives and readjustment of meanings. Instead of large canvasses of explicit expressions, she preferred a quiet form, which develops intimacy with its environment. This is why, she loved painting small works and, while looking at art works she preferred smaller ones for having 'much more depth and feeling.'<sup>366</sup> She admired her painter friend Kit Barker's 'small picture', which she found fit for an 'intimate atmosphere' of her Brazilian home (*OA*, p. 258).

In her 'Poem', Bishop lets us know that her uncle's small-scale painting, is 'live', 'touching in detail' and represents a small section of life, which makes way for the big picture and vice versa, as if 'art "copying from life and life itself"'. Although, the painting shows Baroque motion with its 'munching cows', its 'geese' being fed, the unstable sight of the 'specklike bird' or 'fleyspeck looking like a bird', it 'has earned little money' because of being not bigger than 'the size of an old-style dollar bill' (*PPL*, p. 164-166). However, the little monetary value of the painting does not affect Bishop's appreciation of its Baroque style of composition. But on the

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<sup>364</sup> *Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings*. ed. and intro. by William Benton (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), pp. 48-51.

<sup>365</sup> Peggy Anne Samuels, 'Infiltration and Suspension', in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 56-86 (p. 64).

<sup>366</sup> *Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings*, ed. and intro. by William Benton (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 96.

other hand, Bishop has little regard for her Uncle's 'Large Bad Picture.' Bishop's dislike for her uncle's 'Large Bad Picture' shows her disbelief in the faithfulness of a larger vision. The artist cannot conceive the vastness of space in all its details when his focus is on painting the expanse rather than its peculiarities. The painting's exaggerated perspective of space, with its 'overhanging pale blue cliffs| hundreds of feet high' shows an isolated experience, which does not coordinate with the 'little arches' at 'their bases' (*PPL*, p. 8-9) and with the Uncle's near and far perspective of other things within that space.

The Uncle's painting fails to illuminate small proportions of vision as 'the entrances to caves' are 'masked by perfect waves' (*PPL*, p. 9). This monumental painting of large and protruding cliffs mars the realistic details of experience and its descriptions show the carelessness of the artist as over the cliffs 'are scribbled hundreds of fine black birds | hanging in n's in banks.' Thus, the aesthetic or functional purpose of this painting remains unclear like the ships, which 'apparently' 'have reached their destination' but are not sure 'what brought them there, commerce or contemplation' (*PPL*, p. 9).

For Bishop, reality is also not what is merely seen but how it appears to be in changing dimensions in space and time. Therefore, reality requires closer observation of minute changes among things or spaces. In this regard, small proportions fill in for all those details, which remain vague when seen in a panoramic view. This is why Bishop is particularly fond of surveying natural materials around her. As a traveller, she was keen on examining different textures of art, architecture and nature wherever she went. Her poetry also reflects on her sensitivity to materials that constitute her poems.

While staying in Key West in the late 1930s, Bishop wrote to Moore about her excitement for handmade scroll-work on wooden houses: 'I want to take a great many pictures of the wooden houses with their scrollwork verandahs' (*OA*, p. 67). In another letter, she mentioned the scrollwork on houses looked 'pretty' to her 'as if it were cut from paper' (*OA*, p. 68). She appreciated her friend and painter Loren MacIver's wooden house as it looked 'well made' because of being built by a 'woodcarver' (*OA*, p. 77). Preferring a 'pen', instead of a typewriter to write poetry (*Conversations*, p. 117), Bishop must have appreciated the endeavours of the carpenter's hands in carving the design skilfully, in contrast to the hastiness of a mechanical production. The material determines the Baroque form of the pattern,

which brings movement through repetition and variation suggesting M. W. Croll's description of the spiral movement of the mind in Baroque prose. Bishop's habit of taking pains to shape her poetic materials over the years shows her patience and perseverance for carving her poetic material. Her method shows her affinity with the work of a carpenter who etches in wood, or a sculptor who chisels a sculpture.

The humble struggle of the carpenter with his materials matches Bishop's sense of humility in shaping her poems, while being aware of her visual and linguistic shortcomings. This workmanship of carving and giving accurate form to the material is how Bishop thought of making her poems as *Baroque* pearls. Bishop stands similar to the carpenter in prioritising her poetic material over her personal projection. This is why, while discussing the status of varied art forms in her prose work 'Brazil', Bishop was happy that carpentry was not yet touched by industrialisation as the 'carpenter's only tools are the axe, chisel and "his two hands"' (*CPr*, p. 214). For Bishop, the work of art should unpretentiously reflect on the physical pain with which the artist has moulded his art form. Bishop's students have noticed such qualities in her suggestions on painful reading of poetry in order to remain faithful to any work of art. It is probably due to these merits that Bishop's student Dana Gioia finds her 'the most self-effacing writer' she had ever come across' (*Conversations*, p. 142).

Valuing quality over quantity and professional fame, Bishop appreciated the deformed sculptures of the eighteenth-century crippled African-American artist Antonio Francisco Lisboa (Aleijadinho) in *Ouro Preto*. In a letter to Robert Lowell in 1960s, Bishop writes about him as 'the last and best Brazilian baroque sculptor [...] tools tied to his hands. *Ouro Preto* has whole churches by him – tiny, but lovely' (*WIA*, p. 329).

Aleijadinho's small wooden sculptures exhibit disproportion between varied parts of his sculptures and display the imperfection of the *Baroque pearl*. Aleijadinho presents the modest initiative of an artist who is conscious of his limitations. By executing non-symmetrical carvings with his crippled hands, Aleijadinho shows his allegiance to his taxing materials. His imperfect art shows the quiet infiltration of African cultural forms in Baroque art. It is as if, through his carving, he chisels a humble niche for his marginalised self within the culturally diverse Brazilian art scene.

Alejadinho's statues mar any ideas of order or perfection, which Bishop found in Wallace Stevens's collection – *Owl's Clover*, since it fails to 'reach the lives of the unhappiest people'.<sup>367</sup> The collection shows perfect construction of statues in poems such as 'Old Woman and the Statue' and 'Mr Burshaw and the Statue', which lack vitality due to being unyielding objects suggesting ideas of order amidst a chaotic world. Perhaps, it is because of such ideas of perfection that Bishop thought of Stevens's art as his 'self-consciousness'<sup>368</sup> obstructing depth of perspectives. Bishop prefers imperfect art forms in contrast to Stevens's orderly statues. In doing so, Bishop believes in the immediacy of meanings in her poetic form.

Bishop lamented being part of the *Life* Magazine project on Brazil, which presented the picture-book of Brazil as a 'synthetic whipped cream out of the by-products of a plastic factory than anything remotely connected with writing.' The picture-book reflected the whims and desires of the representatives of *Life* Magazine, whom Bishop regarded as 'high-pressure-salesman types' (*OA*, p. 399-400). Contrary to this 'life-slicked book' (*OA*, p. 413), Bishop wanted to present a dynamic and detailed picture of Brazil, which gave space to different facets of its nature, arts and life for readers across America. Bishop described it as: 'My idea is to mix places, a few life-stories, short stories more or less, a piece on Aleijadinho probably – perhaps popular music, etc.' (*WIA*, p. 579). However, her desire to present an intimate picture of Brazil, more closely observed like a multi-faceted *Baroque pearl*, remained unfulfilled.

What Bishop found missing in *Life* Magazine's projection of Brazil, she found in her student, Wesley Wehr's small paintings having 'so much space, so much air', Bishop remarked with relief: 'why shouldn't we, so generally addicted to the gigantic, at last have some small works of art, some short poems, short pieces of music': 'those small things that are occasionally capable of over-whelming with a chilling sensation of time and space' (*PPL*, pp. 469-470). Bishop's comprehension of Wehr's works reflects on her preference for a modest form of art, like a small and three-dimensional *Baroque pearl* whose mobility and size makes space for intimate engagements with the onlooker. This is why, Bishop has remained interested in

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<sup>367</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'Whispering Galleries: The Visual Arts and the Incarnation of Memory,' in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), pp. (178).

<sup>368</sup>Ibid., p.178.

small art forms such as listening to Webern's 'short instrumental music' (*WIA*, p. 250) and non-commercialised Brazilian Samba for its variations, which give space to improvisations and bring 'spontaneity' and 'freshness' to the musical renditions (*CPr.* p. 216).

In modern art works, Bishop valued the intimate works of Paul Klee in contrast to any big-scale art work, such as the abstract expressionism of Pablo Picasso, which was thought to be a convincing reaction against World Wars. Refuting the 1960s Beats' social-conscious poetry 'like a monument-strewn battlefield' (*WIA*, p. 364), Bishop was attracted to Klee's indirect form of protest in his 'quiet, private voice, rather than monumental gestures.'<sup>369</sup> Bishop's nature preferred 'silence' (*Conversations*, p. 20). Therefore, she did not like loud forms of expressionist art or explicit protest of Beat poets. Bishop did not agree with explicit forms of self-expression, whether it was reacting against the social upheavals or even acknowledging herself as a poet. From very early in her writing career, Bishop preferred to 'hold' her 'tongue' for acknowledging being a poet, or eagerly looking for fame through publishing her work in magazines (*Conversations*, p. 129).

Klee's paintings do not make any explicit social statements or propagate theories. Rather, they shed light on the relationship between the modern man's fragile self and his perseverance in the consciousness of an overwhelming and ever-changing world. In favouring Klee's humility, Bishop appreciated his modest response to the social environment. She found ways to remain steadfast in her attitude of patience towards her art, and her preference for maintaining a distance from the literary pressures of producing and selling poetry and being known as a poet. In her quite manner, Bishop was determined 'not to worry about what other people thought, never to try to publish anything until I [she] thought I'd [she had] done my [her] best with it' (*PPL*, p. 484). In writing slowly, Bishop cherished her strengths and weaknesses as a poet and stood apart from the atmosphere of producing in excess and gaining quick critical acclaim with the help of the patrons of literature and art in America.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Peggy Samuels, 'Infiltration and Suspension', in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 56-86 (p. 65).

<sup>370</sup> Susan Rosenbaum, Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum, *Journal of Modern literature*, 28 (2005), 61-99 (p. 67) < <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/184565> > [accessed 1 February 2016].

### ‘The Monument’ and the Monumentality of Art

Like Klee’s paintings, Bishop’s poem ‘The Monument’ undermines the monumentality of art, both in being literally a big-scale work fixed in space and time and disseminating modern myth or a period in art. Bishop unfolds the monument in the poem as a modest form of Baroque art, an *imperfect pearl*, which belies a modern disposition of awe for perfect structure and larger than life ideas. Bishop’s *Baroque* monument expresses it as a non-period term seeking an intimate relationship with the present time, place, and art forms, rather than celebrating any fixity of period and culture.

Bishop’s student, Dana Gioia once remarked that ‘good poems existed for her [Bishop] in a sort of eternal present’ (*Conversations*, p. 142). ‘The Monument’ is one such example, which emphasises on ‘now’ and shares the twentieth-century discussions on the non-periodisation of Baroque art. I argue that Bishop’s monument represents the term *Baroque* as a traditional form of art, whose heterogeneity expands the scope of Bishop’s poetry to an ‘eternal present’, as it breathes through a contemporaneous occurrence of other art forms. In expressing itself beyond a chronological time-line, place and century, Bishop’s architecture comes close to T. S. Eliot’s view of ‘monuments’ of ‘Tradition’ discussed in his essay ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’.

Although, Bishop’s acknowledgement of Max Ernst’s frottages (designs obtained out of rubbing a pencil on a paper placed over a wooden surface or other natural textures) as inspiration for her writing of ‘The Monument’ have guided critics’ surrealistic reading of the poem, I support Susan McCabe’s observation that ‘The Monument’ memorializes imperfection, incompleteness<sup>371</sup>, and therefore, I see it as a *Baroque* object of modest dimensions: an *imperfect pearl*, which draws the attention of the reader or onlooker. Regarding ‘The Monument’, Bishop told Anne Stevenson in 1964, not to ‘mention Ernst again. Oh dear – I wish I’d never mentioned him at all’ (*PPL*, p. 859), in order for her poem to be cherished for its imperfection and plurality of meanings.

Like the *Baroque pearl*, ‘The Monument’ is an object made of natural material of wood and embellished with ‘vaguely whittled ornament.’ Without any tinge of industrialisation, Bishop’s unpolished monument of ‘weathered wood’

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<sup>371</sup> Susan McCabe, ‘Artifices of Independence’, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 37-97 (p. 55).

(*PPL*, p. 18) represents the imperfect hands of the poet who chiselled and shaped its multi-dimensionality with the assertion that 'I never have any sense of elation after I've finished' (*Conversations*, p. 7).

'The Monument' displays an irregular and indeterminate structure, which is 'built somewhat' 'like several boxes in descending sizes' placed at alternative angles to each other; 'a sort of fleur-de-lys' is set on the topmost box and its 'long petals of board, pierced with odd holes' hold 'four thin, warped poles', which like 'fishing-poles or flag-poles' hang downwards with 'jig-saw' decorations (*PPL*, p. 18). Similar to the *Baroque pearl*, this multi-faceted object contradicts any symmetry of structure and perspective. Wavering between being 'solid' or 'may be hollow', Bishop's monument is constructed from a dialectical relationship between varied things in common with Baroque architecture, such as of Roman architects Bernini and Borromini who introduced an interplay of waves, spirals and ellipse in motion to mar the solidity and linear perspective of walls, columns and arches of Baroque churches.

It is the worn-out texture and contrary structure of 'The Monument', which dismantles its hierarchy as a large-scale structure of overwhelming presence and invites plurality of perspectives from readers and onlookers. This is why Bishop presents a plural voice in the poem, and a dialogue between the contrary perspectives of the *Baroque* monument, as two approaches to the term *Baroque* in America. One voice is of a professional critic who considers 'The Monument' obsolete and not relevant to present times; the other voice is of Bishop herself who finds its relevancy as a modest form capable of expressing the heterogeneity of modern art forms.

The professional critic sees 'The Monument' as a 'shoddy fret-work' and 'temple of crates', but Bishop opens it up to possibilities of becoming an 'artefact', 'tomb or a boundary'; 'It looks old', but 'decorations' give it life, 'wanting to be a monument, to cherish something' (*PPL*, p. 19). These two voices debate over the purpose of a work of art to engage with other art forms and gain value beyond its times. As a non-period art form, the *Baroque* monument desires fresh perspectives to expand its scope in the twentieth-century arts and literature. In this sense, 'The Monument' becomes part of the discussion on the non-periodisation of the term and its associated style initiated by the art historians and literary critics - Heinrich Wölfflin and Erwin Panofsky, Mario Praz, W. M. Croll and Rene Wellek. These critics observed that the Baroque style existed in successive centuries since the

seventeenth-century. It existed beyond socio-political ideologies in all other art forms as a style of expressing ideas, and it equally exists in the twentieth-century in varied art forms such as surrealism, cubism and impressionism. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup,

This resurgence of interest in Baroque forms [...] suggests an affinity between Baroque and the avant-garde movements flourishing at the time. The aesthetics of fragmentation, the heterogeneity of materials, the energy of disparities and oppositions, the emphasis on image: Eliot's and Benjamin's poetics of fragmentation [...] are related to Baroque practices, as are cubism and surrealism to the Baroque embrace of irreconcilabilities as ways of seeing and knowing.<sup>372</sup>

Thus, the seventeenth-century *Baroque* finds space in modern art forms due to its heterogeneity, which encompass plurality of materials, contrary ways of seeing and suggesting relationship between modern fragmentations. As a multi-faceted term, the *Baroque* describes Bishop's idea of 'the whole of contemporaneity': 'modern pieces of art, buildings, scenery – and the sense of the present'.<sup>373</sup>

Longing to be cherished 'now', 'The Monument' is condensed in size as its 'view is geared'. However, Bishop sees it is foreshortened for an intimate perception from the opposing eyes, which find it closer in relation to their sight for being 'so low there is no far away' (*PPL*, p. 18), but spatially distanced in relation to their position being 'far away' within the visual field. 'The Monument' becomes a liminal space of art, which enters the space and time of the viewer who engages with it. Bishop describes the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Monument foreign to the place depicted, as it is 'much better than real sea or sand or cloud', and to her own dimensions, 'Where are we, Are we in Asia Minor, or in Mongolia?' (*PPL*, p. 18). In this sense, the monument becomes a vague 'boundary' between art and life, and its place of origin and belonging. It transcends somewhere from its origin in the past, and embraces the present, the opposing space outside itself.

'The Monument' defies a definite time, place and perspective; as a mobile object of the past, it shows a dynamic spatiality, which is coextensive in art and life. The indeterminate perception of the monument in relation to the indefinite position

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<sup>372</sup> 'Editors' Note to "Baroque in England", in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, ed. by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. (p. 117).

<sup>373</sup> Brett Millier, 'THE U.S.A. SCHOOL OF WRITING', in *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of it* (Oxford: University of California Press, Ltd., 1993), pp. 61-85 (p. 82).



of the poet, and of the other, anticipates the intention of the object to engage in an ever-changing relationship with its artist and the onlooker. Heinrich Wölfflin describes such an architecture as expressive of the artist's style of becoming:

Architecture, an art of corporeal masses, can relate only to man as a corporeal being. It is an expression of the time in so far as it reflects the corporeal essence of man and his particular habits of deportment and movement, it does not matter whether they are light and playful, or solemn and grave, or whether his attitude to life is agitated or calm.<sup>374</sup>

In the light of Wölfflin's relationship between the body and architecture, Bishop's baroque monument expresses her self-effacing attitude in its small and indeterminate dimensions and its non-linear motion. 'The Monument' does not dominate with any socio-political statements; it constantly grows out of familiarity with another work of art in the present space and time. To put it in Rene Wellek's words, Bishop's monument expresses 'Baroque' as 'a neutral term'<sup>375</sup> for 'as not being associated with a single poet and not a mere century-label.'<sup>376</sup>

Unlike Bishop's companion critic, who maintains the obsolete impression of *Baroque* in America and sees it as a 'lonely monument', displaying a 'cramped and crated scenery', Bishop 'is not interested in public attitude' (*Conversations*, p. 37), but the art itself. Like her interest in the *Baroque* pearl, Bishop does not envision art in a colossal shape, and therefore appreciates the 'low' perspective and plural dimensions of the monument, which make it readily available for close associations and new meanings. 'The Monument' is made of wood, whose texture is capable of generating various forms of expression for the poet. No matter how 'old', 'cracked' and 'shoddy' it appears to be, the monument still affects its surroundings as it takes over sky and sea. In its capacity of being a heterogeneous form, this wooden monument elucidates Bishop's critique of 'segregating [...] the arts'.<sup>377</sup> Although different in spatial dimensions, the monument, sky, clouds and sea defy any compartmentalisation of art forms and share the same texture of wood: 'driftwood

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<sup>374</sup>Heinrich Wölfflin, 'The Causes of Change in Style', in *Renaissance and Baroque*, intro. by Peter Murray, trans. by Katherine Simon (NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 73-88 (p. 78).

<sup>375</sup>Rene Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary scholarship,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 88). <[http:// www.jstor.org/stable/425797](http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797)> [accessed 26, March 2014].

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>377</sup>Zhou Xiaojing, "The Oblique, the Indirect Approach": Elizabeth Bishop's "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics", *Chicago Review*, 40 (1994), 75-92 (p. 76). <[http://: www.jstor.org/stable/25305892](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25305892)> [accessed 29, September 2014].

sea', 'wooden' sky 'grained with cloud'. The wood gives similar materiality to disparate things and 'holds together better' 'much better than real sea or sand or cloud' (*PPL*, p. 19). In this way, on the one hand the wooden texture of the monument makes its surroundings timeless by sustaining other forms in wood – sea, sky and clouds - beyond their space and time. On the other hand, the artifice in wood surpasses its timelessness and enlivens itself in the present as it is affected by the atmospheric changes: 'while once each day the light goes around it' 'or the rain falls on it, or the wind blows into it' (*PPL*, p. 19).

As Barbara Johnson explores the liberated vision of the monument of the Statue of Liberty in Emma Lazarus's 'The New Colossus', which offers guidance and promises new life to foreigners in her land,<sup>378</sup> Bishop's monument serves as an expansive space, offering many inlets of meanings in relation to the present space and time of the onlooker. 'The Monument' does not project itself as a mere timeless architecture; its 'artist-prince' tends to leave, what Bishop describes as 'unconscious spots':<sup>379</sup> 'What is within (which after all cannot have been intended to be seen).' When 'watch[ed] it closely', it offers temporally a non-chronological and incomplete form of art, which suggests becoming a 'mark, a tomb or boundary, or make | a melancholy or romantic scene of it ...' (*PPL*, p. 19). Its incompleteness holds life in it and allows it to affect its surroundings as the wooden sea is 'half-shining' and even the clouds are 'glistening splinters!' (*PPL*, p. 19).

Barbara Johnson argues that in 'The Monument' Bishop 'does not share the memory it preserves' and therefore 'lacks respect for the monument, and 'the collective ideal it represents.'<sup>380</sup> Nevertheless, I maintain that Bishop does not show disregard for the monument and its collective memory, for she presents a counter-argument in the poem, which contradicts the apparent shoddiness of the monument by valuing its heterogeneity for becoming a disparate assemblage of other things and objects. Bishop looks at it from different dimensions until she comes across new meanings, where the artefact takes on new spatiality and meanings. 'The Monument' presents itself as a piece of fine art, an artefact, which has stood the test of time and its material still qualifies for moulding present forms of art.

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<sup>378</sup> Barbara Johnsons, 'Monuments,' in *Persons and Things* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 34-44 (p. 43).

<sup>379</sup> Marilyn May Lombardi, 'O Breath: Asthma and Equivocality,' in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), pp.15-43 (p. 32).

<sup>380</sup> Barbara Johnsons, 'Monuments,' in *Persons and Things* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 34-44 (p. 35).

Bishop felt intimacy with her past and acknowledged its monumentality for being temporal and timeless for her. In a notebook entry she describes her past memories of times and spaces in spatialised dimensions of ‘family monuments’<sup>381</sup> stretching out in the past, but also engaging with her in the present by making her acutely aware of her contemporariness; ‘becoming only more firm, and inscribed with meanings gradually legible’ to her in present, the ‘family monuments’ grow, ‘send[s] out roots, as time goes on’.<sup>382</sup> In this way, the monumental dimensions of memory construct a relationship between Bishop’s past and contemporary life. It seems that from the early days of her career Bishop had been thinking about poetics, which could indirectly connect to her past, in order to make her understand its meanings in relation to her present life. In this sense, her ‘family monuments’ give her ways to embed her poetic form in earthly relationships, which takes years to develop, and time and again they are revisited to make poetry grow out of them as a spatial and temporal reality in present. Like Bishop’s ‘family monuments’, her monument in the poem holds a humble tradition of coordinating and readjusting with its present environment, rather than overwhelming Bishop with its grand structure that Sylvia Plath complains about the god-like monument in ‘The Colossus’.

Bishop’s ‘The Monument’ presents a synthesis of poetry and other forms of art. The monument speaks of Bishop’s inclination toward an art form that violates fixed boundaries. It unfolds itself as a mixed-media art, carrying the properties of sculpture, painting and architecture in the process of becoming a poem:

It is the beginning of a painting,  
a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument,  
and all of wood. Watch it closely

(*PPL*, p. 20).

This is why Bishop says to ‘watch it (monument) closely’. The monument expands beyond its material space and boundaries to express the creation of other spaces outside itself. In doing so, the artifice expands its scope of meanings to analyse the relationship and proportion between contrasting things. It carries the expression of contemporary life, which Bishop found in the constellation of different modern music and artists whose works are different, but modest and interactive. Bishop felt

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<sup>381</sup> Victoria Harrison, ‘Gathering in a Childhood’, in *Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetics of Intimacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 107-42 (p. 108).

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

for the varied small parts of Anton Webern's music, which carried 'that strange kind of modesty [...] one feels in almost everything contemporary one really likes – Kafka, say, or Marianne, or even Eliot, and Klee and Kokoschka and Schwitters....Modesty, care, space' (*WIA*, p. 250). The short medley of Webern reminds her of the varied expressions of modernists, whose contemporaneous existence enables her to see them together in a rhythmic composition, which gives space to each distinct fragment and engages them in a dialogue, where movement from one art to another defines and expands each other

Such a plural expression of contemporaneity gives Bishop similar ideas in 'The Monument'. She develops relationship between the historical pastness of the monument and its metaphorical connection to the present; the monument becomes a poem, painting or a sculpture in the present, here and now, as the poet meditates its relation to the contemporary life. The monument articulates a contemporaneous occurrence of various visual arts, which though distinct, bring two spaces and times together. In this sense, it displays a form of art, which is formed out of a dialogue between past and present, before and after, one art form and another, and therefore between poetry and fine arts.

Although, written in 1938, 'The Monument' was published in *North & South* in 1946, the year Rene Wellek anticipated the synthesis of literature and art through Baroque style. In his essay 'Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship', Wellek concludes that:

Baroque has provided an aesthetic term which has helped us to understand the literature of the time, and which will help us to break the dependence of most literary history from periodization derived from political and social history. It is a term which prepares for synthesis, draws our minds away from mere accumulation of observations and facts, and paves way for a future history of literature as a fine art.<sup>383</sup>

Bishop's monument represents Wellek's concept of non-periodisation of Baroque art. In becoming a painting, sculpture, or a poem, the monument shows the potential of becoming a mediated space of visual arts. The Baroque monument exhibits T. S. Eliot's unified sensibility in bringing together different spatial constructs in order to

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<sup>383</sup> Rene Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary scholarship,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Special Issue on Baroque Style in Various Arts*, 5 (1946), 77-109 (p.78) <[http:// www.jstor.org/stable/425797](http://www.jstor.org/stable/425797)> [accessed 26, March 2014]. 5 (1946), 77-109 (p. 97).

create a non-compartmental art form, which is interested in making dynamic connections between disparate things. In an interview with Ashley Brown, Bishop narrates her experience of engaging one art form with another, in order to have a better comprehension of both. She told Brown how the short musical improvisations of Scarlatti helped her in motioning her ideas in her poem ‘Roosters’:

When I was writing “Roosters”, I got hopelessly stuck; it just refused to get written. Then one day I was playing a record of Ralph Kirkpatrick performing Scarlatti: the rhythms of sonata imposed themselves on me and I got the thing started again (*Conversations*, p. 25).

Even working around the tone of ‘Roosters’ Bishop thought of Paul Klee’s painting ‘The Man of Confusion’ to visualise the modern fragmentation in a violent world. While translating Aristophanes’ ‘The Birds’, Bishop kept on thinking about the masque performances of T. S. Eliot and Gertrude Stein’s works. Considering Bishop’s fondness for Joseph Cornell’s three-dimensional boxes, her translation of Octavio Paz’s homage to Cornell in ‘Objects & Apparitions’ seems an act of rearranging Joseph Cornell’s miniature boxes. There is no denying the fact that Bishop’s surrealistic frottages, inspired from Max Ernst, made way for the beginning of ‘The Monument.’

Considering art as a set of associative relationships, the variety that the monument holds suggests Bishop’s interest in improvising space against socio-cultural limitations imposed on art. She advised her poetry writing students, already interested in ‘Shakespeare or Dylan Thomas’, ‘to think about the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth century poets’ (*Conversations*, Wesley Wehr, p. 39). In this sense, Bishop’s monument conveys that poetry does not evolve as a matter of periodization, but as a complex geography of style, which undergoes changes in form and meaning with time and when seen in conjunction to other art forms. All the forms of the Baroque monument – poetry, painting, sculpture – occur due to the rearrangements of ideas, or its box-like structure. Therefore, in becoming one art or another, it does not specify its dimensions, ideals, or beliefs and therefore shows anonymity of socio-cultural identity, space and time. In this sense, their indeterminacy suggests the openness of the *Baroque* term, which can encompass maximal spatial and temporal variations in arts: timeless and temporal, history and contemporaneity, traditional and modern are set up in a metaphorical relationship showing unified realities of life.

In its timeless and temporal form, the monument suggests that its words, like its boxes, are a mere visual spectacle, which can change in meanings and dimensions in each new expression of art. In this way, it comes close to T S Eliot's idea of tradition because it focusses on the functional and aesthetic nature of the artifact, rather than the artist. The artwork is preferred above the artist, as the 'prince' is metaphorically dead and now the work itself speaks for his ingrained endeavours:

The bones of the artist—prince may be inside  
Or far away on even drier soil.  
But roughly but adequately it can shelter

(*PPL*, p. 19).

According to Eliot, the 'consciousness of the past' allows the artist to progress in the future through 'a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.'<sup>384</sup> This is why the 'artist-prince' keeps his spatiality uncertain in relation to his artwork, in order to evade any explicit and defined meanings, which can overshadow his monument.

Like Eliot, Bishop looks for ways to engage with the monument as a past work of art, in order to deduce meanings from her present aesthetic experience of it. Such new methods of looking at the past works were fully trumpeted by Eliot. In her college days, she was keen on writing on 'form' of art due to her changing ideas on it, and to realise her ideas Bishop was looking for a new method of approaching an old form of art i.e. novel. The fact that Bishop aids her thoughts with Eliot's 'Tradition and Individual Talent' in her college essay 'Dimensions for a Novel', points to her interest in Eliot's avant-garde approach of making us see the relationship between past and present, where the past can be seen as a historical reality, but also beyond it as very much alive in our present.

In Eliot's 'Tradition' as 'monuments' of the timeless and the temporal, Bishop found ways to assemble the motion of her changing ideas or events in the novel, which can be equally applicable to poetry and other forms of art. Eliot's 'tradition' presents a dialogic synthesis of past and present, which could suffice for establishing a 'Baroque' connection between maximal fields of experiences:

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<sup>384</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and Individual Talent,' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 13-22 (p. 17).

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.<sup>385</sup>

Eliot's 'monuments' of 'tradition' provided a model for Bishop's heterogeneous ideas in art to grow out of arranging different things, events, emotions and coordinating between cultures, spaces and times that do not coexist in a chronological pattern but according to the 'crisis' of our lives' (*PPL*, p. 677). Like the conformity between old and new forms of art, Bishop's monument alters and readjusts its dimensions with its each new perception in varied spaces and times. In this sense, Bishop shares Eliot's belief that 'no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.'<sup>386</sup> It is the dialogic expression of its form, which gives it meanings subject to perpetual adjustments every now and then. 'The Monument' wishes to be 'commemorate[d]' (*PPL*, p. 19) as indefinite past, which folds up to the present. Therefore, it preserves its historicity along with its contemporariness. In this conjunction of the timeless and the temporal art form, Bishop takes on the position of Eliot's 'traditional writer':

This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless as well as of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.<sup>387</sup>

The historicity defined by Eliot, emphasises the distinctness of two spaces and times, and their attachment through conformity between them. In this sense, Eliot shows Bishop how distance and proximity between spaces can invite varied expressions of assembling contrary ideas, which Bishop found lacking in modern art constrained by social and political movements and personal idioms.

Through 'The Monument' Bishop presents her liminal poetics, which should be seen beyond the confines of a period discussion and socio-political boundaries. Keeping an indefinite posture of her poetry, Bishop takes on the liminal position of

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<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Eliot's 'traditional writer', who is interested in the contemporaneous occurrence of past and present forms of art. By measuring the present with the past of her monument in the present space and time of the poem, Bishop attaches importance to the Eliotic 'monuments' of 'tradition' for their *Baroque* qualities of unifying contrary dimensions of non-linear art forms. In this way, Eliot's unified sensibility expressed through his concept of 'tradition' helps her to translate *Baroque* as a 'neutral' term for her contemporary art form.

Expanding on the denotative meanings of the term *Baroque*, the chapter expresses Bishop's affiliation to its literal meanings and its manifestations she came across in her life. It highlights Bishop's fondness for literal meanings of words and small, detailed objects. Bishop's connection to the term *Baroque* is beyond her association to the seventeenth-century art movement. It expresses Bishop's unassuming self and her poetry, through its modest dimensions within the large-scale artworks and mass production of art and literature championing aesthetic theories. As a modest art form, Bishop's poetry does not anchor itself in place and time; it is mobile and fragile, susceptible to time and decay and self-effacing in humbly conjoining all art forms simultaneously occurring in the present. In doing so, Bishop gives new meanings and an alternative perspective to the monumentality of contemporary art and literature. For Bishop, art maintains its aesthetic and commercial value when it spatially and temporally engages with the present and makes it alive so that it becomes a literal translation of our immediate reality – we see it visually in the sights and sounds around us without the aid of any instructional manuals, such as social, political movements or literary theories.

In establishing Bishop's contemporary baroque form as an unconventional and irregular *pearl*, this chapter makes a humble effort in rescuing Bishop poetics from stylistic generalisations and 'literally' (my emphasis) place her within the variable tradition of the Baroque art encompassing Counter-Reformation aesthetics and metaphysical poetry; Rembrandt and Vermeer's paintings; Leibniz's mathematics and Gillis Deleuze and Félix *Guttari's* world of *rhizomes* and *folds*; *Antonio Francisco Lisboa's* (*Aleijadinho*) distorted sculptures and Paul Klee's abstract artworks; Pablo Neruda's surrealistic poems, as well as T. S. Eliot's avant-garde poetics.



## Conclusion

By positioning Bishop and the Baroque in relation to each other, on one hand, it has allowed us to attend to the spatial characteristics of Bishop's visual poetry and read her poems as fine art – painting, sculpture and architecture. The Baroque style made us notice Bishop's poetic words as moving, changing constructs of asymmetrical and non-tactile lines, curves, *folds*, *rhizomes* and *ellipse* celebrating the aesthetics of her imperfect perception similar to the imperfect dimensions of a *Baroque pearl*.

On the other, the Bishop-Baroque connection has shed light on the Baroque style as an aesthetic disposition in art, which can be seen beyond an art movement or a historical period. Bishop's poetry is about the irregular geometry of motion between contrary things, spaces and art forms. Through this relationship between the early-modern art and modern poetry, Bishop addresses modernity in terms of compartmentalisation of art and literature, stasis and tactility in poetry, self-consciousness in a decentred world, gap between language and signification, and monumentality of art. In this way, Bishop's baroque poetry did not evolve as a matter of periodisation, but as a non-linear geometry of lines, which underwent changes in form and meaning in her poems.

Through critics' emphasis on the chronology of Bishop's poems and their affinity with the Baroque, there has been a tendency to overlook Bishop's aesthetic principles behind her consistent inclination towards the Baroque. This is why, for the first time, this study has established consistent connections between Bishop's poetry and the seventeenth-century Baroque style. By making a close reading of selected poems from Bishop's published collections, this study has resisted relying on the chronology of Bishop's poems, as this often lead to the established knowledge of Bishop's temporary engagement with the Baroque, which obscured the characteristics and extent of this relationship. In this way, this research has moved forward from critics' recognition of Bishop's early writing period belonging within a Baroque context. This study demonstrated that Bishop's life-long engagement with the Baroque style shaped her modest form of contemporary baroque poetry.

Bishop at no point abandons Baroque, but her poetry demonstrates 'Baroque abandon' (*OA*, p. 85) in terms of the spatial movement of her poetic thought, which constantly deviates from the obvious, known and established dimensions of reality in a non-linear fashion. This experience of the Baroque spatiality comes from Bishop's

consciousness of the infinite and asymmetrical space of the universe and plurality of cosmic designs in the poetry of Herbert and Donne. Unlike Herbert and Donne who remained curious about the unknown regions of the universe, in order to determine their religious and secular position in the scheme of things, Bishop felt disorientation and abandonment in the cosmic realm of existence. This is why she was attracted to the Baroque to develop a poetics of relationship by measuring her distance and proximity to spaces and objects in her field of vision.

Inspired by this seventeenth-century cosmology, Bishop's unpublished poems, 'Once on a hill I met a man' and 'I am neither here nor there' explore ways of creating space in art by spatialising relationships between her visible and unreal ideas in manifold dimensions of the real. Like Galileo, Bishop's 'Seascape' and 'Sandpiper' break down the symmetry of a homogeneous world by attracting the human eye to the plurality of space, which remains immeasurable and inexpressible in the infinitude of the universe. Interested in Keplerian geometry of asymmetrical planetary motion, published poem, such as 'The Man-moth' and the unpublished poem 'The Ballad of the Subway Train' demonstrate Bishop's decentralised and multi-dimensional ways of approaching facts through the stretching and twisting of her ideas in spiralling and meandering patterns of motion. Bishop's enlarged secular imagination of the heterogeneity of cosmos shows her preference for visible imagination over knowledge in order to give dimensions to her non-religious and marvellous experiences in the real settings of her poems. Bishop's poems 'A Miracle for Breakfast' and 'The Weed' demonstrate this purpose of modern art to show wonder and surprise by inventing poetry like the miracles of saints.

Bishop measures infinity through a Baroque play of scales, counting the finite against the infinite, and contracting and expanding the scale of spaces and things in relation to one and another. Looking through Galileo's lens, Bishop stretches her vision to see distant things from close quarters. In doing so, reality is distorted when near and distant perspectives diverge in the act of adjusting and readjusting them alternatively in her poems such as in 'Crusoe in England', 'Squatter's Children' and 'Love Lies Sleeping'. Bishop's variable perspectives of observing reality defy fixity of meanings in her poems and keep her poetic language a free association, which has no definite boundaries, but space to interact outside itself.

The awareness of the spatial dimensions activates Bishop's verse and makes us read her poems as maps. The eye which sensuously sees reality or imagines it does it with the help of its spatial dimensions encompassing geometry, cosmology, cartography and topography of places. Bishop has an interesting proximity to Donne in terms of mapping her poems. Exercising Leibniz's asymmetrical geometry, Bishop's poetic cartography and topography features Baroque *folds* and *rhizomes* exhibiting a world of non-uniform lines with curvatures, which make word and world, and art and reality as liminal spaces.

Unlike Donne who maps the topography of his ailing body on the cartography of the earth, Bishop's 'The Map' does not explicitly spatialise her bodily self, as a female being, nor determine her position like a cartographer. She sees herself as a space among spaces, while constructing an assemblage of contrasting perceptions, which do not signify but survey dimensions of land and sea in the act of making sudden relationships between them. Similarly, in the '12 O' Clock News' and 'From the Country to the City' Bishop studies one space, or object in relation to another to know directions to places or objects instead of knowing their position.

Bishop's poetry as a map does not describe a subject or identify an object; it surveys many paths of entry and exit from definite contours of places and things to demonstrate transversal of boundaries. By folding up places near and far and branching out connections between contrasting spaces and objects Bishop's poetry expands and contracts her perceptual dimensions as M. W. Croll envisions the Baroque prose expanding like an undulating 'river' or contracting like a 'jewel' or 'prism'.<sup>388</sup> In this manner, her poems are Baroque maps and not tracings, which aim at exteriority of relationships without pinning down Bishop or the boundaries of her experiences in definite contours. Bishop's poems as maps show her disapproval of any fixed demarcations of poetic forms, which can compartmentalise her poetry from other forms of expression, such as maps.

Other than map-making, Bishop delights in imperfect circles and her poetry shows the tendency of spatialising Kepler's geometrical *ellipse*. Bishop's asymmetrical geometry spatialises her ever-changing emotions of love through the distortion of geometric circles. In poems such as 'The Shampoo', Bishop's expansion and contraction of love distorts the distance and proximity between

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<sup>388</sup> Morris. W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style in Prose', in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p. 433).

earthly and cosmic spheres. In 'Casabianca' and 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore' her love undergoes eccentric expansion by breaking down the symmetry of its spatiality with the plurality of contrary signifiers.

Bishop sees modernity and the language which expresses it as the dilation of a circle into an *ellipse*. The geometric *ellipse* spatialises her decentred form of art and *ellipsis* shows the linguistic decentring of her subject. The spatial *ellipse* reflects Bishop's elliptical bent of mind and plurality of vision to see an elliptical contemporaneity whose decentred space comprises a plurality of art forms and meanings. The linguistic *ellipsis* exhibits the plurality of modern language, as a result of the gap between language and signification, which elucidates itself through omission, repression and excess of signifiers in Bishop's poems. In her published poems 'In the Waiting Room' and 'One Art', modernity is described as the unstable space and perception which deviates from referentiality and destabilises Bishop's sight in non-central and defocussed perspectives. Since there is more than one centre of thought in her poems, everything is not visible from a standpoint and cannot be completely signified. Bishop's decentred perspectives give a sense of otherness and plurality to the dentist's waiting room and to her losses. Bishop constructs an elliptical space and language to question the non-homogenous nature of her self in relation to the other. The non-centrality of Bishop's voice and instability of her vision duplicates her thought of selfhood by making it heterogeneous rather than homogeneous - always belonging to the other.

Similarly, Bishop sees the relationship between word and meaning as elliptical rather than direct. In 'The Bight' Bishop's hyperbolic bent of mind exhibits *ellipsis* through the exaggerated gap between language and signification. The centre of thought is not fixed and lacks appropriate linguistic pattern. Bishop's poetic language is a disoriented elliptical orbit of signifiers pointing out to more than one idea, meaning or thought. In poems such as '12 O'Clock News', there are contrary signifiers, disparate and irreconcilable objects of focus, which repress direct signification. However, these poems show Bishop's delight in keeping the word and meaning from falling apart through an oblique relationship between them. Thus, *ellipse/is* makes Bishop's poems a combination of heterogeneous and decentred angles of vision, and abundance of signifiers, exhibiting the dilation, or compression of her circular thought. The *ellipse/is* allows Bishop to accept disorientation of self and vision as part of the cognitive process of a decentred world. It makes her reader

actively participate in the becoming of the poem and not feel comforted with any one centre of perspective, or hierarchy of knowledge.

Other than deformation of circles and construction of *ellipse*, Bishop's poetry exercises Wolfflin's *painterly* geometry to soften geometric shapes and question her language's ability to paint her poetic environment. Bishop's act of seeing her poetry as a *painterly* painting does not make her an ekphrastic poet, for she is not interested in looking at art works in their definitiveness and stasis. Unlike her paintings, she is not interested in line as a subject. Bishop's *painterly* lines of perception help to differentiate Bishop's spatial poetics from plastic tendencies. Her poems are not tangible facts, but spaces of dialogue.

Like Baroque painters, sculptors and architects, Bishop's *painterly* lines of perception see things how they appear to be as moving lines, oscillating between coordinates which express herself, landscape and interiors as geometrically coextensive spaces, and therefore not settled in one place and time.

In poems such as 'Cape Breton' and 'The End of March', Bishop's *painterly* reality is diminished, enlarged, distorted and kept indeterminate in her restless world.

She demonstrates this spatially indeterminate poetry through her broken and incomplete lines of perception, which indefinitely seek oblique angles of vision, highlighting the picturesque beauty in the worn-out surfaces and ruffled materials. Such picturesque poems – 'Cape Breton', 'Florida' and 'Crusoe in England'-- advocate a non-ideal and unpolished art form, which has a touch of life.

Bishop sees reality in appearances and not as certainties of truth. Rather than capturing an unchangeable fact, Bishop's *painterly* lines exhibit diagonal motion in order to break down the frontality of two-dimensional perspectives into three-dimensional depths. Through diagonal motion, Bishop discovers suddenness of perspectives amidst a passing reality. The three-dimensional perception makes the invisible or occluded reality spatialised in real dimensions. Conversely, the real becomes fantastically unreal when the diagonal motion creates a conjunction between varied planes and objects in the field of vision, receding back and forth and putting every detail into the illusion of movement. In this process, Bishop sometimes foreshortens, or exaggerates the foreground and background to engulf forms and keep motion dependent on relationships.

More than travelling, it is the diagonal motion of Bishop's *painterly* eye, which changes perspectives in her poems and disintegrates any linear connection

with people, places or with her writing process. Bishop sees home/abroad, foreground/background, real/metaphysical, stasis/motion as contrary states which coexist anywhere and determine the *painterly* from the unpainterly materials. It is not lack of imagination, but the dissatisfaction for poetic textures and restlessness for *painterly* materials, which makes her travel and change positions between home and abroad.

As in Baroque art, Bishop does not seek perfection in her poems, and keeps her search for meanings inadequate and open to improvisations. By engulfing definitiveness and tactility of perspective Bishop prefers to keep her frames adventitious, defying geometric shapes and lacking clarity for the sake of deviating from the known. This makes Bishop's poetic form an act of discounting fixed forms of expression. Bishop's *painterly* quality shows her faithfulness to observations, which change with the vicissitudes of life, rather than focussing on the self-consciousness of her poems. In this manner, her *painterly* strategies reduce the distance between verbal and visual representation of her poetry.

The asymmetrical geometry of Bishop's poems, her multi-faceted mobile perception, her diagonal motions, her consciousness of a destabilised self in a decentred world, her elliptical bent of mind, and her celebration of the oblique dimensions between word and meaning shed light on the visual appeal of her poems sharing etymological connections with the term *Baroque* as an *imperfect pearl*. The irregular dimensions of an *imperfect Baroque pearl* redefine Bishop's small volume, modest vision and plurality of form as a fine art.

Like the shape of an *imperfect Baroque pearl*, Bishop's repetition of asymmetrical perspectives arranges and rearranges her vision into small irregular parts in order to see them closely and make her poems as intimate dimensions of an ever-receding space. Bishop's poetics as an *imperfect pearl* reinforces her liking for M. W. Croll's description of Baroque prose, as marshalling together of asymmetrical modes of perception in the form of a 'jewel or a prism'.<sup>389</sup>

Visualising Bishop's poems as *Baroque pearls* gives them an organic form, which grows her poetic materials to small-size poems, whether it comes to the spatiality of the poem on the page, the intimate scale of her irregular poetic perception, the humility in her unstable poetic stance, or the indirect way of

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<sup>389</sup> Morris. W. Croll, 'The Baroque Style in Prose', in *Studies in English Philology*, ed. by Malone Kemp, and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 427-56 (p. 433).

addressing contemporaneity. Aesthetically, this organic craft keeps her poems in a perpetual process of incompleteness, which is diametrically opposite to the growing trends of mechanical production of art and literature in modern times. Bishop's organic poetry agrees with Octavio Paz's description of her poems, as 'not the perfection of the triangle, the sphere, or the pyramid, but the irregular perfection, the imperfect perfection of the plant and the insect. Poems perfect as cat or a rose, not as a theorem.'<sup>390</sup>

Functionally, this poetic demeanour of an *imperfect pearl* spatialises Bishop's response to the monumentality of modern art forms and literature. Contrary to advocating the poetics on display, and generally loud forms of expression, Bishop's baroque poetry redefines the monumental in art and literature. Bishop's published poems 'The Monument', 'A Large Bad Picture' and 'Poem' draw attention to the loftiness of art in not being spatially big and self-conscious, or firmly anchored in space and time, but in being approachable in scale as a coextensive space with life and other art forms. Bishop's perception of the monumental poetics bears comparison to T. S. Eliot's idea of tradition for expressing relationships, rather than emphasising differences between poetry and fine art. Bishop's poetry engages with the seventeenth-century Baroque period and transcends from that past period to bring the term and its style in conversation with her modern poetry. Bishop's poetics translates the seventeenth-century Baroque facets with Eliot's 'creative eye', 'which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present, and yet so lively that it shall be as present to us as the present.'<sup>391</sup>

In this way, Bishop engages with the *Baroque* as a non-period term, which presents her poetry as a heterogeneous object of art evolved out of a continuous dialogue between poetry and fine art. Therefore, Bishop's poems appear to be spatially mobile as they belong to more than one space and time by engaging, both verbally and visually, with their readers and onlookers through their indefinite perspectives and plurality of meanings. As a non-period term, *Baroque* contributes to Bishop's liminal poetics that motions between the early-modern style and contemporaneity.

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<sup>390</sup> Octavio Paz, 'Elizabeth Bishop, or the Power of Reticence', *World Literature Today, Homage to Elizabeth Bishop: Our 1976 Laureate*, 51 (1977) 15-16 (p.15). < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40090381> > [accessed 9 October 2015].

<sup>391</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Euripides and Professor Murray', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), pp. 59-64 (p. 64).

Bishop exercises a similar *Baroque* approach in her translations. She sees foreign poems as *imperfect pearls* while rearranging them as contrary perspectives. Like the shape of the *Baroque pearl*, Bishop's translations focus on small details of foreign words and their spatial meanings, rather than being overwhelmed by the critical acclaim of these poems and poets. Her translations reflect her humble authority over foreign poems in making them liminal boundaries having multiple belongings. Bishop's translations shed light on the term *Baroque* as a transcultural space, which calls for a separate study of Bishop's translations as thwarting the boundaries of objective experiences of self and other through transformation of cultural and linguistic spaces.

As an *imperfect pearl*, Bishop's small and irregular poetic form does not align itself with either early-modern Baroque, modern Baroque, or post-modern Baroque art forms. Rather, Bishop invents a modest form of Baroque style by reintroducing the redundant and worn-out etymology of the term *Baroque*. By digging out the unattractive etymology of *Baroque*, Bishop's poetry makes us think of the Baroque style rhizomatically making new connections with this multi-faceted term and style. Bishop's interest in worn-out forms, which appease her idea of the non-ideal and picturesque beauty, sheds light on another denotative meaning of the term *Baroque* – a 'wart'.<sup>392</sup> Her poems such as 'The Prodigal', 'Florida', 'Filling Station', 'From Trollope's Journal' can make an interesting study of the ugly perspectives of Baroque aesthetics. However, due to limitations of space and time, this study has not excavated this aspect in her poetry. An independent study can be made on this etymology of *Baroque* in order to question the contrary idea of beauty in Baroque art, and use it as another key to study Bishop's understanding of heterogeneity in modern art.

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<sup>392</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary < <https://www.etymonline.com/word/baroque> > [accessed 9 November 2015].



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