Elizabeth Bishop: The Lives of Objects

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Abstract

Elizabeth Bishop's ability to observe and render what is seen into poetry often leads to her categorisation as a simple descriptive poet, a label that hides more than it purportedly reveals. Observation and curiosity are at the heart of the genesis of her poetry, but they are only part of what Bishop writes. In this study I examine both these key attributes and question how they function in the context of the other sensations. Bishop plays with ideas of time in a non-linear fashion; memory and the manipulation of memory are important aspects that structure her poetry, aspects which I analyse as necessary components in the description of sensation. I suggest that Bishop crafts her poems so that they demonstrate characteristics that are more commonly attributed to art works; her care in the presentation of her poems is similar to that of careful choice of a frame around a work. As a traveller, Bishop was attuned to the qualities of departure and arrival, reflected in the themes of much of her poetry; I extend these ideas to look at the function of house and home in her poetry and the idea of the return as a key component in her later poems. Questions of repetition and completion inform these ideas of departure, arrival and return. Bishop's work as a translator, encompassing both her collaborative work with Octavio Paz and her life-long habit of translating from different languages and genres, underpins many of the chapters in this thesis. Thoughts familiar to translators such as the art of listening across cultures, the learning of a language, and the employment of words as tools in the construction of a language, invigorate my examination of her own poetry.

Declaration

I, Katrina Blandy Mayson, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

A small part of the first chapter, 'Constructing a Frame around Life and Poetry', has appeared as 'Elizabeth Bishop and "a bad case of the *Threes*"', first as a paper given at the *Elizabeth Bishop in Paris* conference in 2018, and then as a chapter in *Reading Elizabeth Bishop: An Edinburgh Companion*, published in 2019. See Bibliography for full reference.

Note on Referencing and Abbreviations

Unless otherwise indicated, poems discussed in this thesis are from Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

EAP Elizabeth Bishop, *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*, ed. Alice Quinn (Manchester: Carcanet; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)

EH Elizabeth Bishop, *Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings*, ed. William Benton (Manchester: Carcanet; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996)

OA Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art: Letters*, ed. Robert Giroux (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994

NYr Elizabeth Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence*, ed. Joelle Biele (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

P Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

Pr Elizabeth Bishop, *Prose*, ed. Lloyd Schwartz (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)

PPL Elizabeth Bishop, *Poems, Prose and Letters*, ed. Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz (New York: Library of America, 2008)

VC Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, New York.

WIA Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, ed. Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton (London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008)

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Introduction

'Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes

my words became visible for a moment.'

'Objects & Apparitions' (*P* 202)

This quotation, the final couplet of Elizabeth Bishop's accomplished translation of Octavio Paz's original poem, lies at the core of this thesis. Cornell is lauded for his ability to 'make words visible', a fascinating tautology; by definition all text is visible. This thesis aims to explore ideas revolving around what it is to make text visible. Visibility - and the correlating sense of observation - are two key terms in my analysis of Bishop. My thoughts on visibility cover the place and structure of the text on the page, the presence or negation of biographical detail, and reference to the (in)visibility of the translator. Observation has long been the characteristic that critics and readers alike have ascribed to Bishop; Randall Jarrell, in an early review of Bishop noted 'all her poems have written underneath, *I have seen it*' (1946, 181). Observation is literally the sense of watching, then recording events and emotions from daily life or nature; correspondingly, the two terms 'literally' and 'quotidian' become pivotal in my discussion of Bishop's observational practice. Neither term is pejorative or belittling; both take the drama of the everyday or commonplace and transform them using the lyric voice to become something resonant to others who have not had the experience described. Observation is both motive and tool in Bishop's craft of poetry. The figure of the observer is not just that of the poet but also that of the reader; the words are made visible not solely for Bishop's benefit but for ours, too. The formal poetic structure employed by Bishop both contains and releases the power of the quotidian, so that it can connect the experience of the individual to the inhabited world. However, this is made problematic by what Siobhan Phillips

characterises as the modernist period’s 'accelerating uncertainties about the integrity of the subjective person as well as the coherence of the objective environment' (2010, 3); ambivalence, indeterminacy and contingency all appear as forces that threaten to increase the threat to ideas of the self, rather than affirm its solidity as central to the world. In my view, Bishop does not seek to resolve these tensions or contradictions; rather her ethics of observation come to exemplify and make visible these tensions.

In the quotation above from 'Objects & Apparitions', the reader is reminded that it is the figure of Joseph Cornell who provides the containing frame of reference for the poem. Both Bishop and Octavio Paz (the author of the original 'Objetos y Apariciones') were inspired by Cornell's shadow boxes in which he placed and framed found ephemera to make his work. I do not suggest that Cornell is *the* defining artist for Bishop (although he was a very important influence), but rather that the visibility of text is intimately related to the construction of a work of art. By invoking Cornell's name and the physicality of his shadow boxes, pieces which are constructed in wood, containing found objects, the poem invokes the materiality of the world / word. In this poem, the materiality of the text is strongly impacted by the fact that the poem is a translation. Translation, the presence of objects, and the formal structure of the art work - in this case, the poem - point my way through into theoretical concepts that guide this reading of Bishop. First, translation: the words, ideas, images are originally Octavio Paz's, and yet here they are also Bishop's. Bishop published this translation within one of her own books of poetry, *Geography III*; Paz fully approved of this and claimed to prefer her version of the poem to his. The collaborative creativity inherent in the work of translation helpfully illuminates aspects of Bishop's craftsmanship in working with the legibility of text. Given that the poem is a translation, inspired by an artist working in another medium, 'Objects &

Apparitions' also invokes questions about originality and what it means to create a unique work of art in any form. The term 'shadow boxing', which refers to Cornell's artworks, is extended to structure how I see influence functioning in Bishop's work. That much of what is written about in 'Objects & Apparitions' is already thematically familiar to Bishop's work has already been noted by critics such as Bonnie Costello who notes that 'many of the images were hers before she found them in Cornell' (2008, 105). The second key theoretical concept of objects and objecthood - by which I mean the things themselves and that which they come to represent or embody - draws on the work of Peggy Samuels and her understanding of the porous nature of Bishop's poetry, further extending into research rooted in anthropological studies demonstrating how objects come to embody parts of a dispersed self. Before looking more deeply at the source of these ideas on objects and objecthood, I explain my approach to the critical theories that inform our understanding of Bishop's employment of poetic form.

'Objects & Apparitions' makes clear how important it is to contain movement; it is a poem tightly structured around 13 tercets with a final closing couplet. Cornell, the poem suggests, successfully 'constructed / boxes where things hurry away from their names' (*P* 201), but the name and the thing are still contained within the same space. Bishop understood the power of poetic form to contain and mitigate what might otherwise become explosive. Thus, 'One Art' tightly contains and controls loss in its form as a villanelle. As I demonstrate in my first chapter, Bishop understood that poetic form could be deployed to control emotion, which in turn enabled the poet to keep the reader close to the poetry. This sense of 'keeping the reader close' is fundamental; it is one reason why Bishop used accuracy to modulate her poetic language as she demonstrated in her letters to May Swenson. For Bishop, explosive emotion must not be allowed to distract or frighten away the reader. Throughout my analysis, the figure

of the reader is vital; Bishop invites the reader to observe the curious spectacle of things hurrying away from their names. It is the reader who will first notice that the tercet boxes of 'Objects & Apparitions' mimic the structure of Cornell's wooden shadow boxes. By extension, Bishop suggests that her poems are constrained or framed by the page. However, this notion of containment is complicated by a reading of Bishop's unpublished and draft poems, many of which were first published in *Edgar Allen Poe & The Juke Box*: *Uncollected Poems, Drafts and Fragments* in 2006. This edition marked a notable milestone in the ready availability of previously unpublished draft material. Being draft poems, they also affect ideas about the visibility of text in a very different way to that of the published works.

The draft poems contain examples of Bishop's sometimes illegible handwriting, as well as examples of word choices that were later rejected in final versions of the poems or indeed remained only in draft form, and never worked up for publication. In chapter IV I examine some of the questions raised about the validity of *Edgar Allen Poe & The Juke Box* in the wake of Helen Vendler's objections to it as a book of '"Repudiated Poems"' (*The New Republic* 2006, 33). My method has been to first consider Bishop's published poems, and then to look at the material published after her death, including volumes of correspondence, drafts of poems, and of course the papers held at Vassar College. My awareness of the difference between the published work and the entire body of Bishop's writings, including drafts and archive material, was further stimulated by Stephanie Burt's analysis (2019, 334). Burt makes the point that Bishop, in her published works, achieves a 'thing with its own, *unrepeatable*, potentially permanent, achieved form'. Burt extends this reading of the uniqueness of Bishop's published poems, suggesting that

> This idea that each poem has to be unique not just in its details but in its use of form, in its kind of closure (even if it knows closure is an illusion), the idea that the poet must

> not repeat herself, is another idea you get from reading the completed works of Elizabeth Bishop, an idea we should not lose as we keep delving into the work she chose not to publish, and it is an idea relatively rare even among poets most of us agree are major: it would have been foreign, as an idea to the Wordsworths. (2019, 334)

Bishop's work demands to be read both individually and as part of a collection; and the reader must pay due attention to Bishop's placement of the poem within the collection. As critics, we must be alert to editorial choices that influence this and therefore the reading of the poem; this is an issue made transparent by Bishop's engagement with *The New Yorker* magazine. There is an organising editorial intelligence in Bishop's presentation of her work and in her construction of her oeuvre that requires attention. I choose to analyse the placement of the poem primarily from the point of view of the craft of creating a page, or a book (chapter IV and throughout), rather than charting chronology or biography through the placement of poems in books. This approach has its roots in an awareness of the materiality of Bishop's archive.

In 2019 Bethany Hicok edited a collection of recent scholarship, all essays based on analysis of the archives at Vassar, *Elizabeth Bishop and the Literary Archive*, the stated intention of which was to address 'Bishop's archive as both source and subject' (3). Writing in her introduction, Hicok reminds us first of Bishop's own activity as a 'major curator of her own effects' (2) which include not only drafts of her writing, but also notebooks, correspondence, art works, postcards, photographs, and 2000 volumes of Bishop's books. Hicok stresses the importance of remaining 'attentive to the materiality of the archive and the stories these artefacts can tell' (2019, 6). This emphasis on the materiality of the archive, what each piece looks like, how it was written or printed, the fold of the letters, sent and unsent and so on, is important to my consideration of how Bishop works to form her poetry. My discussion of Bishop's draughtsmanship is limited to a consideration of the formatting of her books, but I have in mind both the materiality of her archive as well as her activity of self-curation of

objects, an activity made particularly pertinent by her travels around the world. In 'The U.S.A. School of Writing', for example, Bishop comments that it was during the period immediately after leaving Vassar whilst working at the correspondence school 'that the mysterious, awful power of writing first dawned on me' (*Pr* 105). Writing became her trade, and the objects she carried around the world to carry out her trade were her tools: pens, typewriters, notebooks, writing desks. Traveling implies the necessity of portability; these were tools that had to fit in suitcases or be available for purchase on arrival. The materiality of the notebooks, which are filled not only with thoughts, dreams, drafts and ideas, but also with cut-outs from other publications and sketches and drawings, attest to the quality of collecting and curating ideas and images, placing them within a book that is portable. To create the notebooks Bishop needed to write, cut, paste, activities that point to physical artisanship and to the materiality of her writing practice. Bishop's awareness of the physicality of constructing a piece of writing shines through a 1953 letter written to Pearl Kazin, recently employed as copy-editor at *The New Yorker*. She writes: 'I see you surrounded with fine-tooth combs, sandpaper, nail files, pots of varnish, etc.—with heaps of used commas and semi colons handy, and little useless phrases taken out of their contexts and dying all over the floor' (*NYr* vii). The text is an object, worked on by tools, and then presented to its public. Recall '12 O'Clock News' (*P* 194–5), a poem that enacts the materiality of writing, and like Bishop's lines to Pearl Kazin, builds a visual image on the page of the writer's desk surrounded by the cut out words that stand for the tools of her craft.

Burt is not the first critic to note the unique nature of Bishop's published poems; in 1960 Lowell wrote to Bishop saying:

> I think you never do a poem without your intuition. You are about the only poet now who calls her own tune—rather different from even Pound or Miss Moore, who built

> original styles then continue them—but yours, especially the last dozen or so, are all unpredictably different. (*WIA* 331)

A poem with 'its own *unrepeatable*' form, suggests Burt; poems that are 'unpredictably different', according to Lowell. The process of how we read Bishop matters; it is important that we read the published work as individual pieces, as well as component parts of the careful construction of a book. Burt's suggestion that Bishop intentionally seeks to make her poems both 'formally finished' as well as 'formally unique' leads me to focus one aspect of my enquiry on this question of repetition and unrepeatability. Repetition is linked to Bishop's exploration of the quotidian; the sun rises every day. Bishop's quiet observation of an ordinary day becomes the practice of an artistic form which in turn forms her aesthetic goal, exemplified by the works she choose to publish. To my mind, the primacy of the published work is essential. Biographical information and draft material simultaneously lie in the hinterland of the published work and at the same time cast their own shadow, creating a chiaroscuro effect on the published work.

Burt articulates the paradox that Bishop believed in the ideal that the 'poet must not repeat herself' even though repetition was a key feature of her writing. Repetition functions to make something new. As Siobhan Phillips has noted, since the publication of Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Though'(1914), it has become possible to view past events as translating 'an inalterable past into a novel future' (2010, 14). Repetition is a key tool in the transformation of the quotidian into the poetic. However, as 'North Haven', Bishop's elegy for Robert Lowell, reminds us, repetition is most effective when allied to change:

> Nature repeats herself, or almost does:
>
> *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise. (P* 210*)*

Repetition and revision are amongst the tools Bishop uses to admit the possibility of change; change which is held in place by the tightness of the form Bishop imposes on her poetry. Change is a charged term for Bishop; one way of considering Bishop's manipulation of change in her writing is to note the metamorphosis of ideas and images as they alter through her letters into her poetry; the reference to her desk in 'The Bight' (*P* 59, *WIA* 23) is one frequently cited example. Another is to track the changes she made to her published, finished poems. Here she largely avoids change, except for in the dedications and end notes of her poems, which contain some of the most significant textual changes. This aspect of change is examined in more detail in Chapter IV.

Another aspect of change can be considered in Bishop's translations. As Bishop practises her abilities as a translator she exposes her thoughts and techniques on how to manipulate text to capture 'not a thought but the mind thinking' (*Pr* 473), the phrase that so engaged her thinking about Gerard Manley Hopkins. This link back to Hopkins reminds us that change is also part of what enables a sense of rhythm and movement in poetry, both aspects of form highly prized by Bishop. Her papers at Vassar include an unfinished draft of a talk on translation, tentatively titled 'Remarks on Translation – of Poetry mostly' (VC 54.12) which she was preparing for a talk at Boston University in 1979. The notes provide many insights. She accepts the fact that a radical change of format - from poetry to prose – may be required in order to capture the meaning and intention of the original poetry. She also reminds herself of the need for the translator to proceed cautiously in the naming of things in order to retain the meaning of the words transposed across language remarking that 'A rainstorm in Panama may be quite different from a rainstorm in England'. This is an example of her process of creating a poetry 'where things hurry away from their names' ('Objects & Apparitions', *P* 201) without

quite allowing a complete disjunction between thing and name. Reading Bishop's translations and considering her word choices also illuminates aspects of cultural appropriation: what does her choice to translate the Brazilian place names in 'Brazilian Tragedy' (*P* 242) reveal about her representation of the lyric in a voice not wholly her own?

These tensions between visibility and invisibility, discourse and reticence, and the implied suggestion that the poem is a created object of art form the parameters of my reading of Bishop. On starting this thesis, my initial instinct was to explore the idea that Bishop renders her poems into objects, much as a sculptor forms a piece of work out of a hard material, forming a finished, polished, three-dimensional piece of work. However, despite the merit in this idea, I found myself fundamentally opposed to imposing it on Bishop's poems. In a moment reminiscent of Gertrude Stein, I think that for Bishop, a poem is a poem, and an object is an object. There is a difference here between object and poem that I wish to respect. The distinction lies in the textual nature of her work, and in the difference between the published and unpublished work. Nonetheless, objects and ideas of objecthood are integral to my analysis. There is a caveat here. There is, for me, an aspect of Bishop's published poetry that strongly resists interpretation through theory. In part, this stems from her own avowed aversion to theory; it is also a result of her interest in depicting the literal as a means by which she can capture 'not a thought, but the mind thinking' (*Pr* 473). That caveat aside, I find Siobhan Phillips astute in her note that 'poststructuralist doubts about ontologies of subject and object seem to have complicated rather than obviated concerns about the rights and relations of any discrete identity' (2010, 3). These doubts complicate the works of earlier theorists, such as Theodore Adorno. As his writing on subject and object remind us, we can only discuss objects subjectively. As explained by the website of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of*

Philosophy, Adorno's aesthetic theory posits that 'authentic works of (modern) art [are] social monads' (Zuidervaart, 2015, 4. 'Aesthetic Theory', website), where the tensions in the art work stem from an artist's struggle with sociohistorical 'laden materials'. My reading of Adorno is that he sees these tensions as contradictions which need to be worked through and eventually resolved. To my mind this is one of the theoretical blocks that impede me from a productive application of Adorno's theories of objecthood and lyric to Bishop's work; Bishop steadfastly resists resolution and embraces ambivalence. Instead, I examine objects and their relationship to the poet and the poem through anthropological and artistic lenses; my theory of objecthood is grounded in the perception of poetry as Bishop's chosen craft form, which I referred to earlier in my discussion on the materiality of her archive. Nor do I think that the question of distinction between a 'thing' and 'object' is greatly helpful in understanding ideas of objects in Bishop's poetry. Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' (2001) challenges and extends notions of how objects help to create and to hold together notions of a coherent (human) self, particularly in times of challenge or in moments of transience. I find more resonance in an anthropological reading of objects, such as the work of Chris Godson and Yvonne Marshall, writing on 'The Cultural Biography of Objects' (1999), whose ideas provide helpful context for considering the relationship between people and their objects. To these ideas on objects, I emphasise Bishop's poems as permeable objects, a reading informed by Peggy Samuels's work. In her introduction to *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art,* Samuels explores 'Bishop's complex conception of the surface the page of poetry as akin to the surface of a painting and of both as the boundary at which interior and exterior encounter one another' (3). I take Samuels' ideas to explore both Bishop's observation of and incorporation of objects in her work, as well as considering how these are part of Bishop's construction of finished, polished, poems that are in their way, art objects.

That the poem, like the object so often described within, allows both egress and ingress of emotion and experience leads to a deeper understanding of another important key word for my work, that being the contingent, not coherent nature of the self. In her study *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (2002), Kirsten Hotelling Zona perceptively comments that 'more strategic than mere insecurity, Bishop's ambivalence signals the contingent, not coherent, nature of self' (69). Contingency, ambivalence, reticence are all part of Bishop's approach to poetry; they are all key aspects in the form and structure of her finished poems that allow for a multiplicity of readings. Nor is memory linear in Bishop. Early poems such as 'The Monument' and 'Quai d'Orléans' play with ideas of perspective and alteration, demonstrating a working out of how to portray contingency in poetry. Nor does the lyric 'I' assume stasis in Bishop; her translations demonstrate different approaches to maintaining or removing the personal pronoun from poems, giving us greater understanding into Bishop's awareness of the contingent nature of the self. Poems, like objects, alter depending on whose gaze they are examined by. Finally, the work of Donald Winnicott (1964, 1986) and his theories of the transitional object as a part of a child's development, cast some light on why an object - such as a doll - can facilitate one piece of work in one form, and yet not have the same effect in another form; for example the figure of Gwendolyn and the doll in the story 'Gwendolyn' (*Pr* 52-62), or the dolls 'Gertrude, Zilpha, and Nokomis' in the unfinished fragment 'Where are the dolls who loved me so …' (*P* 295). Transitional objects such as a doll function in different ways in Bishop's writing. Sometimes, as with 'Gwendolyn', they can either release or impede the narrative movement. At other times, transitional objects such as buttons, bubbles, and marbles find their way into Bishop's poetry and take on a thematic life of their own. These objects move beyond autobiography and expand and extend readings of Bishop.

Like Paul Klee, I begin my walk through Bishop with a single point: observation. Like Bishop, my walk meanders to encompass other sensations. Bishop was a traveller, accustomed to departures and arrivals, but I suggest that a sense of return, of coming home, is equally important to her poetic momentum. Essential to my study is an understanding of how Bishop encourages the reader to participate in the creation of poetry and in so doing is able to find a 'home' in Bishop's poetry. My work revolves around the notion that Bishop is making the invisible visible in her poetry. Psychoanalysis helps to inform my ideas on repetition and change, as well as the importance of being able to forget. It further informs thoughts on how a personal object can become transformed into a container - albeit a porous container - for potentially explosive emotion and experience. Peggy Samuels' work on the influence of art and artists in Bishop's work, particularly the importance of surface and depth, informs my understanding that the porosity of objects - and indeed poems - is not negative, but in fact positive. I then turn to poet-critics, such as Seamus Heaney or Colm Tóibín, who elucidate how this porosity is a key part in Bishop's ability to create space for the reader. The position of the reader and the intriguing idea that the reader finds a space within Bishop's poetry, returns me to Paz's understanding of the power of reticence in her work; this has a vital part to play in her ability to make the invisible visible. Ideas on the invisible 'I' taken from translation theory further inform my thinking on Bishop's creation of a lyric voice.

In the first two chapters of my study, I explore the frames of life and writing that form and contain Bishop's work, with a consideration of how Bishop structures the frameworks around her poetry and how this in turn enables her to turn the interiority of thought outwards, an action that invites the reader 'in' to her poetry. This is Bishop learning her craft, exploring structures within which to hone her poetical ability. Ideas on observation and what it means

to see follow on from this, extended in my third chapter into a full examination of how Bishop utilises all the senses in her creation of a poetry capable of holding human emotion. Observation never functions in isolation. In summary, the first three chapters of this thesis form a study of Bishop's observational practice, extended into a wider exploration of the way in which the various senses permeate Bishop's poetry. The second part of my thesis works more extensively with ideas of 'shadow boxing' inspired by Cornell; dedications, translations, and house and home are all themes that lie in the shadows of observation and the visibility of text. My fourth chapter considers Bishop's dedications and end notes in relation to paratextual ideas, especially the poem as art object on the page. I also analyse Bishop's dedicatory practice as an indicator of her desire to revise her poetry and so track some of the less obvious changes made to her poems on publication. My fifth chapter considers Bishop's translation work, particularly in relation to Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Octavio Paz. I have a particular interest in the concept of 'collaborative listening' in her working relationship with Paz, and how this illuminates facets of her own poetic practice, particularly her attempts to voice the other. Translation theory informs my reading of Bishop's manipulation of language in her translations, enabling another layer of understanding to be added to her textual craft. My final chapter is an examination of house and home in Bishop's work, where I explore Heather Treseler's suggestive idea that *in Questions of Travel*, Bishop's 'motivating query' is not travel, but whether one should have stayed home (2019a, 256-7). It is also in this final chapter that I return to focus on 'Objects & Apparitions', Bishop's translation of Octavio Paz's poem, which 'since it is the only translation she collected in a volume of her own poetry, it seems valid to read it as an *ars poetica'* (Costello 2008, 105). It is in 'Poem' that my walk through Bishop comes to a rest, a poem where there is space for 'our looks, two looks' (*P* 197) to coexist within the framework of the poem.

I first came to Bishop not through her poetry, but via the two major collections of her letters, *One Art* (1994) and *Words in Air* (2008). The former traces the arc of Bishop's wide and varied friendship, not just the bond with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, two of the most important influences on Bishop's career, but also her friendships with Ilse and Kit Barker, May Swenson, Flannery O'Connor, Frani Bough Muser, to name but a few. Kirsten Hotelling Zona, in her 2002 study *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson: The Feminist Poets of Self–Restraint*, explores the connections between these three poets, bridging the critical divide between self-restraint and self-expression, devoting a chapter to Bishop and Swenson. Writing in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender* (1993), Victoria Harrison explores the letters between Bishop and the Barkers, useful to my consideration of Bishop as an encourager of, and patron to, artists and writers either younger or at a distance from her. Bishop's friendships with poets such as Moore, Lowell, and Swenson naturally connect her work to theirs; Bishop's correspondence and biography relates the power of the exchange of ideas, images and criticism between her and her contemporaries. Within the temporal span of her working life, Bishop marked herself as coming of age after World War I (rather than II); the nature of her travels and her facility with language and her work of translation widens the scope of her connections far beyond the north American continent on which she born. Bishop's contemporaries were not just those with whom she shared a similar life span; her letters and poetry show her to be deeply connected to poets, authors and artists who had long since died. 'From Trollope's Journal' (P 130) is one such example; as Heather Tresler perceptively notes, Bishop situates the words of 'her Cold War critique in the Civil War experiences of a British novelist penning modified Shakespearean sonnets' (Treseler 2019a, 261). The role of allusion and reference is further considered in Chapter IV; I also examine the strength Bishop's voice gains when it is met, even tangentially as is the case in translation, by another voice. That

Bishop lived for so long away from North America is relevant to her connections with her contemporaries; time and distance makes her work even more her own that it would perhaps have been. This is one reason why her collaboration with Octavio Paz is so interesting; poets of equal stature they came together to work on a mutual project in a way that Bishop did not do with either Lowell or Moore or indeed any other poet. After her disagreement with Moore over 'Roosters' Bishop preferred to proclaim and enjoy friendship and the stimulation it gave her poetry, but she was careful to maintain her distance.

Bishop claimed Herbert, Hopkins and Baudelaire as her poetic '"best friends"' (*Pr* 328) in an unfinished essay on the art of writing poetry; all are poets separated from her by time and distance and in Baudelaire's case, by language. She also notes that the qualities she most admires in poetry are '*Accuracy, Spontaneity, Mystery*'. Her range of influence is far wider than these names; she was profoundly influenced by hymns and by textual works in other source languages, particularly French, Spanish and Portuguese poets. I explore the connections between Bishop and the Romantic poets primarily through her use of language and allusion; where modernist poets such as Moore showed her the power of accuracy, Wordsworth gave her the rhythm of natural life. I examine how Bishop mined these poets for what they could teach her about rhythm and movement, something she explored extensively in the works of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. Her interests widened her sphere of influence further; she understood and appreciated painting, sculpture, music, architecture. The natural world was perhaps one of the greatest consistent influences and presences in her life; *The North Haven Journal 1974-1979* is one small example of the extensive notes she made on her natural surroundings throughout her life.

Bishop's epistolary persona is conversational, intimate and thoughtful, reaching out through time and distance to talk as if she was in the room next door. By contrast, her poetic voice, is measured, pared down. Reticence is a key quality in Bishop's poetry; Paz identified her gift as being 'the enormous power of reticence' (1977, 213), reminding us that 'we have forgotten that poetry is not in what words say but in what is said between them, that which appears fleetingly in pauses and silences' (1977, 213). The ability to depict that which appears in 'pauses and silences' resonates with Bishop's interest in capturing 'not a thought, but a mind thinking' (*Pr* 473) as it also anticipates contemporary readers' reactions. In his study *On Elizabeth Bishop* (2015), Colm Tóibín finds that the

> power of these late poems by Bishop comes from what is said and what lies beneath; they use exact detail to contain emotion, and suggest more, and then leave the reader unsure, unsettled. (23)

Tóibín links the exactitude of detail with both containment and expansion; this is another version of a reading which appreciates Bishop's ability to create a vista populated by detail, and yet shadowed by the texture of ambiguity. Like Paz, Tóibín is immensely struck by the power of 'reticence' in Bishop's poetry (2015, 105), writing that:

> I found something in the space between the words, in the hovering between tones at the end of stanzas, at the end of poems themselves, … which made me sit up and realize that something important was being hidden and something equally important was being said. (2015, 105–6)

Tóibín's conception of the layers in 'what is said' and 'what lies beneath' encapsulates an aspect of reading Bishop that is so attractive to me; somehow in the space between the two, Bishop creates the conditions for a multitude of reader responses. There is space in Bishop's poetry, a space where readers forge their own connections and responses. It is possible to simultaneously admire the quality of reticence whilst also acknowledging the impact of biography; but it is necessary to find an appropriate balance between the two. As Bonnie

Costello notes in her essay 'Elizabeth Bishop's Impersonal Personal', some of the 'contradictions and misapprehensions' that arise from the results of biographical research do so because of our 'perennial uncertainty about the nature of lyric voice and the relations between the poet, the poem and society' (2003, 335). Costello explores the pervading critical themes arising from an interest in Bishop's biography before extending her analysis into a reading of 'Crusoe in England'. I hold in mind two points Costello makes: first, Bishop's articulation of the necessity of a 'self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration' (*PPL* 861) as a condition for the creation of art; and secondly, that Bishop's ability to portray a more 'intimate, immediate voice for lyric' in her late works is not so much due to 'personal disclosure' but rather to a 'generic achievement' (Costello 355). The quality of reticence that Bishop hones and employs throughout her poetic career in an important facet of her creation of an intimate voice for lyric poetry that is simultaneously rooted in the self, whilst also being 'self-forgetful'.

Since Bishop's death in 1979, scholars have slowly added to the library of finished poems that Bishop left in the public domain, including the discovery of a 'cache' of Bishop's papers in Brazil by Lorrie Goldensohn in 1986, which included the love poem 'It is marvellous to wake up together'. Goldensohn's book on Bishop, *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry*, was later published in 1992, and begins with Bishop's time in Brazil before moving on to look at continuities between Bishop’s early and late work. Goldensohn's work on Bishop continues to evolve; her recent essays have focused on Bishop and psychoanalysis (2021, 245–255) and the discovery of the Ruth Foster letters (2015, 1–19). The Ruth Foster letters are a series of letters, written by Bishop to her psychanalyst, Dr Ruth Foster. They lay bare many of the deeply troubling incidents of her childhood, including forms of abuse, seeking to find resolution through therapy. Goldensohn explores Bishop's experience of psychoanalysis,

interrogating how it integrates with Bishop's writings. Linda Anderson, in an essay titled 'Disturbances of the Archive: Repetition and Memory in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry', explores the resonance of the letters in terms of repetition, questioning the therapeutic ability of the act of writing to enable Bishop to face and encompass her past so that it does not overwhelm her future.

Bishop's dedications are another way of tracing the web of her relationships and friendships; there is a sense in which she offered poems to friends as gifts (Samuels 2014, 179). Bishop’s dedications and end notes have received little consolidated critical attention, one exception being Jonathan Ellis’s essay, '"For a Child of 1918": Elizabeth Bishop at Seven Years Old' (2019a), where he asks if these dedications are poetry and finds that they are essential tools in locating oneself within Bishop's poems. In some respects, dedications to Bishop's books function much like titles or short explanations of art works in that they direct the reader's attention in a particular direction; however, Bishop had a habit of encrypting her book dedications behind a cloak of foreign language (*Questions of Travel*), deceptively simplistic gift giving (*A Cold Spring*), or disorientating text (*Geography III*). A tangential response to what this habit of encryption might mean is suggested by Heather Treseler's work on Bishop's response to the Cold War and her use of para-literary tropes. Treseler explores (2019a, 255) the temporal continuity between the work Bishop did with Dr Foster and the writing of 'View of the Capital from the Library of Congress', 'From Trollope's Journal' and 'Visits to St. Elizabeth's', organising her essay to investigate the ways in which Bishop employs these tropes to develop a 'space within the lyric poem in which private faces might be worn in public places with some measure of impunity' (2019, 263). The expression of a private face in a public space speaks to Bishop's dedicatory practice in aspects different to the political. Maureen McLane also

explores aspects of Bishop's dedicatory practice by looking at Bishop's use of parenthesis. In *My Poets* (2012) she observes:

> Bishop's parentheticals are like Moore's pangolin scales features essential for defense what is defended here is the possibility of exact vision which means revision which means seeing and thinking in time unfolding…' (47, 48)

As Jonathan Ellis notes, McLane does not demonstrate 'what Bishop knows or thinks but how a Bishop poem gets under the skin' (2019b, 8). For this, I celebrate her work. The dedications or explanatory notes that Bishop chooses to put into parentheses—for example, '[*On my birthday*]' ('The Bight', *P* 59), impact on the reading experience and indicate a formal decision on the part of the poet. The dedications do not, in themselves, impose a unitary lyric voice on the poem; on the contrary, my reading of them suggests that they form a crucial part of the development of Bishop's contingent lyric voice, a voice that alters and shifts in accordance with a personal perspective, as well as in response to the different contextual cultural and historical narratives surrounding the poem. I recall the words of Bonnie Costello, who, reflecting on 'Crusoe in England', reminds us that this poem is haunted by a fear that poetry 'may be just [...] repetitions of the self, propagation of the merely personal rather than engagement with the world in its otherness' (Costello 2003, 360). Bishop's dedicatory practice exposes the terms of her negotiation between the 'merely personal' and a lyric engagement with the world, pointing towards the confident polish of the later poems in *Geography III*. Appendix I details all of Bishop's dedications and endnotes, following the order established by the 2011 edition of *Poems*, but highlighting the insertions and alterations made by Bishop at different stages of publication.

Candace MacMahon's *Elizabeth Bishop: A Bibliography, 1927–1979*, proves invaluable in aiding scholars to track the changes made by Bishop to her published works. It also provides

a sense of the format and layout of the Bishop's books of poetry as they first appeared in bookshops. Although in the 'Forward' Bishop professed herself to have mixed emotions on being the subject of a bibliography, she collaborated fully with the work. For the purpose of this thesis,—and because the *Bibliography* sparked my interest in the presentation of Bishop's books as objects themselves—I have collected copies of the covers of Bishop's original books of poetry, as well as accessed the archival pages of *The New Yorker* to gain an understanding of the surrounding of many of her poems as they were first published. Bishop's voluminous exchange of correspondence with *The New Yorker* magazine, collected in *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence*, (2011), edited by Joelle Biele, has been an extraordinarily useful companion to me as I consider Bishop's interest in and control over the process of publication of her poem, as well as exploring the many facets of her exchanges with her editors at the magazine and their impact on her work. The question of when a poem is considered to be finished varies according to perspective; is it at the point the poet speculatively sends it to a magazine for publication? Or after the alterations have been made by the editors of the place of publication? Or when the poem is republished between the covers of a book, as part of a collected work? I do not suggest that any of these points negate Burt's earlier formulation of a 'potentially permanent, achieved form' in Bishop's collected works. Instead, I explore the impact that the different points of finishing have on the reading experience.

Hearing the voices of Bishop and her editors at *The New Yorker* in dialogue in *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker* is important; the strength and timbre of Bishop's voice is different in monologue to dialogue. Marilyn May Lombardi devotes a chapter to Bishop's translation of Brazilian works in *The Body and the Song* (1995), a discussion that ranges from Bishop's choice

of translations as a reflection of her 'activity as an avid consumer of texts and connoisseur of the strange' (139), to questions of language and the cultural appropriation of the translator. Extensive work on Bishop's time in Brazil has been undertaken: George Monteiro's *Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and After: A poetic career transformed* (2012) explored Bishop's literary and personal experience of Brazil and its impact on her own writing, while Bethany Hicok's *Elizabeth Bishop's Braz*il (2016) integrates a series of cross cultural approaches to Bishop's writings whilst in Brazil. Mariana Machova's monograph *Elizabeth Bishop and Translation* (2017) offers the first full-length appraisal of all of Bishop's translation works, making it clear how Bishop ranged across language and genre in translation, an activity that she carried out, alongside her own writings throughout her life. Machova points to how 'literary translation can be seen as a form of creative reading' (2017, 4), thus increasing our knowledge of Bishop as both reader and critic. The work of Brazilian critics on Bishop is also important to acknowledge, particularly Lúcia Milléo Martins' work on the synergy between Bishop's poetry and the works of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in *Duas Artes-Carlos Drummond de Andrade e Elizabeth Bishop (2008).* Being a translator myself, I did my own informal translation from Portuguese into English of the works of Brazilian poets that Bishop translated, which I then used as a basis of comparison with her translations. This comparative study was particularly useful in highlighting Bishop's manipulation of personal pronouns, a point also made by Lee Fontanella (1999) in relation to Bishop's translations of Octavio Paz's poetry, referred to in my third chapter. I have briefly considered the reaction of Brazilians to Bishop's work via the reverberations following the nomination and retraction of Bishop as the subject for FLIP 2020 (Festival Literária Internacional de Paraty—Brazilian International Literary Festival of Paraty). Paulo Brito, a poet and one of Brazil's leading translators of English and American works (including Bishop's), reads Bishop as a cultural intermediary, writing that 'Bishop was a most

ineffective (and reluctant) cultural intermediatory; in fact all she asked of Brazil was a home' (2020).

Linda Anderson's book *Elizabeth Bishop: Lines of Connection* (2013; future references are to the 2015 paperback edition) deftly considers the interrelations between Bishop's process of writing and the tensions between positions of interiority and exteriority, past and future. Anderson comments that 'one of the most important discoveries Bishop made as a writer was how to use memory in her work' (2015, 7); Jonathan Ellis's book, *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* (2006), directly addresses this, accepting that a life story is not sequentially linear, but rather moves forwards and then backward. Mary McCarthy was one of the first critics to identify the '"I" counting up to a hundred waiting to be found' (McCarthy 267) within Bishop's work, which in turn finds further extension in Hotelling Zona's chapter on 'Elizabeth Bishop's Ambivalent "I"' (2002 69–94) and Gillian White's look at the 'lyric I' in *Lyric Shame (*2014). White takes Bishop's 'Five Flights Up' as her departure point for her study of 'a sense of shame involved in twentieth-century "lyric reading", producing and describing what I call lyric shame' (2014, 2).

I have found the work of poet-critics in their response to Bishop particularly insightful. These are varied and extensive; it seems that Bishop's work has the ability to elicit a response from many who read her. Adrienne Rich's appreciation of Bishop as a feminist writer in 'The Eye of the Outsider' explores Bishop's appeal to those who are outside the societal norm. As Victoria Harrison notes, Rich's article is self-reflexive; it is as much about how she has grown to appreciate Bishop's poetry as a feminist poet as it about Bishop's poetics (1993, 14). Other poet-critics whose work has been invaluable for me include Seamus Heaney (1988, 1995), Mark Ford (2003, 2007), Paul Muldoon (2006), Thom Gunn (1993) and Maureen McLane

(2012). I found Colm Toíbín's study of Bishop, *On Elizabeth Bishop* (2015), particularly compelling, in part because of the deft way he weaves his exploration of the space that Bishop creates for her readers between the words and the silence she keeps. How Bishop creates space in words to allow for silence has been a fundamental question I have asked myself throughout this process.

Marianne Moore identified Bishop's artistic temperament and inspiration early on in their friendship, writing that 'you are three-fourths painter always, in whatever you write' (*The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore* 1998, 440). In their exchange of letters over 'Roosters', Moore praises Bishop for what she calls her 'Pope-ian sagacity' (1998, 403), enviably consummated in some of Bishop's rhyme scheme. One of the many schemes in Pope's 'Essay on Criticism' is his comment that 'True ease in writing comes from art, not chance', and Moore, masterful critic and appreciator, is immediately alert to Bishop's poetic art; both art as a reflection of visual art, and art in the sense of practised, perfected craftsmanship. Although text became Bishop's medium of choice, she was also an accomplished painter and musician. Her knowledge and appreciation of these art forms seep into her poetry; in this study ideas borrowed from visual arts conjoin to suggest that the experience of reading a Bishop poem is analogous with the experience of viewing an art work. Questioning how objects guide our engagement with the world led me first to engage with ideas of ekphrasis in Bishop's poetry, drawing on the ideas of John Hollander, who in *The Gazer's Spirit* writes on how poetry 'directly' deals with works of art, described in terms of a 'confrontation' (4). As Adrienne Rich observed, it is in her later poems that Bishop relies less on the strategy of 'the poem-about-an-artifact' growing towards a poetic voice which embodies 'a need to place herself in the actual' (1984). Bonnie Costello's *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (1991) explores 'what

it means to be a visual poet' (5). The availability of Bishop’s art work in reproduction is an important adjunct to my appreciation of Bishop's poetry; it is intimately related and yet tangential to an appreciation of her own poems as art objects. William Benton's *Exchanging Hats: Elizabeth Bishop Paintings* (1996) and the exhibition booklet, *Elizabeth Bishop: Objects & Apparitions*, produced by Tibor de Nagy Gallery (in association with James S. Jaffe Rare Books) on the occasion of the 2011 exhibition of Elizabeth Bishop's art works at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York, are both vibrant works that serve to remind us of Bishop's artistic capabilities in medium other than text. My work on the draughtsmanship of Bishop's poetry is largely limited to ideas on writing and handwriting, rooted in a visit to an inspirational exhibition, 'Writing: Making Your Mark' (2019), at the British Library.

Parts of this study rely on a visual appreciation of Bishop's poems as they appeared on the page. I have attempted to reproduce her words with the same meticulous attention as she herself employed whilst balancing the demands of brevity. Finally, although I have relied on the 2011 editions of *Poems* and *Prose*, my work on Bishop would not have been possible without the Library of America's edition of *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (2008), a single edition collecting together all of Bishop's most important work invaluable to the travelling critic such as myself. Like Bishop's action of folding 'North Haven' and keeping a copy in a pocket, I travelled with my copy of *Poems, Prose, and Letters*, and always felt ready to face the world with the company of Elizabeth Bishop, astute observer and master of words whose created poems render the invisible legible and make a home for the displaced.

Chapter I: Constructing a Frame around Life and Poetry

'Writing poetry is an unnatural act.' (*Pr* 327)

Why did Elizabeth Bishop become a poet? Born on the 8th February 1911 in Worcester, Massachusetts, Bishop spent many of her formative years in Great Village, Nova Scotia with her maternal family. Bishop's father, William T. Bishop, died in 1911, leaving his daughter a small stipend which gave her some financial independence throughout her life. Her mother, Gertrude Bulmer Bishop, was ten years her husband's junior and suffered from mental breakdowns dating from his death onward and possibly prior to this date. She was to die in May 1934, after years spent in the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. One of the objects that Bishop carried with her throughout her life was her 'baby book' (Travisano 2019, 16) in which her birth was recorded, and in which she kept an obituary from the *Worcester Magazine* of her father's death (VC 113). William Bishop's influence over his daughter remains shadowy, although the short period she spent with his parents in Boston marked her childhood profoundly, as evidenced by her short story, 'The Country Mouse'. Her early childhood in Nova Scotia surrounded by a large and loving Bulmer family marked Bishop profoundly, as did her mother's long illness and eventual death. It was not until Bishop moved to Brazil in the 1950s that she felt ready to publish both poetry and prose that reflect on her early childhood years. Writing to Ilse and Kit Barker in 1952, she commented on her sudden ability to address her childhood, saying 'it is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia—geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even' (*OA*, 249). The cadence of the place names in her letter,—Brazil, Nova Scotia,—indicates the defining nature of a sense of place to her poetry; the undercurrents of

autobiography in her work may be deep, but they are quietly sensed. Nor would Bishop want to be defined by autobiographical detail. Writing in 1964 to Anne Stevenson, her first biographer, Bishop corrected the dates of her mother's illness and death emphasising accuracy over and above the impact of these events on her. Bishop annotates Stevenson's chronology, marking a point in time in 1916 when her mother descended into permanent insanity, and then her death in 1934. 'I've never concealed this,' writes Bishop, 'although I don't like to make too much of it. But of course it is an important fact, to me. I didn't see her again' (*PPL* 855). Bishop elides together the concealment of two facts—insanity and death—and in so doing casts a shadow over both. Punctuation is important; notice how the placement of the comma in 'fact, to me' indicates her preference for the emotional hinterland behind these dates to remain as private, for her own consumption. In this chapter, I engage with Bishop's life in order to explore the context in which she worked. I also chart the terms for my inquiry into the frames she constructed around her published poems, with consideration for issues of paratext as well as recalling the need to approach the published poems both as individual works and as part of Bishop's collected works.

Bishop's 'earliest published poem' 'The Call' was published in volume 18 of the *Camp Chequesset Log* in 1925 (Travisano 2019, 67). When Bishop entered Vassar in 1930 it was her intention to be a musician, but her freshman English teacher, Barbara Swain, recalled writing 'on Bishop’s card that she was evidently doomed to be a poet’ (Fountain & Brazeau 1994, 40). Swain’s comment marked Bishop’s card; but Bishop did not share her fatalistic certainty. In her youth, she was a talented musician and artist and at different times contemplated developing these disciplines into a

profession. Even when Bishop had achieved success and renown as a poet, she continued to feel periodically insecure about her choice of profession. Nor did Bishop attribute her ability or success uniquely to fate, writing in 1975—four years before she died—that poetry:

> can't be done, apparently, by willpower and study alone—or by being "with it"—but I really don't know *how* poetry gets to be written. There is a mystery & a surprise, and after that a great deal of hard work. (*OA* 596)

Bishop worked hard at her craft, drafting prose and poetry over years until she deemed it ready for publication. Her vast library of books, her notebooks, her translations and her voluminous correspondence attest to her commitment to her work, to language, and to the business of writing. Swain's identification of a sense of doom presages a question Bishop posed much later in 'Efforts of Affection', her tribute to, and memoir of, Marianne Moore. Bishop defends Moore, arguing that she can sometimes be both whimsical or humorous, and then asks 'Surely there is an element of mortal panic and fear underlying all works of art?' (*Pr* 132) That 'element of mortal panic and fear' is one that Bishop seeks both to explore and control, sometimes simultaneously, throughout her life; conversely, it is also the element that underlies her insecurities about her ability as a poet. In 'Sandpiper' (*P* 129) Bishop observes and explores the sense of physical and psychological panic; her bird 'runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward, / in a state of controlled panic'; he is 'looking for something, something, something. / Poor bird, he is obsessed!' Panic plays a key part in another significant poem, 'In the Waiting Room' (*P* 179), where the experience of memory and self-realisation in the feeling of 'you are an *I,* / you are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*' (lines 60–63), is framed by two verses which signal a moment strikingly like a panic attack. In the preceding verse Bishop writes:

Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I—we—were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the *National Geographic*,
February, 1918.

A double line space ends this verse. Then begins the next where the young Elizabeth experiences her moment of self-realisation which opens with 'I said to my myself: three days / and you'll be seven years old' and closes with 'a cry of pain that could have / got loud and worse but hadn't?' This verse in turn is also separated from the next by a double line space. In this way, a visual white frame is created around the verse that contains 'you are an *I*, / you are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*.' The penultimate verse functions as the liminal threshold over which the created self slides—accompanied by the reader—who both return to:

The wating room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another.

(*P* 180–181)

The physiological sensation of panic, that of sliding in and out of oneself, is combined with the psychological to form a poem pivoting around memory and the creation of a self. Bishop controls and exploits the sense of panic by the creation of, or imposition of, poetic form, using both the text and the paratextual space around the text as seen in the spacing between verses in 'In the Waiting Room'. There are other poems, such as 'Sestina' or 'One Art' where form is strictly employed to control overriding emotion,

which need not always be panic. The closing couplet of 'Objects & Apparitions', Bishop's translation of Octavio Paz's original poem 'Objetos Y Apariciones' (Paz 1991,404–407), reads:

> Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes
>
> my words became visible for a moment.
>
> (*P* 202)

The restriction imposed by the framework of the box is a key component in making the art visible. This applies both to Cornell's artwork and to Bishop's position of the poem on the page. In 1958, Bishop was reading Stravinsky's *The Poetics of Music*, from which she quoted in letters to both Marianne Moore (*OA* 358–9) and May Swenson. In both cases, she highlights a passage which comments on the paradoxical freedom awarded to a piece of art by the imposition of a tight framework. The exact lines she chooses to quote to Swenson come after a long piece of close reading and criticism of Swenson's poetry; Bishop employs the Stravinsky quote to show what the poet has to think about if:

> you want to keep the reader with you without a hitch. As Stravinsky says, "The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free…My freedom thus consists in my moving about within the narrow frame of what I have assigned myself for each of my undertakings…it will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more I surround myself with obstacles." (June 4th, 1958, Washington University, in Saint Louis website *Final Versions: May Swenson and Elizabeth Bishop's (Re)writing of Dear Elizabeth, http://digital.wustl.edu/r/revision/Swenson_Collaboration/Correspondence.html)*

Note that Bishop approaches this from the point of the reader; the tightness of the frame is a crucial component in establishing a successful author-reader relationship, one where the poet can carry the reader through the 'knowing artificiality' (Ravinthrian 2015, xvii) which Bishop builds into her construction of verse. Ravinthrian's comment

comes in the context of Bishop's 'intimacy and freshness of speech' which he notes is 'nevertheless speech as *imitated on the page*. Bishop's verse plays with the synthetic quality of its sentence sounds' (xvi, xvii). This acknowledgement of the artificiality of speech as imitated on the page, linked with Stravinsky's notion of working within controlled environment, points towards important aspects of how Bishop constructs her own poetic voice, aspects of which I explore later in my chapter on translation.

One of the obstacles that Bishop did not always need to circumvent in her working life was that of money. Her father, William Bishop, left her a small inheritance in his will; she later benefitted from a further inheritance from her paternal grandfather, John Bishop (Travisano 2019, 65–6). This left her generally comfortable, if not wealthy; her letters are peppered with comments on the need to earn enough to buy a new coat (*OA* 22), to travel to Europe (*OA* 245), to return to the U.S from Brazil (*OA* 327), and to enable her to do her own work rather than teach (*OA* 577). To some degree, Bishop wrote because she could; in her early career she did not need a job to support her way of life. This prompts the useful question of whether Bishop’s skill was confined to poetry or if she successfully practised other forms of writing. As a young writer she was equally as focused on submitting prose, particularly short stories, as well as poetry, for publication. Vidyan Ravindran's *Elizabeth Bishop's Prosaic* demonstrates how Bishop took the techniques and resources of prose, incorporating and developing them into her poetry. 'In the Village' became her most well–known short story, and the only one she chose to include in the 1965 edition of *Questions of Travel*, although it was not included in her 1969 edition of *The Complete Poems*. Bishop contemplated creating a book of short stories throughout her life, writing in October 1946 to her

editor at Houghton Mifflin, Ferris Greenslett (*OA* 142), that she would be grateful for his opinion on such an enterprise, and later considered an edition of short stories called *In the Village & Other Stories* (*P* 342, note 11). If publication is considered to be the lode star of success, then the range of Bishop's published material from poetry to short stories, translations to literary commentary, is indicative of her skill as a writer. Her voluminous correspondence, whilst never published in her lifetime, created what Tom Paulin called a 'a web of dynamic textuality' (1996, 216), a skein of communication, shared thought and criticism, between herself and her various correspondents, leading Paulin to claim that Bishop will be seen as 'one of this century's epistolary geniuses' (215). Notable amongst her failures was her inability to fulfil her contract as the poetry critic for *The New Yorker*. However, in her letters to other poets, particularly those to Robert Lowell and May Swenson, Bishop showed herself to be a finely attuned, close reader of prose and poetry. Perhaps it was not so much an inability to form a critical opinion, but rather a reluctance to set that opinion in stone that prevented Bishop from publishing any critical pieces in *The New Yorker*. To paraphrase her response to a questionnaire on the art of writing, successful criticism 'all depends' (*PPL* 686) on allowing both the author and the reader(s) to find space in the work.

It was Marianne Moore who first noted Bishop's aptitude in both prose and poetry. Writing in August 1936 in response to Bishop's doubts about becoming a poet, Moore affirms her confidence in Bishop's ability, singling out her abilities:

> To have produced what you have—either verse or prose is enviable, and you certainly could not suppose that such method as goes with a precise and proportioning ear is "contemporary" or usual. (*The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore* 1998, 363)

Moore's formulation of either 'verse or prose' captures the movement between these two forms that was to ebb and flow throughout Bishop's life and writings. It was not just a question of choice of profession that shadowed Bishop, but also the choice of format in which to express herself. This choice was not just literary but encompassed other art forms. When Bishop entered Vassar College in 1930, she did so as a music major, although she soon gave this up, moving onto literature. Bishop is a child of World War I, as she demonstrates in 'In the Waiting Room' where it is the presence of the First World War that is recalled (*P* 181) as she returns to awareness. When Bishop left Vassar in 1934, the 19th amendment giving American women the right to vote had only been passed 14 years previously. The years between the wars were formative for Bishop, particularly as they provided the opportunity for her first experiences of travelling to Europe, including to Spain, then in the throes of the Civil War. Bishop first went to Europe in in 1935, shortly after graduating; as she recalled, the fact that she did '*my* travelling earlier than the poets who aren't so much younger than I am, seems to have put me in a different category [...] While they were teaching and marrying I was out observing the world' (*Pr* 430). It was not yet habitual for women, especially single women, to travel so freely around the world.

One of Bishop's observational tools was art; she was an accomplished artist (mainly using watercolours) who 'often claimed that she would have preferred to be a painter rather than a poet' (Travisano 2019, 157). Although music and art were always essential ingredients to the creation of her various creative endeavours, it was to language that Bishop most frequently returned in the expression of her own creativity. As noted previously, prose features strongly in Bishop's work, but it was poetry that

became her main calling. In *Elizabeth Bishop's Prosaic*, Ravinthiran devotes a chapter to 'Poetry and Prose-Rhythm', thoughtfully illuminating a series of defining parameters in Bishop's choices of form, arguing that Bishop made a series of analytical choices—as well others that were more instinctual—in deciding which prose techniques and resources to use in her poetry. As Ravinthiran comments, what interests Bishop in prose is:

> the inexhaustible "resources" of its cognitive momentum —which relates both to its open-ended rhythms, and also the interaction between its cultural history and readerly expectations. (7)

Ravinthiran's formulation of a 'cognitive momentum' flows not only from his close analysis of Bishop's work, but also from a comment Bishop quoted in her undergraduate essay on Gerald Manley Hopkins. Bishop's essay focuses on the timing in Hopkins' poetry; she is working to try to understand his use of sprung rhythm. In her analysis, Bishop quotes an article, 'The Baroque Style in Prose' by M.W.Croll, from which she chooses the following statement about these writers: '"Their purpose was to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking…"' (*Pr*, 473). The desire to capture 'the mind thinking', not the 'thought', is the fulcrum of my analysis of Bishop's work. From a very early stage in her poetry, Bishop was concerned to create movement, to resist stasis in her work. One way she does this is to borrow techniques from prose, as Ravinthiran suggests; another is her habit of 'shadowboxing' with other art forms, such as painting, sculpture, music and translations, in her own work.

Poetry, prose, letters, translations; these all ebbed and flowed throughout Bishop's life, each one of them a place for what Mary McCarthy (her contemporary at Vassar) identified as the 'the mind hiding in her words, like an "I" counting up to a

hundred waiting to be found' (McCarthy 1981, 267). Seamus Heaney riffed on McCarthy's theme in *The Redress of Poetry* when he suggested that Bishop's gift was to 'ingest loss and to transmute it.' This she did by counting to

> a hundred by naming the things of the world, one after another, like the coins and scales and ring and jackknives in her story; and with each of these things she would mark a point on the scale of memory, a mark which both proclaimed and contained the forces that it took the measure of. (1995, 165)

Objects are themselves and yet also other in Bishop's work; they tether certain themes, principally memory, time, geography and an interest in their own 'thingness'. Objects often have human attributes given to or projected on them; often they have a 'voice'. An example of an object inhabiting its own thingness is Crusoe's knife in 'Crusoe in England' (*P* 182–6). Crusoe is speaking towards the end of the poem, beginning to describe the present, not the past:

> The knife there on the shelf—
>
> it reeked of meaning, like a crucifix.
>
> It lived. How many years did I
>
> beg it, implore it, not to break?
>
> [...]
>
> Now it won't look at me at all.
>
> The living soul has dribbled away.
>
> (*P* 186)

This is one small moment in a momentous poem, serving to illustrate some of the ways in which objects function to contain and express human emotion in Bishop's poems, a key theme throughout this work. The idea of 'thingness', was coined—in the context of Bishop's work—by John Ashbery in his 1969 review of *The Complete Poems*. Ashbery discusses Bishop's prose poems, 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics,' which are spoken by a

giant toad, a crab and a giant snail. He identifies with the dilemma of these creatures thus:

> their dilemma is ours too, for we too confusedly feel ourselves to be part thing and part thought.... This quality which one can only call "thingness" is with her throughout (1969, 202–3)

Ashbery's use of 'thingness' is a way of pointing to the subject-object interrelation in the act of self-realisation, but it also points us towards Bishop's use of objects around which to anchor herself and her poetry. (I investigate the connection with 'thing theory' as used by Bill Brown in 2001 in chapter II). Not every reader responded with pleasure to Bishop's early evocation of objects in her poetry. As Adrienne Rich remarked in 'The Eye of the Outsider', some of Bishop's early poems (Rich singles out the poems in *North & South*) are cases where

> the poem-about-an-artifact-owes too much to (Marianne) Moore. Bishop wrote such poems later in her life… but not often. More and more, her poems embodied a need to place herself in the actual, to come to terms with a personal past, with family and class and race, with her presence as a poet in cities and landscapes where human suffering is not a metaphor. (1984)

Rich's review is in part an act of reconciliation with a poetic predecessor with whom she shared some personal attributes, but whose work had also pushed her away. Rich takes the point of view of the outsider, including (but not exclusively) in her analysis the narrative of a younger, female, lesbian poet looking for connections with other female poets. 'The poem about an artifact' may not speak to Rich, but Bishop's presence as a poet is conditional on an ability to find roots in a sense of place or a sense of 'thing'. Take for example, 'Sestina', where the house, grandmother, child, stove, almanac and tears weave their intricate dance one around the other to create a poem, where, as Heaney suggested, loss is ingested and transmuted. 'Sestina' is a tightly

controlled, formal poem, one where the form and structure plays an important part in the forward momentum of the poem. Bishop achieves a sophisticated reconciliation of form and thought, successfully creating a moment when suffering is not metaphorical, but direct.

In the shadowland of how a reader responds to a poet lies the contextual history of the both the poet and the reader. Hindsight is an unreliable friend, particularly for readers of a poet such as Bishop who guarded her personal life so carefully. In 2011 a large number of previously unknown letters were added to the archives at Vassar College. These include the three ‘Foster’ letters, dating from 1947 and written by Bishop to (although there is no record of them being received by) her Kleinian analyst Dr Ruth Foster. Writing in *The Yale Review*, Lorrie Goldensohn (2015) suggests that they form

> an underside to the self-possessed letters that Bishop wrote to Anne Stevenson in 1963–64, from which all critics, famished for the literary explanations which Bishop gave out so parsimoniously, have subsequently drawn. (3)

'The Foster Letters' are extraordinarily personal and exceptionally revealing, presenting a challenge to each reader of Bishop's published work as to what extent biography is allowed to interrupt poetry. Biography is not the only aspect considered in these wide-ranging letters, but biographical readings tend to dominate. As Goldensohn says, ‘Because (Bishop) wrote relatively few poems but a great many letters, the drive to receive her letters as an equivalent art is strong’ (19). What position to adopt is a decision each reader must take for themselves; my own preference privileges the published poetry first and foremost, seeking to avoid the temptation to allow biographical knowledge to overwrite a response to a poem. These letters are difficult

to contain; they discuss Bishop's alcoholism, sexuality, childhood memories of abuse and suggest that Bishop suffered from an anatomical abnormality in the clitoris. The letters contain many images and thoughts that later made their way into poems, particularly, in this case, 'At the Fishhouses'. This aspect is not unusual for Bishop—many of her letters contain images, words, sometimes phrases, that go on to form a part of a poem. Writing in prose in a letter was both a means of maintaining the ongoing dialogue of friendship as it was also a rehearsal for poetry. Similarly, translation provided a way to work with language and genre when Bishop was unable, or did not want, to work on her own originals. From a poetic perspective, the Foster letters illuminate Bishop's struggles with her own sense of panic that, at least in part, drove her to write. For example, Bishop discusses the development of her own poetic voice in one of the Foster letters (February 1947), going on to comment:

> I have just noticed that I've lost the fear of repeating myself to you, in fact I've known I've been doing it and gone right ahead. And I feel that in poetry now there is no reason why I should make such an effort to make each poem an isolated event, that they go on into each other or overlap. etc., and are all really one long poem anyway.

Repetition and uniqueness of form are two key concepts in Bishop; they appear contradictory but, as I suggest in my chapter on sensation, are complementary. In her essay, 'Elizabeth Bishop at the End of the Rainbow', Stephanie Burt works with ideas suggested by the image of a rainbow, including one, which encapsulates the rainbow's ability to be both unique and yet repeated time after time. Burt concludes that:

> the sense we get from Bishop's published poems - though, importantly, not from much unpublished work - that each poem has been a perfect, unique construction, not just a thing with a form, but a thing with its own, *unrepeatable*, potentially permanent, achieved form. (2019, 334)

These ideas of overlap, repetition and uniqueness are ones I keep in mind throughout this thesis. The concept that Bishop posits to Ruth Foster of writing 'one long poem' helpfully stretches a frame around her work, so that we can envisage *The Complete Poems* and *Questions of Travel* as being, at least in some ways, *Geography I & II*. This is a thought indebted to John Hollander's essay 'Elizabeth Bishop's Mappings of Life' about *Geography III*, and published in 1977 long before the Foster letters came to light. Furthermore, the divisions Bishop created in *Question of Travel*, 'I. Brazil' and 'II. Elsewhere' are not just ones of place, but also form a macro structure around which to question the form and function of memory, which we see in more micro form in poems such as 'The Monument'.

If increasing knowledge of Bishop's private life draws critical thinking towards the 'why' of poetry to contain Bishop's sense of 'mortal panic', it is important to remember that Bishop placed great emphasis on humour, lest panic become too deeply embedded. Bishop was always keen to provide a balance to the darkness of the world, saying in an interview in 1967 that 'the tendency is to overdo the morbidity. You just wish they'd keep some of these things to themselves' (quoted in Lombardi 1993, 57). Humour and cheerfulness meant a great deal to Bishop; the last lines of 'The Bight' read 'All the untidy activity continues, /awful but cheerful' (*P* 59), which is also the epitaph chosen for her gravestone. In her letter of January 8th 1964 to Anne Stevenson, Bishop noted that many of her friends had a great wit 'and I mean real wit, quickness, wild fancies, remarks that make one cry with laughing' (*PPL* 858). The ability of the witty to evoke tears and laughter simultaneously depends greatly on a sense of timing, a characteristic closely shared by poetry. Timing is one of the great facilitators of

Bishop's art, a component of her art deeply embedded in her work right from her days at Vassar and her essay on Gerald Manley Hopkins.

When Bishop retrospectively considered her time at Vassar, she commented in an aside to Anne Stevenson that '(Now I wish I'd "majored" in Greek & Latin)' (*PPL* 852). Bishop habitually tucked important thoughts and remarks into brackets in her letters, the punctuation helping to create the sense of a casual aside that calls attention to itself by differentiation. More often seen in prose than in poetry, brackets, hyphens, dashes,—and other punctuation marks indicating gaps, space, pauses,—are a potent tool in Bishop's poetry. For example, in 'North Haven' (*P* 210), the poem Bishop wrote in memory of Robert Lowell in 1978, the bracket mark appears twice in the fifth stanza, first, where Bishop inserts a remark designed to accentuate accuracy and pin-point memory to time, and secondly to shade emotion over memory:

> Years ago, you told me it was here
> (in 1932?) you first "discovered *girls*"
> and learned to sail, and learned to kiss.
> You had "such fun," you said, that classic summer.
> ("Fun"—it always seemed to leave you at a loss…)

Notice how Bishop works the arrangement of bracket and speech marks in lines 22 '(in 1932?)…"*girls*"' and then reverses the pattern in line 25 '("Fun"—…)'. This inversion is not exact, but nevertheless the visual patterns in the quintet reinforce the patterns of absence and memory that the words and rhythm of the poem seeks to establish. The brackets emphasise the enigmatic, double-edged nature of the fun/loss relationship. The final stanza contains a single aside in parenthesis in line 29:

> [...] You can't derange, or re-arrange,
> your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.)
> The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.

Here the brackets work to contain grief, emphasising the ongoing natural lifecycle. The brackets contain factual corrections designed to increase the ambivalence in the sensations, and heighten the tension between memory and emotion. The final bracketed insertion, '(But the Sparrows can their song)', is an observation alive with the possibility of change; the rhythm of emotion in the line runs counter to the thought that renewal is possible. Bishop was extraordinarily attentive to punctuation and presentation on the page, something she shared with her editors at *The New Yorker* (although in the case of 'North Haven', the parentheses are all Bishop's originals). Maureen McLane's appreciation of Bishop perfectly captures a reading that balances between appreciation of, and frustration with, this habit of punctuation. 'Bishop', writes McLane, 'is parenthetical. Her parentheses create emphases even when their purpose is to hesitate not asseverate' (2012, 46). McLane's reading is alive to the spirit and enjoyment of Bishop's poetry, but she also adds a warning note that excessive use of parentheticals 'could become a tic' (49). While a bracket may seemingly encapsulate an aside, the action of framing a thought or emotion has the effect of encouraging the reader to look closely at that thought. Brackets are leaky frames, simultaneously drawing attention to that held within and prompting questions about that left outside.

Just as Bishop used brackets to frame important comments or events, so I want to use the concept and language of frames and framework to structure my thoughts and interrogations of Bishop's work. After Bishop graduated from Vassar in the

summer of 1934 she went to live in Greenwich Village, New York City, where she began exploring the contemporary art scene. According to David Kalstone, 'she was reading Wilenski's *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* and despaired of finding terms half as precise and useful in contemporary literary criticism' (2001 30). Bishop's interest in sculpture flowed deeply through her poetry. Sculpture is tangible, multi-dimensional and kinetic; witness the work of Alexander Calder. Calder became a personal friend in the late 1950s when Bishop was living in Brazil with her lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, who had long been a close friend of Calder's. Lota owned a number of his works, and Bishop included one in her painting, titled 'Interior with Calder Mobile'. Calder's sculptures are all about movement, but he also

> loved the drama and chaos of the circus—simultaneous acts, overhead wires, shifting spotlights, the staging of a spectacle. He created a body of work that describes its virtual volume by moving through the viewing space; he took sculpture off the pedestal and presented his works as actors in a "theatre in the round" (Coxon 2015, 28)

Like Calder, Bishop encourages her readers to move through the viewing space around the poem; her poems use the white space of the page to create temporal and visual pauses. The circus was a shared interest with Marianne Moore, and some of Bishop's early poems, specifically 'Cirque d'Hiver', reflect this attention to performance art. Tangentially, one of Bishop's first translations was an attempt at a translation of Aristophanes *The Birds*. As Mariana Machova notes, drama is 'not a genre' usually associated with Bishop but 'she was deeply interested in theatre as a teenager and young woman' (2017, 13). Bishop's notebooks contain a sketch of the stage, another movement evidencing her interest in theatre and how people or things move across a performance stage. This realm of performative art and Calderesque sculptural movement, seem to have aided Bishop in her search for a language in which to describe

the balance between statis and movement, allowing objects to be presented 'in the round'. In both her poetry and her art, Bishop often employed tethers and ties, either real or imaginary. One effect of this is to create the illusion of proportion. In 'The Armadillo', the 'frail, illegal fire balloons appear. / Climbing the mountain height', with their 'paper chambers flush and fill with light / that comes and goes, likes hearts' (*P* 101). The balloons are not tethered, but they create lines across the sky as they climb, their movement on the currents of air mimicking the pause and beat of the human heart. The depiction is pictorial, visual, the poem encouraging the reader to look up beyond the page, just as the words of the next verse track up beyond the sky towards the planets. One of the principle themes of the 'The Armadillo', the dramatic enaction of the fragility of the natural world, is played out when the fire balloons come crashing back down to earth, startling the owls who 'shrieked up out of sight', starting fires, flushing out an armadillo and rabbit and leading to the closing lines: *'a weak mailed fist / clenched ignorant against the sky!'* (*P* 102). The last verse of 'The Armadillo' is almost an epigraph, presented in italics, a railing cry against the forces of fate, or corruption, or government, depending on viewpoint. My analysis of this poem takes in one aspect which is to notice the shared appreciation with works of mobile sculpture of lines that move, then are still, creating a dramatic ending in the mind of the viewer that can be adjunct or other to the subject matter that preceded it. Something similar happens in 'The End of March' (*P* 199) where, in the second verse, the speaker comes across the tide marks on the beach that are visualised as 'lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string,' and washed away into the sea, 'A kite string? – but no kite.' Again, there is the pattern of motion then stasis, repeated once more in the third verse, where the

movement of the tide marks or kite string gives way to an imaginative realisation of Bishop's:

> […] proto-dream-house,
> my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box
> set up on pilings, shingled green,
> a sort of artichoke of a house, […]
>
> (*P* 199)

This still, strange, structure moves to occupy the central theme of the poem, something akin to Calder's sculptures that, in Coxon's words, 'describe [their] virtual volume by moving through the viewing space' (2015, 28); the poem moves Bishop's proto-dream house in to take centre stage of the viewing space in tandem with the pace of the walk along the beach; then, again in tandem, the walkers move away and the house fades from the central viewing space. I discuss other aspects of the human body in motion suggested by these lines in the conclusion to this thesis.

Sculpture is at the root of the debate surrounding the notion of ekphrasis, and in Bishop's poetry there is an interest in sculptural art that bridges ancient art and modern art. In 'Roosters', a much earlier poem from the 1940s, we find the following:

> Old holy sculpture
> could set it all together
> in one small scene, past and future:
> […]
> But in between
> a little cock is seen
> carved on a dim column in the travertine (*P* 38-39)

Elizabeth Jones, writing in *Notes and Queries,* suggests that this image, as well as many others in 'Roosters', is borrowed from an article called 'Iconography of the Cock on the Column' by S.A. Callisen and published in *The Art Bulletin* of 1939, which Jones supposes that Bishop read, due to her interest in the visual arts. Bishop went to Rome in 1937, and visited the Vatican during that time *(OA* 64), describing the experience in a letter to Frani Bough Muser. Much later on, in 1956, Bishop denied that 'Roosters' was inspired by a Picasso rooster; her memory, as she tells May Swenson, is that she wrote it 'at 4 or 5 a.m, in the back yard in Key West' (*OA* 316). Attempts to prove the exact source of Bishop's creativity can prove to be, at least partially, redundant; 'Roosters' is just one example of a poem that benefitted from a collage of images and artworks as inspiration. This process of accumulating and discarding inspirational sources is discussed further in my chapter on sensation. Like so much of her interest in visual art, Bishop's interest and connection with sculpture became a way of exploring notions of time, conflating the historical and the present, and exploring movement of the objects at the heart of her poetry and the relationship between kinetic energy and rhythm and rhyme in her poetry.

A frame is literally composed of the surrounding to a work of art; this can be the wooden frame around a painting as it can also be the space around a sculpture or the white space of the page that frame a poem. There are natural intersections between the concept of framework in the visual arts and the literary concept of the paratext. Critics such as Peggy Samuels in *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art*, and Jonathan Ellis in *Art and Memory in the Works of Elizabeth Bishop* have taken their lead from Bishop herself and viewed her poetry through the lens of the visual arts,

resulting in valuable insights in Bishop scholarship. One aspect of their scholarship demonstrates that the terminology of visual art translates with ease into discussions about Bishop's poetry; it is a poetry that invites the use of terms such as observation, and perspective. In 'Bishop and Visual Art', Samuels summarises the impact of the visual arts on Bishop's poetry, stating that Bishop's 'response to the visual arts and to criticism of the arts becomes a significant part of the story of the composition of poems' (2014, 169). That Bishop enjoyed the work of many artists and was stimulated by art criticism is clear. For my purposes, it is the overview of the impact of various 'artistic' techniques on Bishop's work that is most useful. I highlight how the context of modern art helped Bishop think about the unconscious, the geometric and the abstract in opposition to the biomorphic (Samuels 2014 169), and how visual art provided a way for Bishop to imagine 'how voice and subjectivity could be structured in poems' (Samuels 2014, 170). Samuels suggests that in *North & South* we see Bishop:

> probing how the relations between inner and outer will be structured in poems, and this probing situates her as contemplating the relations between the visual (what can be seen) and the linguistic (what the mind thinks and feels) and crafting a means of arranging their "touch" through the materiality of verse (2014, 171)

I discuss 'Quai d'Orléans' in more detail in the chapter on sensation. This is a key poem in Bishop's pivoting aesthetic, marking a development from the early oneiric poems to the later more biomorphic poems. As I discuss, 'Quai d'Orléans' articulates the difficulty of manipulating perspective in ways the modernists would have been familiar with, so that the work '"orients itself to how the world appears when one is within the scene."' (Altieri 2009, cited in Samuels 2014, 171). Bishop's manipulation of perspective and of its relationship to surface is particularly acute in poems where water provides an unstable mirroring effect to the portrayal of sensations and emotions. This ability to

work with perspective from within the scene enriches the observation of others, both motionless and in a state of flux. Writing in *The Art of 20th Century Poetry,* Charles Altieri explores how, in *Questions of Travel*, Bishop

> uses the role of tourist to focus … on the question "Where am I standing?" Her poems then become explorations of location – of angle and relative distance. That mode of questioning allows others – other people and the entire world of nature – a significant and mobile existence. … The other has as much reality as the self, but in a different place, changing at different rates. (193)

The key here is the acknowledgement of the equal reality of the other, and that the other is not only the object observed by Bishop, but also that observed by the reader. As Samuels notes, Bishop 'explicitly shows the impossibility of using classical perspective in 'Twelfth Morning; or What you Will' (Samuels 2014, 171). Similar manipulation of perspective is seen in Bishop's paintings, which Joelle Biele suggests is linked to Bishop's own visual appreciation of the works of Piero della Francesca during her visit to Italy in 1937. 'Peiro', says Biele, 'did not paint with a vanishing point in mind', and Bishop's paintings 'place viewers inside the frames and involve them in the process of seeing. Her lines generate depth much as her poetry's shifting verb tenses do' (Biele, 2011, 42). Thus, Bishop's relationship to visual art informs and enables her poetry. This concept of being able to move the viewer into the frame of the picture to actively involve them in the process of seeing is analogous to Bishop's poetic ability to invite the reader to step into and over the white space of the poem.

As a result of my increasing awareness of the care Bishop took over the presentation of her poems, I became very interested in the original book jackets that Bishop—and her publishers—chose. The jacket of the book is often the first frame that a reader notices and then moves past into the interior of the work itself. According to

U.T. Summers, Bishop had a reputation as a being a difficult client at her first publishers, Houghton Mifflin. Bishop had clear ideas of how she would like

> the book to look, including recommendations for the typeface and the book's shape and binding.... She wanted to approve each step of production, including the location and size of the page numbers and the advertisement blurbs on the dust jacket. (Fountain & Brazeau 1994, 98)

Bishop did not like the first dust jacket for *North & South,* eventually approving of the jacket for *Poems: North & South - A Cold Spring* (1955), designed by Loren MacIver (*OA* 306). Prior to the publication of *North & South,* Bishop exchanged letters with her editor in which she details the typeface that she prefers for poetry, as

> Baskerville. I think that Baskerville monotype, 169 E, makes the best looking poetry pages I've seen printed. I particularly dislike those light typefaces some publishers seem to think appropriate for poetry. It seems to me that the Baskerville monotype 169 E, eleven-point, would be perfect—but eleven point might be too big—it might make too many run-over lines—maybe they could try and see. It would all depend on the size of the page. (*OA* 125)

Note Bishop's awareness of the size of the page and the implicit understanding that this brings that a book of poems is a multi-dimensional thing, which invites interaction with the reader in a number of ways. Her comments and instructions are led by her appreciation of how visual details frame and contextualise a reader's response to what is found within. This early awareness of how the page frames the poem and the typeface conditions the reading experience, matures into what Paul Muldoon calls 'the positing of a relationship between topography and *typo*graphy' (2006, 85) in reference to Bishop's prose poem, '12 O'Clock News', a poem describing her writing desk.

Bishop's desire to approve every step of production is part of her engagement as an author with her readers, in the meeting point between the reader and the poetry itself. The dichotomy between author/reader or art object/spectator is partially

overcome by the materiality Bishop assumes, creates, and shares with her readers. One way of doing this is her involvement in the act of production of her books themselves. In a letter to Dr Anny Baumann in December 1975, Bishop is pleased to have successfully 'designed my own book jacket for the books of poems that will come, I hope, next fall. It's be called *Geography III*, and looks like an old-fashioned schoolbook, I hope' (*OA* 602). In the event, the jacket was designed by Cynthia Kraupat following Bishop's suggestions. (*OA* 605) It was Bishop who decided to include an epigraph at the beginning of *Geography III,* taken from an old geography primer (possibly given to Bishop by John Ashbery, VC 1.6). This epigraph contains the words, but not the images, of the original primer. In the words of John Hollander, this insertion is

> claimed for parable in that seamless way of allowing picture to run into image that the poet has made her own…and about direction, following the epigraph in its own language but now become fully figurative. (1977, 244)

Here Bishop elides the differences between viewing and reading by loosening the text from its visual anchors, and thus enabling the text to stand for something other. It is an inverse echo to 'The Monument', the early Bishop poem which Samuels reads as an articulation of an 'aesthetic theory that she felt unable to articulate in the form of a prose essay' (Samuels, 2014, 181). The geography primer is only one example of Bishop's use of other literary—rather than artistic—media to alert the reader to experience outside the frame of the poem. In '"Too Shy to Stop": Elizabeth Bishop and the Scene of Reading', Heather Treseler takes ideas from the psychoanalytic critic, Mary Jacobus, to point towards how Bishop uses 'para-literary media' (2019b), nominally maps, the family Bible of 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', postcards in 'View of The Capitol from The Library of Congress', and letters ('Letter to N.Y.'), to signal the extension of the reading experience beyond the boundary of the

poem and invite readers to join narrators and poet within the text itself. Treseler's identification of Bishop's use of a myriad forms of paratextual readerly material in her poems alerts us to how Bishop stretches form beyond poetic structure to abut other textual and artistic media. In some respects it was Bishop's reading habits that tuned her gift towards poetry rather than towards art or music. The most frequent advice Bishop gave aspiring poets was 'to read a lot of poetry—all the time [...] read ALL of somebody. Then read his or her life, and letters, and so on' (*OA* 596). Bishop's capitalisation of 'ALL' hints at a process that Seamus Heaney calls internalization, a process Bishop encouraged in the classes she gave at Harvard during the 1970's. Bishop set exam questions requiring her students to write their own original verse imitating the poets that had been studied (Goia 1986, 155). As Bishop was well aware, 'even if you try to imitate [great poetry] exactly—it will come out quite different' (*OA* 596). Paradoxically, imitation spawns originality, forcing the aspiring poet to reach into the process of creating a poem. Bishop herself deeply internalised her sources of inspiration, something that is made visible by conjoining what we know of her reading habits and the notes she kept on her dreams. Judith Merrin quotes a moment from Bishop's notebook where she makes Herbert her contemporary:

> 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. (Bishop 1934–1936 journal, quoted in Merrin 1990, 39)

Herbert emerges from the past to converse with Bishop, and time and absence are collapsed to a single point where she, Marianne Moore, Herbert and Donne can be present together. Heaney helpfully describes the process of redefinition that aspiring

writers undertake, as they begin producing work that will replace those who came before and is thus

> derived from modes of expression originally taken to be canonical and unquestionable. Writers have to start out as readers, and before they put pen to paper, even the most disaffected of them will have internalized the norms and forms of the tradition from which they wish to secede (1995, 6).

Writing, be it poetry, prose or letters, offered Bishop the opportunity to redefine the life she lived, but it was in reading that she found the tools with which to work. Translation work offered Bishop a very focused opportunity to be both a creative and a critical reader; she was both in all her reading habits but studying her translations helps make her processes clearer. Reading, like writing, works with both surface and depth; Treseler's 'para-literary' (2019b) media expand the boundary of a Bishop poem outwards, whilst the process of reading simultaneously drives the poem more deeply to the internal. As Borges suggested in his preface to *Obra poética* :

> The taste of the apple (states Berkeley) lies in the contact of the fruit with the palate, not in the fruit itself; in a similar way (I would say), poetry lies in the meeting of poem and reader, not in the lines of symbols printed on the pages of a book (1964, 294)

Borges's understanding of the physicality of emotion enacted by reading echoes Bishop's enjoyment of the tangibility of her work, further discussed in the chapter on sensation.

The concept of framework extends beyond the book jacket into the poem itself. There is a notable difference between the appearance of a poem in a book versus a magazine. In Bishop's case, this is most clearly demonstrated by looking at the first publication of poems in in *The New Yorker*, and then their positioning in her own books. Note that although Bishop allowed a number of her poems to appear in anthologies,

she actively avoided being included in an anthology of 'just women', because 'literature is literature, no matter who produces it' (*OA* 549). An obvious difference between magazines and books is the paratext; poems published in magazines appear surrounded by other text, images and other mixed media, including advertisements. The individual poem carries both a title and the author's name, often at the end of the piece. This, together with the white space around the poem, frames the poem, presenting it as a complete entity on the page. All of Bishop's poems, even 'The Moose', appeared on a single page in *The New Yorker.* The exception to this is her prose story, 'In the Village' which, when it ran in the magazine, took up eight consecutive pages (December 19, 1953, 26–34), and was interspersed by cartoons and a poem by John Holmes. The prose-poem, 'Rainy Season: Sub-Tropics', ran in *The Kenyon Review* in November 1967, topped by Bishop's name, the title and then an illustration (similar to a woodcut) of the sea and what look like tree trunks. Each speaker of the poem is accompanied by an illustration of the animal, and the poem ends with another sketch, again like a woodcut, but this time showing what looks like a destroyed forest. (*The Kenyon Review*, 1967, 665–670). The reading experience of encountering a poem in a magazine is clearly different to that of encountering it in a book or anthology, where the paratext is strictly controlled by the author and does not disrupt or distract from the content of the poem. Disruption by the paratext was brought to the fore by the publication of 'Manuelzinho' in *The New Yorker* on the 26th May 1956. Bishop was surprised that the magazine accepted the poem, writing to May Swenson that '*The New Yorker* took a long, long poem—to my great surprise, it was such an impracticable shape for them' (*OA* 315). Not just 'length' but also 'shape'; again, Bishop's language is implicitly aware of the three-dimensional. Further, as Fiona Green notes, Bishop's

characterisation of the poem as 'impracticable' extends into a reading of the poem as 'the most untranslatable object, the most Brazilian thing she has made, and it is in that sense that she is surprised that it belongs in the *New Yorker'* (2012, 813). I discuss the 'untransablility' of poems further in my chapter on translation. 'Manuelzinho' is a poem Bishop wrote while living in Brazil with Lota de Macedo Soares; the poem stakes its place and voice in the explanatory note that appears below the title '*[Brazil. A friend of the writer is speaking.]*' (*P* 94). Consequently, the poem is commonly read as being spoken in Lota's voice, although there is nothing further in the text to specify this. Furthermore, the shadow of Lota has meant that the poem is usually read as being spoken by a female, although again, there is nothing further in the poem to specify this. The poem describes the relationship between the speaker and the gardener; the attitude is simultaneously sympathetic, amused and paternalistic (the latter indicated by the diminutive 'inho'). The impression left is one of tenderness as well as of an implicit acceptance of the class system described. How the poem was placed on the page of *The New Yorker* magazine concerned Bishop. The poem appeared on page 32; the facing page, 33, carried a cartoon of two wealthy ladies coming out of the theatre, signifying what Fiona Green describes as a 'certain kind of doublespeak that is characteristic of *The New Yorke*r' (Green, 2012, 805). Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell after the poem appeared, saying 'I am pleased you said you liked my "Manuelzinho". Somehow when he appeared just now, in *The New Yorker*, he seems more frivolous that I'd thought, but maybe that's just the slick, rich surroundings' (*OA* 320). As Joelle Biele notes:

> In the context of the drawings, the speaker of 'Manuelzinho' was very much one of the women in the drawings, more sympathetic because of Bishop's

> exhaustive detail but just as much a subject for humour as her incompetent gardener (*NYr* xxxix).

The poem's placement accentuated an uncomfortable position for Bishop; if the speaking voice was supposed to be Lota, it carried with it tones of racial and cultural superiority, as well as appropriation of the gardener's voice, complicating the reception of the poem by Brazilian readers.

Before returning to the placement of the poem on the page, it is worth exploring the sense of discomfort that Bishop felt over 'Manuelzinho' in *The New Yorker*. His 'frivolity' is a nod to knowing that Bishop's reception by Brazilian readers has not always been unanimously positive. Regina Przybycien helpfully outlines the varying critical response Bishop received in Brazil in 'Elizabeth Bishop: Poet or Character? The Reception of Bishop's work in The United States and in Brazil'. Przybycien highlights three points in Bishop's residence and career in Brazil that made the Brazilian media aware of her work. These are the publication of her translation of *The Diary of Helena Morley* in 1957, the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize in 1956, and the publication of 'On the Railroad Named Delight', a prose piece about Rio and Brazil, published in March 1965 in *The New York Times Magazine.* The first two generated largely positive readings, whilst the reception of the third was much more complicated. When reading 'On the Railroad Named Delight' (*Pr* 342–351), it is useful to know that in 1964, the Brazilian military staged a coup to overthrow the President João Goulart. This coup was supported by Carlos Lacerda, a close friend of Macedo Soares, (and by extension, of Bishop's), tainting by association Bishop's writing on Brazil with politics. The coup is only briefly mentioned in her article, but Lacerda appears a number of times. In a response to 'On the Railroad Named Delight', Bishop was accused by a

reporter from the *Correio de Manhã* of being a racist, an accusation she firmly rebutted. In the archives at Vassar, there are the drafts of the various responses that Bishop drew up (VC. 38.18), where she furiously describes the article as 'a weird and depressing performance. He has taken almost everything I said in almost exactly the opposite sense to that it which it was intended.' Her indignation centres around two points; first, as she points out, she had nothing to do with the images and captions that surrounded her text in *The New York Times*, which she says she did not like and wrote to complain about (VC 38.18). Just as with 'Manuelzinho' there is a sense of discomfort around the presentation of work that bridges two cultures. The second point is her 'reading' of an advert featuring a Negro cook kissing her white employer on the cheek in thanks for a new gas stove, with which she finished 'On the Railroad Named Delight'. This advert, says Bishop:

> is not utopian, socially speaking, and that the advertisement is silly—but could it have appeared on billboards, or in the newspapers, in Atlanta, Ga., or even in New York? In Rio, it went absolutely unremarked on, one way or the other. (*Pr* 351)

Bishop's reading of the advert is framed by her own racial perspective, rooted in North America, and at a disjunct with the reading that native Brazilians may have given both the advert and her identification with it. At the time, the polemic blew over, but as a result of these three events, it is, in Przybycien's words, 'ironical that the character Elizabeth Bishop … becomes famous in Brazil whilst the poet remains virtually unknown' (1998, 103). There has since been a Portuguese novel by Carmen de Oliveira that purports to tell the love story between Macedo Soares and Bishop, as well as the release in 2013 of a film, *Floras Raras* or *Reaching for the Moon* directed by the Brazilian Bruno Barretto. This disjunct between North and South America, and an English

speaking or Brazilian-Portuguese speaking appraisal of Bishop's works, reached its apogee in the polemic, reported by the BBC, around the 2020 Brazilian literature festival FLIP (International Literature Fesitval of Paraty). This was the moment chosen for the first major appraisal of Bishop's works in Brazil, as Bishop was the first foreign author to have been nominated to be the subject of the festival. However, her nomination caused a furore due to her political stance during her lifetime, as well as for her perceived colonial attitude to Brazil. In the event her nomination was quietly dropped. Thus, from the very first days of her poems being published in *The New Yorker*, readers and critics have tended to frame their perspective of Bishop's Brazil from an English speaking, North American perspective. Opinions on Bishop's Brazil from a Brazilian perspective have been slower to form, taking the same aspects of the paratext—adverts, photographs—and so on to shift the framing of Bishop's work and thus altering our perspectives and readings of her writing.

The positioning of 'Objects & Apparitions' within the first edition of *Geography III* is a different, but co-terminous example. Like many of the poems in *Geography III*, the length of 'Objects & Apparitions' is accentuated by the editorial choice to limit each page to five stanzas, so that the poem takes up three pages. This appears to have been a deliberate choice on the part of Bishop and her editors. Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell about her concerns about the length of *Geography III*, saying that she did not originally feel that was long enough, but that Robert Giroux disagreed (*WIA* 795). In the words of Lloyd Schwartz, Bishop was delighted with the 'little joke' (2014, 149) perpetrated on her readers, who, when turning the pages of *Objects & Apparitions*, would enjoy the juxtapositions between the concluding image of the poem—the boxes

of Joseph Cornell—and the notice of translation 'from the Spanish of Octavio Paz' (*P* 202) at the foot of the page. John Hollander called 'Objects & Apparitions' a 'wonderful translation … a string of boxed tercets' (1977 246), an observation that encapsulates how the rhythm and movement of the text on the page is tonally and visually set by the white space surrounding each tercets. The tension between constructing or breaking the ties between each internalised frame linking the stanzas of a poem is a theme in Bishop's original edition of *Geography III*. Schwartz recounts her initial intention to place 'One Art' at the end of *Geography III*; however, the deliberate placement of the poem low on the page and the number of pages of the book meant that the page would have to be turned to read the last stanza of the poem. This, says Schwartz, was 'unacceptable to Bishop. She felt the reader had to see the whole poem, on facing pages' (2014, 149). Contrast the treatment of 'In the Waiting Room', where the last six line stanza is broken so that the last four lines are presented over the turn of page 7 into page 8. The reader reaches 'Outside', turns the page, and literally steps over the threshold from the inner world of self-realisation into the waiting room, returning to the pivotal point of memory, 5 February 1918.

Page 7 Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,

Page 8 in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.

(Bishop 1976, *Geography III)*)

This is another moment when words become visible; the physicality of the reading experience is accentuated by these deliberate editorial choices. Consequently, the act of reading encourages an inner cognitive understanding of the sensations—memory, self-realisation—that the poem describes. Bishop revelled in the materiality of her books of poetry, her pleasure evident in her letter to Frani Blough Muser (the designer Cynthia Kraupat's mother): 'I think [*Geography III*] is extremely pretty-cloth cover, pages, everything, except for the fact that is glued, not sewn' (*OA* 610). Notice her preference for a sewn seam, one that, in my opinion, accentuates her appreciation of the production of a book as a work of art, emphasising the action of the hand over mechanics. Bishop said in a interview with Elizabeth Spires that she used a typewriter for prose, particularly letters, but for 'poetry I use a pen. About halfway through sometimes I'll type out a few lines to see how they look' (1978, 117). This again emphasises the materiality and the physicality of writing, a moment repeated in the action of the burin in 'Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', discussed in the next chapter.

In an interview with George Starbuck, Bishop relates how she originally placed Octavio Paz's name at the beginning of 'Objects & Apparitions' and then changed it to its position at the end of the poem, feeling that there were otherwise too many things suspended under the title, which already included the dedication to Joseph Cornell (Starbuck, 1977, 83). I discuss how Bishop viewed and used dedication and endnotes in more detail in a later chapter, pausing now to note that Bishop was sparing in her use of them. This reticence stems partly from her awareness of how dedications and endnotes significantly influence the reading experience, and partly because her default

position was that the poem should stand for itself on the page, with the reader needing no external information, except possibly a dictionary. The deliberate positioning of the endnote for 'Objects & Apparitions' is both a joke and a surprise, but it is also makes a wider point about how ekphrastic poetry is often a 'translation' of the visual across into the written, or a re-envisioning, a re-creation. For Bishop, translation was primarily an exercise carried out across language, but, like her poems and letters about art, it also enabled her to extend her thinking about the nature of poetry. Bishop was herself a translator in the traditional sense; she translated poems from Greek, French, Spanish and Portuguese into English. Of her own translation work, Bishop wrote in January 1964 to Anne Stevenson that:

> I don't think much of poetry translations and rarely attempt them,— just when I see a poem by someone I like that I think will go into English with less loss than usual. That means it isn't necessarily one of the poet's best poems. My translations are almost as literal as I can make them, […] (*PPL* 856–7).

In effect, her translating work was one of the tools (letter writing being another) that Bishop used to access the formative power of language when she found herself blocked in her own work. In her 1956 review of the selected writings of Jules Laforgue, 'The Manipulations of Mirrors', Bishop lampooned her own status as reviewer of a book of translated poetry, saying first that the review must declare the task of translation 'impossible', but then qualifies this with 'it is impossible to translate poetry, or perhaps only one aspect can be translated at a time, and each poem needs several translations' (*Pr* 270). Bishop praises the work of the translator—a Mr W. J. Smith—but finds him wanting in the loss of the 'quickness, the surprise, the new sub-acid flavor' (*Pr* 270), from the original to the translation. In these words I hear the contemporaneous echo of Bishop's evocation of the three ingredients she most admired in poetry, 'Accuracy,

Spontaneity, Mystery' (*Pr* 328). In both cases, Bishop quantifies her need for rhythm and pace in her poetic art, but her identification of a 'sub-acid flavor' speaks directly to the role of sensation in her poesis. It is as if Bishop is tasting the poetry as she reads it; the sharp delight of 'sub-acid' must surely lie somewhere mid-tongue just after first speaking the words and before a deeper realisation of what they may mean. In my chapter on translation, I discuss the process of dismantling and reassembling a poem to create a piece of work that is not identical to the original but rather analogous with it. This process illuminates some aspects of how Bishop worked with words in the construction of her poems. As a young poet, she became friends with Marianne Moore, whose friendship had a dual nature for Bishop. Moore was both friend and mentor to Bishop, although their disagreements over 'Roosters' in October 1940 saw a more confident Bishop claim her own voice. Shortly before this, in September 1940, Bishop wrote to Moore describing her own reflections on her poetry, saying:

> I have that continuous uncomfortable feeling of "things" in the head, like icebergs or rocks or awkwardly placed pieces of furniture. It's as if all the nouns were there but the verbs were lacking—[…] But you remember how Mallarmé said that poetry was made of words, not ideas— (*OA* 94).

Bishop's dismantling of language into its component parts is one small insight into her poetic process, explored in more depth in my chapter on sensation. 'Words, not ideas' is a fulcrum for Bishop's poetry, and how the sound of words is key. Whilst considering the impact of Mallarmé on Bishop, I read J. H. Prynne's 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', where he discusses Mallarmé amongst others. Prynne's exploration of a phonological analysis of poetic form is fascinating, but it is his comment that 'the poet works with mental ears' (2010, 128) that resonated strongly with my perception of Bishop's working practice. I have written more about this in 'Elizabeth Bishop and "a bad case

of the Threes"'. Here I want to point to how Bishop's deliberate manipulation of language, the sorting of the "things" in the head into poetic form, involves a vibrant, deep connection to poets of the past, as well as requiring the reader to be alert to how Bishop's poetry sounds when read aloud. Recall the words of Gerald Manley Hopkins, one of Bishop's great influences, who wrote to Robert Bridges that one should not only read with the eyes but 'take breath and read it with the ears' (1935, 79). 'Reading with the ears' is in many ways an apt description of Bishop's aptitude in spoken Portuguese. In an interview from 1966 whilst living in Brazil, Bishop commented that her ability to speak Portuguese was like that of 'a dog: I understand everything that's said to me, but I don't speak it very well' (Brown 1966, 19). For all of Bishop's mastery of foreign languages, it is clear that while she was comfortable reading in other languages, she preferred to speak English whenever possible, reserving a particular dislike for speaking French (*Pr* 430). This disconnect between the written and the spoken strikes a chord with her dislike of, or inability to, perform, which first became visible at Vassar when she was struck down by stage fright (Fountain and Brazeau, 1994, 39). Both speech and recital have a performative element to them; speaking in a foreign language is a public act of communication, where success is measured by the audience's comprehension.

Bishop's arrival in Brazil in 1951 and the consequent publication of 'Arrival at Santos' in *The New Yorker* 1952 marked a turning point in her life. The poem straddles a period of change in more ways than one; it was the penultimate poem Bishop choose for *Poems* (1955), and the first poem to feature in *Questions of Travel* (1965). The traveller has come to another home – even if she does not yet know it. Bishop may

have travelled alone but the poem co-opts a fellow passenger, Miss Breen, to refract the experience of travel and arrival. Miss Breen is revealed to be 'about seventy, / a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall, / with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression' (*P* 87). We are not told why Miss Breen is travelling or where she is destined for, but aged seventy, single and on her own, Miss Breen is more a figure of the capable, intrepid female traveller than Bishop herself. Anonymity is one of the gifts the traveller can expect to find on the journey, but not one enjoyed by Miss Breen. Only the speaker within the poem is privileged to remain anonymous. The poem ends on a note of departure; the speaker is 'driving to the interior' (*P* 88), a literal prefiguring of the work that Bishop would achieve in Brazil, so much of which drew on memories of her childhood in Nova Scotia.

Retrospect and memory are keystones of many of Bishop's poems. As Linda Anderson notes, what Bishop achieves by her conception of '*experience-time*' (*PPL* 659)—something she first outlined in her early essay 'Time's Andromedas'—and her summation that poetic theory is something only ever applicable in in retrospect (*PPL* 687), is the ability to return to the "sense of process and potential, and the impossibility, when she is writing, of situating herself anywhere else but on the inside; she cannot thus have an 'overview'' (2015, 5). Returning to the structure of 'Arrival at Santos', it is clear that Bishop moves from a general outlook over an approaching shoreline, 'Here is a coast; here is a harbor;' all the way through the detail of the disembarkation, the customs officers and their stamps, right into 'driving to the interior' (*P* 88). Bishop's poetry works with many levels of depth and surface, both visually as well as in language. As Anderson notes, her notebooks contain 'patterns and

codes and … lists of words in her notebook' (2015, 4), all part of her process of writing and structuring a poem. Thus the interior pictured in 'Arrival at Santos' is not merely a geographical one, indicative of the vastness of Brazilian terrain, but also one that hints at process, emotion and memory. In some ways, it is the inverse mirror to Bishop's preoccupation with how the poem looks in its frame on the page, or how her book feels in the hand. Bishop finds ease in the ability to stay alert to difference and ambiguity, an ability that comes from adopting a position both interior and exterior, surface and depth, something that comes into play very strongly in her final book of poems, *Geography III*. Bishop's poetry is, to paraphrase her words on Gerald Manley Hopkins, the poetry of a mind thinking, not of a thought; she grew to understand how to manipulate her position and that of the reader so that a position of interiority could be synchronous with that of exteriority. Her appetite as a voracious reader gave her access to many of the tools of her trade which became that of poet; but her complex and extensive engagement with other forms of writing and other art forms, including the visual arts, enhanced and informed her process of writing.

Chapter II: Observation and the Poetics of Making Visible

'Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!' ('Poem', *P* 196)

Bishop's ability to work simultaneously within surface and depth is deeply rooted in the strength and subtlety of her observations. Observation is often allied with recognition and memory, the two emotions that Bishop evokes most strongly in her poem, 'Poem', one of the few actual ekphrastic poems that she published. This chapter is concerned with ideas around Bishop's observational practice, which necessarily includes aspects of ekphrasis in the consideration of poems such as 'Poem', as well as ideas directly linked to the practice of visual art. I follow Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis as being '*the verbal representation of graphic representation*' (1991, 299); by this definition, Bishop published very few actual ekphrastic poems, some of which could be considered notionally ekphrastic, according to Hollander's distinction between fictional and real works of art (1995, 4). I also recall Peggy Samuels' identification of Bishop's poetics as being 'very much about the touch of the materials of the mind and world inside the materiality of verse' (2010, 11). Samuels goes on to explore Bishop's borrowings from visual art and her work with the materiality of surface and depth (in, for example, the influence of artists such as Klee, Schwitters and Cornell), while I emphasise Bishop's action of observation and the questions that arise from the differences and similarities between objects and things. However, in this consideration of the poetics of observation, it is useful to hold in mind Samuels' evocation of the touch of materials one against the other, both in relation to aspects of cognition and as evoked in Bishop's verse.

At the same time as the publication of *The Complete Poems* in May 1969, Elizabeth Bishop gave a reading at the Guggenheim Museum where Robert Lowell introduced her as the 'famous eye' (*PPL* 915). Shortly afterwards, John Ashbery published his perceptive and enthusiastic review of *The Complete Poems*, in which he notes that the 'mysteries' described in the final line of 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', '-and looked and looked our infant sight away' (*P* 58), have 'very much to do with the nature of Miss Bishop's poetry' (1969, 204). As both Lowell and Ashbery imply in their appreciation of Bishop's work, the action of 'looking' is key to the construction of her poetry. Ashbery goes on to comment that 'looking, or attention, will absorb the object with its meaning', suggesting a reciprocal communication between the observed and the observer. It is in this same review that Ashbery coins Bishop's quality of 'thingness', her poetry evoking the sensation in the reader of being 'part thing and part thought' (202). Observation, 'thingness' and objects are woven together to create the associations by which Bishop creates her own interpretation of the lyric form as being one that simultaneously inhabits the interior of the mind whilst touching the materiality of the world. In this chapter, I explore observation and 'thingness', whilst objects feature more specifically in the analysis on house and home. I want to return momentarily to the scene at the Guggenheim, where Bishop is said to have replied to Lowell with a characteristically humorous comment, one that also emphasises the connection with the corporeal. She apparently remarked that the '"famous eye" will now put on her glasses' (*PPL* 915), a throwaway line that emphasises the material functionality of observation, tempered by a light, self-deprecating good humour.

Bishop's interest in observation elicits a rich response from a wide field of readers. As Bishop's habit was to observe and render into poetry that which she experienced—physically, mentally, emotionally—so readers respond empathetically from a multitude of disciplines and directions. Poetic form, religion, gender, travel, art, dreams, psychoanalysis, politics, language, translation—these are all areas that Bishop sparks a response in. This range of interest and empathy is striking not least because Bishop was what I think of as a 'quiet' poet; someone who despite success avoided attention, and who opposed the boundaries of classification in a number of areas, primarily gender and travel, resisting the urge to join her contemporaries in the move towards confessional poetry in her published works. A quiet poet and one who published a small body of work in her lifetime—no more than 100 poems (excluding her translations), mostly contained in five major collections of poetry; *North & South* (1946), *Poems: North & South - A Cold Spring* (1955), *Questions of Travel* (1965), *The Complete Poems* (1969) and *Geography III* (1976). As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, this volume of published work and a resistance towards classification raises questions of the functionality of repetition, and, to borrow Housman's phrase, the 'vibration' (1933, 12) of emotion between poet and reader. As I have come to know Bishop's work more deeply and begun to read around the variety of responses to her poetry, I was struck by how many authors seemed to find a place for themselves in her work. Even those, who, like Maureen McLane, admit to finding Bishop sometimes 'dull' (2012 45), find a resonance within her works. Bishop is sometimes called 'a poet's poet's poet'—a tag attributed to John Ashbery and one which hints at the hidden interiority within her world of described observations, in which readers find their space. Why—and how—does Bishop elicit such a range of responses? One aspect is her

familiarity with ambivalence and uncertainty; Bishop is never absolute. Colm Tóibín writes brilliantly on this feature in his *On Elizabeth Bishop,* exploring the ways in which Bishop's ambivalence functions to form a pact with the reader, and thus encourages the acceptance of difference. Another feature is Bishop's ability to hold silence or to not say; as Robert Lowell wrote in 'For Elizabeth Bishop 4',

> […] Do
>
> you still hang your words in air, ten years
>
> unfinished, glued to your notice board, with gaps
>
> or empties for the unimaginable phrase—
>
> unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect? (*History* 198)

Lowell encapsulates Bishop's ability to hold back, her quest to use the best possible phrase in her poetics, as he also captures the materiality of her process, the physical and tactile nature of words as they hang pinned to her notice board. Accuracy in observation as in life is essential; writing in 1964 to Lowell, Bishop commented

> My passion for accuracy may strike you as old-maidish—but since we do float on an unknown sea I think we should examine the other floating things that come our way very carefully; who's to know what might depend on it? So I'm enclosing a clipping about racoons. (*WIA* 553)

Just as with her comment about the famous eye putting on her glasses, Bishop tempers her avowed affirmation of accuracy and observation with a humorous but material aside; the change in tempo from morality to racoons jolts the reader into awareness. Note how the racoon goes by way of a clipping, a selection of words carefully chosen and kept, a physical enactment of the bridge between the processes of observation, emotion and cognition that Bishop writes about. In fact, the racoon clipping is a bridge within a bridge, as the letter itself spans a literal and temporal distance between the two correspondents. When Bishop wrote to Lowell about her 'passion for accuracy',

she framed it as a life raft enabling her to navigate—and thrive—on the sea. It is a life raft composed of accurate words, demonstrating that for Bishop, the act of writing presented some sort of saving grace. Of course, as a traveller in the 1930s just before air travel became commonplace, Bishop was profoundly at ease with sea travel; water, floatation and the reflexive properties of the surface of water are all themes that work their way into her poetry. Water presents a very instructive and important surface material to Bishop, as Peggy Samuels explores in *Deep Skin* (2010 29–55). Bishop's skilled observational accuracy, alongside her appreciation of the arts and her mastery of the tools of language, sets the scene for how the act of observation informs her poetics. How do these disparate skills conjoin to enable Bishop to create a poetic structure so that the poem is itself in some way extended beyond the page? Does the poem become, for Bishop and her reader, an object that is inhabitable, an interior refuge? Recall the words of 'Object & Apparitions' where Cornell is lauded for creating art in which 'my words became visible for a moment' (*P* 202), or the painting in 'Poem' which captures 'Life and the memory of it cramped, / dim, on a piece of Bristol board'(*P* 197). It was David Kalstone who first identified that for Bishop 'objects hold radiant interest' (2001, 220) because they act as repositories for emotion for her. Ekphrastic analysis can help investigate the properties of objects, particularly that around the art of prosopopoeia, defined by Heffernan as the 'rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object'(1991 302). There are a wide variety of objects that speak out in Bishop's poems; ranging from Crusoe's knife (considered in more depth in chapter VI), the painting in 'Poem' that I go on to discuss here, and the carving of the cockerel in 'Roosters', noted in chapter IV. Objects play on oppositional ideas of interiority and exteriority; they house and expose emotion, they are silenced and give voice.

Yet this is not to suggest that Bishop turns her poems into symbols. Thom Gunn gives a helpful reading of the difference between object and symbols in Bishop's poetry. Gunn begins with Kalstone's observation, and then extends it, writing that:

> since they [objects] had "radiant interest" in themselves, there was no temptation to turn them into symbols, filling up with meaning. And so we come, by contraries, to Robert Lowell, one of whose great talents was indeed that of loading the physical world with his own meanings. (1993 81)

Unlike Lowell, Bishop did not render the observed object into a symbol; rather she appreciated the properties of objects that make them independent entities. Aspects of André Breton's surrealist concept of '*Poème-Objet*', literally a fusion of the two notions, are useful to pause over and consider. In the 'Surrealist Situation of the Object' (1935), André Breton describes how

> at the present time there is no fundamental difference between the ambitions of a poem by Paul Éluard … and the ambitions of a canvas by Max Ernst, … Liberated from the need to reproduce forms essentially taken from the outer world, painting benefits in its turn from the only external element that no art can get along without, namely inner presentation, *the image present to the mind.* It confronts this inner representation with that of the concrete forms of the real world, seeks in turn, as it has done with Picasso, to seize the object in its generality, and as soon as it has succeeded in so doing, tries to take that supreme step which is the poetic step par excellence: excluding (relatively) the external object as such and considering nature only in its relationship with inner world of consciousness. (1972, 260)

This is poetry playing an influence on art in depicting the 'inner world of consciousness' through the object captured on the canvas. There are, as I will later demonstrate, echoes of these thoughts in Bishop's 'The Monument' and in 'Objects & Apparitions', but I am not suggesting that Bishop performs this surrealist move in her poetry. The idea of a poem-object is most useful in holding up the idea of an '*image present to the mind*' in Bishop's work and reinforcing an appreciation of the process of Bishop's poetics. Her creativity had a very material, tangible aspect; as she cut and pasted

articles, words, translations, drawings and so on into her notebooks, so, too, did she find a creative release in painting and making her own shadow boxes in the style of Joseph Cornell. It is the relationship of the object with the 'inner world of consciousness' that Bishop inherits from Breton and transposes to her poetry. This consciousness is both hers and the readers'. There is a corresponding creative release enacted in the materiality of books and their collection in libraries, captured in the writings of, for example, *Packing my Library: An Elegy and Ten Digressions* by Alberto Manguel, a response to Walter Benjamin's original essay 'Unpacking my Library: A Speech on Collecting'. Whatever the impulse behind Bishop's creativity, the outcome of her overriding interest in observation did lead her to produce work that corresponds with the original (now defunct) definition of the noun, 'object', in the OED: ‘Originally: something placed before or presented to the eyes or other senses. Now (more generally): a material thing that can be seen and touched’. In the context of Bishop's observation skills, the range of possibilities suggested by including not only the eyes but ‘other senses’ is a necessary corrective to the emphasis on the eye; no single sense operates in a vacuum. Bishop's poetry functions within multiple sensory dimensions—as do objects—and in so doing, a poem becomes not just a repository of human thought and emotion, but also a sanctuary accessible to both Bishop and the reader.

In an interview with Alexandra Johnson in 1978, Bishop acknowledged her

> great interest and respect, if you like, for what people call ordinary things. I am very visually minded and mooses and filling stations aren’t necessarily commonplace to me. Observation is a great joy. Some critics charge that I’m merely a descriptive poet which I don’t think is such a bad thing at all if you’ve done it well. (1978, 100–101)

This concept of incorporating the observation of the every-day object is familiar to us from our vantage point in the twenty-first century. In her evocation of the joy of observation as a functional part of her poesis, Bishop was building on an inheritance that stretches at least to the Romantics poets, and further. In 'Tintern Abbey' Wordsworth describes the poet as being given the gift of a 'blessed mood' in which

> […] we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul,
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (1994 121)

Here Wordsworth is suggesting a temporary cessation of physical observation, allowing the poet—and, by extension, the reader—to experience something deeper than the surface of the observed life, something almost spiritual. Writing to Anne Stevenson in January 1964, Bishop described her admiration for what she called Darwin's 'endless heroic *observations*', imagining the process of creative flow that he might have experienced, suggesting that 'what one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration' (*PPL* 861). Bishop's 'self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration' is an echo of the ability to 'see into the life of things' that Wordsworth suggests is possible with the cessation of physical observation. For both poets there is a paradox in observation which involves going beyond the immediate physical sense of the eye, to enable an exploration of the depths in the 'I', although for Bishop, the scale of observation is different to Wordsworth's worldview. Bishop once described herself to Lowell as a 'minor female Wordsworth' (*OA* 222), a view rehabilitated from

connotations of inferiority by critics such as Susan Rosenbaum (2005) who repositions 'minor' as a celebration of the small and miniature rather than a derogatory comparison of ability. Randall Jarrell's review of *North & South* continues the vibrations linking accuracy, observation and the ability to see beyond the surface. He wrote that all of Bishop's

> poems have written underneath, *I have seen it*. She is morally so attractive in poems like 'The Fish' or 'Roosters', because she understands so well that the wickedness and confusion of the age can explain and extenuate other people's wickedness and confusion, but not, for you, your own. (1946 81)

A part of Bishop's poetic inheritance is owed to the Romantic poets, but she resists classification as a 'Romantic' poet of her generation. In part this resistance stems from the way in which she treats the landscape and objects around her; these retain—or lose—their objective 'radiant interest' independent of her. Crusoe's knife is a case in point; consigned to the museum it will in some way live on, but removed from the island it has also died (*P* 186). As Eavan Boland wrote, Bishop:

> never suggests that her fishhouses and hymn-loving seals, her Nova Scotia kitchens and Tantramar marshes depend on her…Her earth is not represented as a dramatized fragment of her consciousness. Instead, she celebrates the separate-ness, the awesome detachment of the exterior universe. Whatever, I do, her poem whispers, 'The Bight' will continue—"awful but cheerful"'. (1988 77)

Bishop resisted the impulse to shape the external world she observed, a resistance that is both a strength and a weakness. It was Marianne Moore who crystallised this duality in a letter to Bishop in 1938. Moore's comment arose after reading what she called Bishop's 'prison meditations', the prose piece that became 'In Prison'. Moore wrote that 'I can't help wishing you would sometime in some way risk some unprotected profundity of experience; or […] some characteristic private defiance of the significantly

detestable' (1998 391). In part Moore is reacting to Bishop's employment of observation as an act of self-preservation. Similarly, Bishop's unwillingness to fully engage in some of the horrors she witnessed as she travelled causes readers to question the depth of her responses. In 'A Curious Cat', Jonathan Ellis explores Bishop's detachment in reference to her travels in Spain in 1936, examining Bishop's lack of formalised response to what she witnessed of the Spanish Civil War. Ellis concludes that Bishop resisted formalising her political opinion on the Civil War, preferring to settle into ambivalence. Only much later in her poetic life did Bishop write and publish directly political poems such as 'Visits to St. Elizabeths', 'From Trollope's Journal', both dating from the 1950s, or 'Pink Dog' (*P* 212-213), dated 1979, and written in reaction to conditions of poverty in Rio de Janeiro and the Brazilian government's suggested solution.

Seamus Heaney provides a helpful insight into Bishop's use of observation, categorising it as a 'discipline' to which Bishop subjected herself, so that 'observation was her habit, as much in the monastic, Hopkinsian sense as in its commoner meaning of a customarily repeated action' (1988 102). Heaney's instinctive understanding that, for Bishop, observation is as much of an article of faith as it is a reflex action, resonates strongly with the letter Bishop wrote to Anne Stevenson in January 1964, in which she expands on the motivation for her poetry (*PPL* 855-865). This letter—sometimes described by readers as the 'Darwin letter'—was written in response to a series of questions from Stevenson, who was Bishop's first biographer. It marks a moment of unusual public openness for Bishop. It is here that Bishop details her admiration for Darwin's quality of observation, quoted above. Just before this moment, Bishop makes

a comment that she admires both Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence for their 'living in the real world and knowing how to do things' and then goes on to expand her thoughts towards writers she does not admire, reasoning that it is a 'lack of observation' (amongst other negative attributes) that she dislikes. Bishop writes that a ‘lack of observation seems to me to be one of the cardinal sins, responsible for so much cruelty, ugliness, dullness, bad manners – and general unhappiness, too’ (*PPL* 860). Under these terms, the act of observation is for Bishop both an absolute requirement in order to find the capacity and knowledge of how to live in the 'real world', as well as being embedded within a personal moral code, carrying with it a responsibility towards the subject of her observations. Bishop elucidates further, saying ‘what I mean is of course more than “observation” […] It is a living in reality that works both ways, the non-intellectual sources of wisdom and sympathy’ (*PPL* 860). Here again Bishop gives her readers a glimpse of the depth and multiplicity of currents of thought, sensation, morality, that exist in her conception of what observation does, and what it means to observe. The letter then goes on to touch on what Bishop calls the 'always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life' where the observer and the observed can, in moments of communion, 'catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important’ (*PPL* 861). Surrealist thought and influence is marked in Bishop's early poetry, notably in poems such as ‘The Weed’, ‘Sleeping Standing Up’, ‘Sleeping on the Ceiling’, ‘Paris, 7 A.M’, where she drew extensively on dream imagery or the liminal time between sleep and awakening. As Peggy Samuels reminds us, by the late 1930s Bishop had altered her 'relationship with Surrealism' (2014 170) to focus on the observation of real life. Nonetheless, Bishop's acknowledgement of the potential clarity afforded by glimpses of 'peripheral vision' is

pertinent throughout her writing; she is quietly aware that the terms for the creation of a successful poem based on observation cannot solely rely on the 'eye' or the 'I'. All sensations are needed for effective and perceptive observation, and observation is a two-way process between the observed and the observer. Time also has a crucial role to play in Bishop's observational practice. Kalstone identifies 'Anaphora', the poem that ends *North & South*, as a kind of '*ars poetica*' for her future work, nominally because it is also the point at which 'observation is indissolubly linked to memory' (2001 96). I suggest that this moment comes earlier in her work, with the publication in 1938 of 'Quai d'Orléans'. As I discuss in chapter III, this poem, despite its imperfections, grapples with ideas of memory and observation, some of which remain unresolvable in the poem. It seems to me that Bishop, from a young age, studies memory and the function of memory, with an awareness of the uncomfortable reality that, despite a human desire for reliability and absolutism, memory is neither. The ambivalence of memory can be both attractive as it can also be threatening (recall the Foster letters). Like dreams, memory adds a 'peripheral' dimension to an understanding of what a 'living in reality' might mean. As Bishop states in her letter, wisdom and sympathy are necessary in the transformation of the mundane into poetry, but it is observation that is key in enabling Bishop to extend her work into the sometimes uncomfortable arena of a self observed or remembered.

<u>Observation: 'Imagination pressing back against reality'</u>

Observation is an action fundamentally linked to social codes or habit. The primary definition of 'observation' (2004) in the OED is that of 'senses relating to the

observance of custom, duty, etc….'. When the 'famous eye' performed the ritual of reaching for her glasses, she enacted both the primary and secondary definition of observation, conjoining ritual with a sense of 'taking notice', which is both an action and a condition. For Bishop, there is a sense that an ability to be acutely perceptive conjoined with the condition of observation reinforced the loneliness that she purported to feel. In 1957 Lowell recalls her saying to him 'when you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived', though he adds the caveat that 'probably you forget, and anyway all that is mercifully changed and all has come right since you found Lota' (*WIA* 225). Despite her extensive circle of friends and the support of her lovers, particularly Lota de Macedo Soares and Alice Methfessel, loneliness—being both in lack of company and being alone—is an emotion that Bishop felt in differing degrees throughout her life. Perhaps this condition was one of the paradoxes set by the terms of Bishop's conditions for successful observation; although this depends on a 'living in reality' it also creates—or demands—a loneliness. This loneliness is both loosely Romantic as in the idea of finding solitude in nature, but also contemporary, in the sense of a being seeking amongst the depths to find a single unified self. For Bishop, the ability to write was crucial to her capacity to withstand loneliness and to fashion a coherent self-hood. However, it was not always writing in the form of poetry that Bishop chose; prose, letters, notebooks and translations all served her creative spirit, and supported psychological, physical and emotional health. Seamus Heaney makes a similar point in his opening essay on the 'why' of poetry in *The Redress of Poetry*. Heaney writes that '"The nobility of poetry", says Wallace Stevens, "is a violence from within that protects us from a violence without." It is the imagination pressing back against the pressures of reality' (1995 1). Bishop admired

Stevens, calling him one of the American 'greats' (*OA* 596), despite finding many 'rough spots' (*OA* 48) in *Owl's Clove*r, assessing and praising it as a book that is 'such a display of ideas at work' (*OA* 48). I want to pause on the words that Heaney chose to quote from Wallace Stevens, his formulation of a 'violence within' protecting from a 'violence without', and then his own conclusion that this represents 'imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality'. Bishop's last book, *Geography III,* is, amongst other things, a collection of poems that represent the success of the imagination pressing back against reality. Here the reader will find 'In the Waiting Room', 'Crusoe in England', 'The Moose', 'One Art', and 'The End of March', many of them dealing with loss or alteration, and each one of them an example of Heaney's observation. However, it is 'Poem' (also in *Geography III*) that I find captivating in the context of the imagination pushing back against reality.

'Poem' is one of Bishop's few actual ekphrastic poems, a quiet, calm, poem ostensibly about a small painting done by her uncle George Hutchison, but in fact a poem that encapsulates major themes about the ontology of painting as well as the psychology of being. The first lines of the poem, 'About the size of an old-style dollar bill / American or Canadian,' (*P* 196) creates an immediate framework for the reader viewer; this piece of art is probably only about 7 inches by 3, with its geographical roots in North America. The poem goes on to explore questions of value and worth; this painting has 'never earned any money in its life'. The theme of the value ascribed to art is woven throughout the poem; the painting comes with an inherited sense of family value as it was done by 'Uncle George' who was a Royal Academician and thus someone who had achieved ability and status in the art world. Questions of money, the value of

art; these all become intermixed by memory, trade, the skill of the craftsman, the usefulness of the painting to the current owner.

Bishop moves onto the next verse with apparent certainty; 'It must be Nova Scotia;' but by the end of the verse, certainty has given way to a fruitful ambiguity in the quality of what is observed. This second verse is almost an exegesis of the painting itself; it is described in such closely observed detail that the reader can see and feel the subject portrayed; yet by participating in the observation, questions of time, and memory begin to play in the detail. For example, about half way through the verse Bishop zooms into the detail of the painting. The eye of the observer has moved past the houses, registered the steeple, elms and hills in the distance, and noted the cows and geese in the foreground. Then

> Up closer, a wild iris, white and yellow,
> fresh-squiggled from the tube.
> The air is fresh and cold; cold early spring
> clear as gray grass; a half inch of blue sky
> below the steel-gray storm clouds.
> (They were the artist's speciality.)
> A specklike bird is flying to the left.
> Or is it a flyspeck looking like a bird?
>
> (*P* 196)

The materiality of the paint is very pertinent here; the iris is both clear to the eye but also raised to the touch. The next lines reinforce the physicality of looking; the skin is touched by the air and cold. Where the verse began with certainty it ends in ambiguity; the bird is entirely open to interpretation and the stilled movement of the flying bird is as old as art itself in its presentation of movement rendered static. The poem moves

on into the next verse through waves of identification playing against uncertain memory; we are told that the poet 'almost remembers the farmer's name', and we wonder if we are —or not—looking at Miss Gillespie's house? Time then marks a pivot point for the poet and the reader;

> Those particular geese and cows
> are naturally before my time.

This is the moment when the poem begins to broaden, working hard to achieve what Heaney termed 'imagination pressing back against the pressure of reality'. Thus far, in the poem, the process has been reversed. First two moments of reality, that of the scene as captured by Uncle George, and the action of observation of the painting by the poet, conjoin to form a work that the reader has to use their imagination to participate in. Then the reality—for the poet—comes into play. The poet and the artist are separated by time; they view the same scene but not together.

> Our visions coincided—"visions" is
> too serious a word—our looks, two looks:
> art "copying form life" and life itself,
> life and the memory of it so compressed
> they've turned into each other. Which is which?
> Life and the memory of it cramped,
> dim, on a piece of Bristol board,
>
> (*P* 198)

There is no pat answer to 'Which is which?'; the poem captures the processes of the moment when the imagination swells to contain the pressures of reality but does not seek to give absolute answers to any of the major questions of time, value, memory or art that the poem describes. There is some sense of comfort in the closing lines, where

Bishop writes of 'our earthly trust' and of our 'abidance', words that are infused with the strength of the continuity of nature. However, even nature is not immune to the pressure of reality; the poem ends describing the 'yet-to-be-dismantled elms' that the artist saw standing and Bishop knows and remembers will be cut down.

Where 'Poem' represents Bishop working at the height of her abilities, an earlier poem, 'The Monument', demonstrates many of the same concerns but without the same polish. 'The Monument' is another ekphrastic poem dating from the end of the 1930s, partially inspired by inspired by the frottages (wood rubbings) of Max Ernst. Naturally, being a poem, the reader has only—in Breton's words—the '*image present to the mind*'. The poem reads as an extended commentary on the act of observation, interspersing a descriptive account of the monument made 'of wood / built somewhat like a box' with questions from an onlooker about the form and function of the monument. We are told that the monument may exist because an 'artist-prince / might have wanted to build a monument / to mark a tomb or boundary' (*P* 26). There is no certainty as to what the monument is; it is described as 'an artifact / of wood' or 'an object' whose structure 'may be solid, may be hollow'. As such, one of the questions that the poem posits is that of the capacity of verse to hold the subjectivity of the poet. The poem moves towards its conclusion, which reads

> It is the beginning of a painting,
> a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument,
> and all of wood. Watch it closely.
> (*P* 27)

It almost seems as though Bishop settled on the final lines of the poem first. As Jonathan Ellis informs us, the notebook Bishop took to France at the time (1930s), now held at Vassar, contains a sketch of what look like boxes at sea. Ellis quotes from the

notebook (Vassar 75, 4A: 100) '"Take a frottage of this sea," Bishop reminds herself above the drawing' (Elllis, 2006, 67), adding a draft of the lines that will become the closing verse of 'The Monument'. As Ellis notes, citing Costello:

> the inscription on Bishop's monument "does not seek to aggrandize as Ozymandias had ("Look on my Works, ye Mighty and despair!"), or to mystify in Keatsian tautlogy ("Beauty truth, truth beauty") but merely to cherish and commemorate."' (Costello 1991, 219, cited in Ellis 2006, 71)

In this statement, Costello and Ellis usefully bring together two of the major ekphrastic poems that 'The Monument' in dialogue with, as well as providing an insight into Bishop's process. There is no indication on the finished poem—no dedication or epigraph—from Bishop that indicates that she is formulating a reply to either to Shelley or Keats, allowing her readers to find their own way there.

The conversation with ekphrasis is a quiet one, and it builds on textures other than words. Recall that the poem opens with a question, followed by an answer that corrects the terms of description even as they are spoken:

> Now can you see the monument? It is of wood
> built somewhat like a box. No. Built
> like several boxes in descending sizes
> one above the other.
> (*P* 25)

The effect of opening with a question is to alert the reader to follow the image as it is written on the page simultaneously building an image in the mind's eye. To see is the key action the poem wants to awaken in the reader. Wood, its grain and texture, runs throughout the poem; many of the observations are rooted in these qualities. Concurrently, the poem explores key elements of observation, including perspective, distance and detail, and, as we saw in 'Poem' the requirement of the participation of the other senses to work with observation to create an understanding of an imagined

object that can hold a personal subjectivity. Unlike 'Poem', 'The Monument' is less polished as it moves through these stages. In the fourth line, the reader is told that the boxes 'are turned half-way round so that / its corners point towards the sides' (*P* 25); this is an image that I find hard to imagine although it is possible to draw it on paper and thus visualise. Then the view telescopes the detail; the reader moves from it being ‘of wood’ to a detailed description of the topmost cube, on which there is:

> […] set
> a sort of fleur-de-lys of weathered wood,
> long petals of board, pieced with odd holes,
> (*P* 25)

Here is one example of the attempt to bring to the fore the grain and texture of the wood, which in turn begins to awaken the reader's awareness of the tactile nature of observation as well as to question ideas of perspective and distance. The reader is then made aware of how perspective alters that which is observed:

> The view is geared
> (that is, the view’s perspective)
> so low there is no “far away,”
> and we are far away within the view.
> (*P* 25)

The way that Bishop plays with ideas of perspective and the positioning of the subject as both in and out of the view makes them a precursor to the realisation in 'Poem' of the imagination pushing back against reality, which begins with 'Our visions coincided'. This moment in 'The Monument' is not realised but the poem demonstrates many of the structural processes on which Bishop could later build a poem such as 'Poem'. In 'The Monument', the poem moves on to muse about what may be held within the body of the monument before opening into dialogue between two voices, raising its final questions on the relevance of art. In 'The Monument,' the opening question functions

as a step over which the reader must pass, by obliging us to attempt to fashion a mental vision of what is described on the page. The reader is then conducted through a tour of some of the defining points of observation, much as an artist creates and frames a painting to enhance or challenge the view captured within. There is a movement from a general to detailed description, an awareness of the potentially deceptive nature of perspective, the beginnings of a realisation of the tactile nature of this piece of art, the introduction of another voice to complicate or deepen the view described and an awareness of history and memory embedded in the object observed. Nonetheless, the poem ends with a moment of implied change: change we must be ready to observe.

'The Monument' is rich in the detail of the multiple aspects that conjoin to function as observation. Bishop's final instruction to her readers to 'Watch it closely' awakens the possibility that observing an object does not have merely pictorial results but is also key to resolving the 'problem of depicting a mind thinking, so that the idea is not separated from the act of experiencing it' (*PPL* 666). This expression originates from Bishop's essay 'Gerard Manley Hopkins—Notes on Timing in His Poetry'. In this essay, she explores Hopkins's use of sprung rhythm and the effect it has on the 'timing' of his poetry; she writes with the perspicacity that stems from her extraordinary engagement with, and enjoyment of, Hopkins' poetry. As Bishop notes, one of the effects of sprung rhythm is to create what she terms

> the possibility of *hangers* or *outriders*: unaccented syllables added to foot and not counting in the scansion—placed in such a way that the ear recognizes them as such and admits them, so to speak, under the surface of the real meter. *(PPL* 662)

Surface and depth in the form and function of sprung rhythm: this is one of the striking aspects of Bishop's reading of Hopkins'. She goes on to quote from 'Windhover' to make her point. The result, she says, is a poetic:

> timing and tuning of sense and syllable [that] is so accurate that it is reminiscent of the caprice of a perfectly trained acrobat: falling through the air gracefully to snatch his partner's ankles he can yet, within the fall, afford an extra turn and flourish, in safety, without spoiling the form of his flight. (*PPL*, 663)

Note her subtle understanding of the further interiority of a specific movement; the acrobat turns and flourishes 'within' the fall, while still completing his flight. I suggest that Bishop's treatment of the observed subject we see in poems such as 'The Monument' has a similar effect to Hopkins' use of sprung rhythm. Observation is the tool she uses to capture the moment when the acrobat turns, performs a flourish, and then catches his partner's ankle. Returning to 'The Monument', it is the scrupulous, artistic observation of the wood body of the 'artifact' of the monument that provides the material context of the poem. The qualities of wood pervade the poem. It is the material from which the artefact is made, and it is the suggested geographical (and physical) boundaries and frame of the poem. This is implied in line 24 where we are told:

> A sea of narrow, horizontal boards
> lies out behind our lonely monument,
> (*P* 25, lines 24, 25)

Five lines later, this is then challenged by a questioning voice, seeking an interpretation of the scene, asking:

> "Why does that strange sea make no sound?"
> Is it because we're far away?
> Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor,
> Or in Mongolia?"
> (*P* 25, lines 31–34)

The challenge posed by the interlocutor enables the poem to move beyond the merely descriptive. Simultaneously, the attributes of wood are extended beyond the physical reality of the artefact and the reader is guided to an awareness of a duality of perspective, one being descriptive, the other held in the voice of the interlocutor, of the monument. The reader-viewer's eyes are turned, and travel with the questioning voice to look over:

> "But that queer sea looks made of wood,
> half-shining, like a driftwood sea.
> And the sky looks wooden, grained with cloud.
> It's like a stage-set; it is all so flat!
> Those clouds are full of glistening splinters!
> What is that?"
>
> (*P* 26, line 40–45)

Like Darwin, Bishop builds a case of 'fact and minute detail' in her observation of wood, which then extends beyond its physical boundaries so that even the ethereal clouds are permeated by wood; they are 'full of glistening splinters'.

Although 'The Monument' is not as polished as Bishop's later ekphrastic works, it is an early example of Bishop's poetic skill where she can transform and open up space in her poems so that 'things waver between being what they are and being somewhat distinct from what they are' (Paz, 1977 212). In a style reminiscent of amateur scientific studies, Bishop, and by extension, the reader, examine the structure of the monument to find that it displays all the characteristics one would expect to find on a wooden structure; the poem 'proves' that this monument can only be built of wood. However, the physical characteristics of wood mutate to be other than themselves when they permeate the clouds. For the reader the process of following the extended observation beyond the representational into the realm of the abstract is akin to the moment of the acrobat's flourish, where an idea is not separated from

the act of experiencing it. The ending tightens this sense of experiencing the mind thinking. The reader is brought full circle from examining a purportedly finished, historical object – the monument – until the final lines of the poem position the observation of the monument not as a conclusion but instead as a beginning.

Given Bishop's ability to invert the expected order of things—as, for example, she does by including a beginning at the end of 'The Monument', or by titling a poem about a painting 'Poem'—it is no surprise that a key element of her observational ethos is the need and ability to see things afresh. In 'Poem' the challenge to see afresh is couched in personal terms; 'Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!' (*P* 196) she writes of the Nova Scotian landscape. Similarly, in an earlier poem 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', Bishop presents a series of images that are both familiar and yet foreign. Note that 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' was the second poem in Bishop's book *A Cold Spring*, dedicated to her doctor, Dr Anny Baumann. In the book, the poem's context is one of renewal, following as it does the spring of 'A Cold Spring'. 'Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' was first published in 1948 by *Partisan Review*, having been rejected by *The New Yorker* for being 'too difficult' (*NYr* 36). Where 'Poem' presents a single image to the reader, 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' works with a series of snapshots or postcards. The poem plays on the ennui of the overfamiliar that the traveller often feels; the Seven Wonders of the World are 'tired / and a touch familiar'. This sense of being both foreign and yet familiar continues into the next series of images, depicting scenes of the 'squatting Arab, / or group of Arabs, plotting, probably, / against our Christian Empire' (*P* 57). The juxtaposition of the foreign against the Christian sets the scene for the final stanza of the poem where the theme of seeing anew is redolent with

Biblical imagery. However, before the reader reaches that point, the poem moves away from travel imagery to territory more familiar to Bishop herself. In line 32, the poet is 'Entering the Narrows at St. Johns', the entrance to St. John's Harbour, Newfoundland. By line 37, 'And at St. Peter's the wind blew and the sun shone madly', it is no longer clear if the poet has reached St. Peter's Rome, as suggested by the 'Collegians' marching in lines, or if the poem is further referencing Nova Scotia (possibly the village of St. Peter's in Cape Breton). This ambiguity of place discourages the reader from falling into an unthinking familiarity with either scenes of travel or conditions of geography.

The poem contains echoes of 'The Monument' in the depiction of the holy grave, which like the potentially empty or hollow tomb of the artist-prince is empty, only 'half filled with dust,' which is not even the dust of the decayed body of the 'poor prohet paynim who once lay there' (*P* 58). The final stanza of 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' builds further on the imagery of tombs being once full, now empty containers, holding a hollowness within:

> Everything only connected by "and" and "and."
> Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
> of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
> Open the heavy book. Why couldn't we have seen
> this old Nativity while we were at it?
> —the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
> an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
> colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
> and, lulled within, a family with pets,
> —and looked and looked our infant sight away.
> (P 58)

Steeped in the Baptist heritage of her childhood and the language of The Bible, the poem demonstrates its position within the lexicon of Bishop's Nova Scotian inheritance. In the poem, the Biblical references are double-edged. Although the imagery of

renewal is clearly Biblical, reminding us of both the birth and resurrection of Christ, the pun between 'gilt' and 'guilt' is easy to see and hear. The change in the terms of reference to the necessity of viewing anew pivots sharply in line 55 where the poet tells us: 'I saw what frightened me most of all / A holy grave, not looking particularly holy'. 'I' becomes the 'we' of the final stanza, asking: 'Why couldn't we have seen / this old Nativity while we were at it?' (*P* 58, line 68). In this stanza, vision metamorphoses from attachment to experience (the experience of travel) to an attachment with memory, either personal or inherited. In the 'old Nativity' the poem returns to the familiar Biblical images of the beginning of the poem, closing with a bittersweet acknowledgement that we—poet, reader, viewer—have colluded '—and looked and looked our infant sight away.' The Biblical references are strong; 'infant sight' recalls St Paul's words to the Corinthians of 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, … but when I became a man I put away childish things '(1 Corinthians 13, v.11–12). Time, age and memory alters our perception of what we observe. Sight is mutable, and, as Bonnie Costello notes, 'the eye is not innocent and it sees mutability in everything' (1982 358). Mutability, like renewal, may be ambiguous, but the ability to change is also liberating. The nature and power of observation dominates the poem, the process of change that 'seeing afresh' triggers towards the observed object (or person, experience or memory) serving to continuously contextualise and renew experience.

Observation, however, is not just concerned with the eye. A second reading of 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' makes this clear. The poem opens by inviting the reader to look through a poetical scrapbook of places, telescoping back and forth through time and place. There is an immediate tension between what is expected and what is actually seen; 'Thus <u>should</u> have been our travels' (*P* 57), (my

underlining), not these <u>were</u> our travels. I have demonstrated how memory and its role in the changing perception of self comes into play primarily in the last verse, but well before then Bishop constructs a web of sensation around vision that has the effect of continuously changing perception. The first lines replays the ennui felt by the traveller, opening up into broader questions of religion and renewal in the described scene of 'Arabs, plotting, probably, / against our Christian Empire' (*P* 57). The scene is extended by Bishop's description of the physicality of the moment; one figure stands 'with outstretched arm and hand' pointing towards the tomb. This position is partially framed by the natural world and the 'date palms' and by man's position within the natural world; the date palms are followed by a 'cobbled courtyard'. Mankind's manipulation of the tools of language further comes into play in these lines. The 'Illustrations' and 'Concordance' of the title initiate a paratextual conversation with aspects of writing and text; note how the date palms look like 'files', the courtyard is a 'diagram'. In line 15 Bishop moves towards thoughts of 'history or theology'; but these abstract concepts are again tethered to the page figuratively and literally a few lines further on, where we are told there are:

> … the specks of birds
> suspended on invisible threads above the Site,
> or the smoke rising solemnly, pulled by threads.
> (*P* 57)

Just as the birds and the smoke are tethered by threads (Goldensohn, 1999, 167–175) so too are the words and images of the poem, which are 'Granted a page alone or a page made up / of several scenes arranged in cattycornered rectangles'. These scenes are then

> caught in the toils of an initial letter,
> when dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves.

The eye drops, weighted, through the lines
the burin made, the lines that move apart
like ripples above sand,
(*P* 57)

Bishop adroitly adjusts the scale of perspective in the poem, first pulling the reader's eye away from the more distant scenes to the detail of the page; 'cattycorned rectangles' implies the diagonal arrangement of scenes. The eye then picks out the 'toils of an initial letter' – recalling both the travellers' effort of writing a letter home, but also becoming closely identified with the work involved in the illustrated capital letter typically found in the Bible (Kalstone 130). Bishop emphasises the physicality of observation: 'The eye drops, weighted' moving 'through the lines / the burin made', lines which are then moved apart by 'God's spreading fingerprint'. Note that a 'burin' is a tool used by an engraver working in copper or stone, so that, by implication, the reader is not just drawn to observe the illustrated letter alluded to in the earlier lines, but also to trace the letter much as a child would trace a carving with their finger. The eye has to move down and through the lines of the poem and of the letter on the page, just as a finger might feel the dip and etch of an engraving. The scansion reinforces the physicality of this moment, where touch and feel combine in the turn of the line 'weighted, through the lines / the burin made,' and then lightened again when the eye is drawn back to the surface, 'like ripples above sand'. This rhythmic lightening is mimicked visually by the 'watery prismatic white-and-blue'.

The reader is encouraged to move away from passive reading to actively engaging with Bishop's multiplicity of observation and interpretation. As Goldensohn notes Bishop, 'never relinquishes that scrupulous notice of the fluctuating ground between observer and observed, between foreground and background' (1992 86). For

the reader, 'fluctuating ground' presents a challenge of orientation. For the writer, the emphasis may be different. Bishop's emphasis on the physicality of observation finds a secondary rhythm in her use of prepositions and conjunctions. This is very specific in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' but more subtle in her later poetry. In the former poem, the final stanza opens with: 'Everything only connected by "and" and "and". / Open the book' (*P* 58). These lines totally immerse the reader in the act of reading, but what the lines mean is constantly open to reinterpretation. Writing in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intim*acy, Victoria Harrison reminds readers of the American pragmatic traditions which form part of Bishop's poetic context. Harrision links Bishop to William James, quoting his argument that:

> "we ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue*, or a feeling of *cold*" (quoted in Harrison 1993, 4).

Harrison goes on to extend this to form part of her reading of Bishop's pragmatic impulses, particularly looking at the juxtapositions that allow 'Bishop's poems [to] enact relationships, by means of often surprising conjunctions and transitions' (1993, 5). The element of startling surprise in some of Bishop's juxtapositions is important, but here I want to pause to appreciate the emphasis that James' argument of sensation in prepositions gives to the sheer physicality of the process not only of reading, but also of writing. In this poem, the physical nature of reading combines the senses, especially sight, sound and touch, with a very specific moment of focus on the 'initial letter' of line 57. The final stanza opens by connecting all the myriad of images described in the poem, but also interrogates the nature of reading and writing, circling back to the eye dropping 'weighted, though the lines / the burin made' (*P* 57 lines 26, 27). That initial

letter becomes an object in its own right, attached to the others in the poem by 'and' and 'and', but there is also an interrogation of language itself.

Object-struck

Bishop enjoyed the invigorating impetus of curiosity, which formed a part of the balance of her poetical ethos. She was an acute observer of people and their habits, as well as of objects. Defending her interest in objects, she said in an interview in 1978 that:

> I am very object-struck. Critics have often written that I write more about things than people. This isn't conscious on my part. I simply try to see things afresh. A certain curiosity about the world around you is one of the most important things in life. It's behind almost all poetry. (Johnson 1978, 100)

The distinction between objects and people often breaks down in her writings, as does the distinction between animals and humans. By contrast, objects are positioned as repositories for Bishop's curiosity and observational skills; they provide a freedom and space around which she can explore emotion and self-expression. Objects are everywhere in Bishop's poetry; criticising some of her students' works, Bishop enjoined them to 'use more objects in your poems – those things you use every day ... the things around you' (Wehr 1966, 39). One of the strongest ties of connection between Bishop and her first mentor, Marianne Moore, was their shared love of objects; their letters trace their attachment through the exchange of small gifts ranging from the quotidian to the exotic. In Bishop, objects are repositories for time, memory and fragments of a personality; 'Questions of Travel' is a poem as much about collecting objects as it about travel. Some of the objects Bishop uses are personal artefacts—such as the dolls and marbles in 'Gwendolyn', or the painting by her uncle that inspired 'Poem'. Other

objects may have personal resonance but are more anonymous, for example, the nautilus shell that lies in the shadows of ‘Jerónimo’s House’ or the wasp nest in ‘Santarém’. Bishop's response to certain artists provides a useful mirror in which to evaluate her approach to objects. She professed to be drawn to artists who demonstrate

> that strange kind of modesty that I think 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*, a sort of helpless-ness but determination at the same time. (*WIA* 250)

It is this transposed ability to grant ‘modesty, care, space’ to the objects she observes in her poetry that sets her apart from her contemporaries. As Bonnie Costello remarks, Bishop is an ‘inheritor of the American modernist obsession with ideas in things. But she is less driven than either Stevens or Williams to isolate the object from its world and fix it in an aesthetic space’ (2008 86). This is not to say that objects could exist only in historical cultural context. A comment made by made by one of her students resonates here. Discussing her teaching methods, Dana Goia remembered that she did not 'see poems in any strict historical perspective. Good poems existed for her in a sort of eternal present’ (1986, 142). In poetry, as in art, Bishop resisted confinement by definition.

Although Bishop declared herself to be 'object struck' (Johnson 1978, 100), discussions of objects often elides with discussion around 'things', particularly in the context of Ashbery's identification of 'thingness' (1969 202) in his review of *The Complete Poems*. Ashbery's comment comes in the context of his analysis of 'Rainy Season; Sub Tropics' and how the creatures in that poem are 'actually brief, mordant essays on the nature of being' (1969 202). Ashbery is not making a point about objects;

rather he is considering how the creatures in Bishop's poetry are containers or vessels for being and thought. Objects and things share this sense of being a container, but there are pertinent differences between them. Where objects are loosely defined as material artifacts, thing theory is a means by which we 'can explore the dynamics between human subjects and inanimate objects' (Wasserman, 2020). 'Thing theory' as conceived of by Bill Brown draws on a distinction made by Heidegger in his essay 'Das Ding'. In *Things that Talk*, Lorraine Daston writes that 'the "thing" must, Heidegger insists, be sharply distinguished form the Kantian "object" (*Gegenstand*), the latter being the product of ideas and representation of the thing' (Daston, 2004, 16), noting that Heidegger does not then go on to resolve various paradoxes arising from the conjunction of materiality and meaning. The most helpful approach to incorporating thoughts from these theories, is, in my opinion, to follow a more anthropological path suggested by Daston and 'take it for granted that things are simultaneously material and meaningful' (2004, 17). Like the authors of *Things that Talk*, I assume that 'matter constrains meaning and vice versa' (2004, 17).

Bishop's fifth book of poetry, *Geography III*, resists categorisation by arbitrary definition more directly than any other of her books. The stage is set by her choice of preface: the text (without the illustrations) from a children's geography primer (*P* 178). The effect of removing the illustrations is similar to that of removing the grid or coordinates from a map; topography is fluid. Thom Gunn noted that in *Geography III* the ‘longest three poems were directly concerned with uncontainable, unboxable experience’ (1993, 78). Gunn does not specify which are the three poems he is thinking about (they are probably 'The Moose', 'Crusoe in England' and 'In the Waiting Room'); his assertion adds another dimension as to why Bishop’s poetry extends beyond the

merely descriptive. Her observational skills resist the temptation of simplistic categorisation and Bishop actively seeks to look beyond or within that which is placed in front of her. The tension Bishop creates in the preface to the book actively precipitates the reader's experience of catching a 'glimpse of the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life,[…]a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important' (*PPL* 861). As there are no illustrations in the preface, the described object cannot be viewed. The removal of the illustrations from the quotation disturbs the text so that the reader is encouraged to be aware of peripheral vision as they encounter the poems that follow. Peripheral vision, or an awareness of what lies outside the margins, is a reoccurring trope in Bishop; unsurprisingly, the first poem in *Geography III*, 'In the Waiting Room', draws on ideas of geography and looking at the periphery. The young Bishop is looking at the *National Geographic* as she sits and waits for her aunt; it is when she is looking at 'the cover: / the yellow margins, the date' (*P* 179), that she hears the '*oh!* of pain' from inside which precipitates her fall off the edges of the world into her interrogation of self. This is one example of Gunn's 'uncontainable experience' and points the way to understanding how seemingly solid objects – such as the *National Geographic* – can suddenly seem permeable. As I shall discuss in chapter VI even solid objects—such as houses—are intrinsically permeable to Bishop.

Returning to the source of the preface chosen for Geography III, *First Lessons in Geography* *on the Plan of Object Teaching*, *(*my emphasis*)* I want to pause to briefly consider some biographical detail that is pertinent to Bishop's appreciation of objects. Bishop deliberately designed the cover for *Geography III* so that it looked like an 'old-

fashioned school-book' (*OA* 602), and the reference to 'Object Teaching' reinforces the influence of past school days on the book. 'Object Teaching' refers to a specific school of educational thought, primarily espoused by the Kindergarten movement who believed that the early years of education should be directed through an awareness of the physical nature of the world. The preface to *First Lessons in Geography* explains object teaching as being 'the plan possessing that vividness of instruction with which the mind receives impressions through the medium of the eye, is here so combined with the Map Exercises…' (1884 Preface). The eye is the conduit to the mind, relying on 'vividness' to impart knowledge. In this sense, vividness is not just an impression on the eye, but also refers to the multi-sensory approach of this school of teaching. This theory of education was originally proposed by Heinrick Pestalozzi, the eighteenth-century reformer who encouraged a multi-sensory approach to learning, moving away from a dry reliance on textual works. In his best known work, *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (published 1801), he expands his theory of education into practical lessons instigating the teaching of arithmetic by the use of peas, stones and other objects to help with counting and sums.

Bishop attended Primer Class in Great Village in 1916. As she describes it in her eponymous short story, 'Primer Class was a sort of Canadian equivalent of kindergarten; […] But we didn't sit about socially and build things, […] We were taught reading and writing and arithmetic [...]' (*Pr* 79,80). From this description there appears only to be the loosest of personal affiliations with Pestalozzi's theories, but it may be relevant that Bishop's mother (also called Gertrude) was a school teacher. The school of object teaching may also have reached her indirectly through Marianne Moore,

whose poetry was more directly influenced by her experiences at Kindergarten. In her autobiography of Moore, Linda Leavell notes that Marianne and her brother Warner, started kindergarten in 'May 1893 just after a long article on the kindergarten movement appeared in *The Century*' (2013, 33). Leavell goes on to describe how, in an object lesson

> the children would sit in a circle while the teacher presented for their scrutiny a natural object such as a seashell, quartz crystal, or flower… Along with gardening and nature walks, such activities directed the child toward close observation of the natural world (2013, 33).

Not only did children observe the natural world, but they were also encouraged to play with 'special toys, called "gifts", designed to develop the imagination through manipulations of abstract forms … To give their play an underlying geometric structure, children played with these gifts at long tables etched with a one – inch grid' (2013 33). This was Moore's childhood, not Bishop's, and yet the affinity between the two women was such that it is tempting to read shadows of this experience into Bishop's history.

The image of children exploring objects against the background of a grid prompts an awareness of an intriguing connection between shape and sound in Bishop's short story 'Gwendolyn'. Bishop was deeply interested in Mallarmé, the French symbolist poet whose poetry emphasised phonetic ambiguities to create sound poetry. In 'Gwendolyn' Bishop describes her memories of playing with the delicate, diabetic, Gwendolyn Appletree, who is immediately fascinating because of her 'beautiful names. Its dactyl trisyllables could have gone on forever as far as I was concerned' (*Pr* 54). The sonorous pleasure that the young Bishop registered is specifically remembered in terms of syllabic beats by the elder Bishop, who then recalls the simple joy the two girls found in playing with a set of small blocks

> that were exactly fitted in a shallow cardboard box. These blocks were squares cut diagonally across, in clear reds, yellows, and blues, and we arranged them snugly together in geometric designs. Then, if we were careful, the whole thing could be lifted up and turned over, revealing a similar brilliant design in different colours on the other side. (*Pr* 54)

Bishop's multi-dimensional appreciation of objects and the vividness by which they impart experience to the mind through the conduit of the senses is deeply rooted in her childhood experiences and then refined by her relationship with Moore, in the period when the latter was her mentor.

I have already touched on Seamus Heaney's identification of Bishop's 'supreme gift' which was to

> be able to ingest loss and to transmute it. She would count to a hundred by naming the things of the world, one after another, like the coins and scales and rings and jackknifes in her story. (1995, 165)

Heaney refers to 'things', not objects, but in this case, both are the physical artifacts that can be read in anthropological terms as to individually and collectively compose the self-definition of the individual. These things coexist with the evocation of the active role of counting; a number scale that Bishop manipulated so successfully. Heaney's choice of things are those that make up the backbone of Bishop's story 'In the Village', objects which, 'mark a point on the scale of memory, a mark which both proclaimed and contained the forces that it took the measure of' (1995, 165). Two treatments of the same object loved by Bishop helps illuminate the qualities of memory. Bishop's short story from 1953, 'Gwendolyn', opens with a description of Aunt Mary's doll, which the young Bishop has been allowed to play with because she has been ill. The doll and her wardrobe are intimately described so that:

> she made the family of dolls I usually played with seem rugged and childish: the Campbell Kid doll, with a childlike scar on her head where she had fallen against

> the fender; the two crudely felt-dressed Indians, Hiawatha and Nokomis; and the stocky “baby doll,” always holding out his arms to be picked up. (*Pr* 52)

Aunt Mary’s doll becomes the stand in for the ‘pure-tinted’ (*Pr* 54) Gwendolyn, whose death provides the ‘volta’ of the story; the story ends with Bishop and her cousin Billy ritualistically re-enacting Gwendolyn’s funeral, adorning the doll with flowers, and making a wreath for the ‘nameless doll’. The game becomes reality at the point at which children name the doll; as Bishop says, ‘I don’t know which one of us said it first, but one of us did, with wild joy—that it was Gwendolyn’s funeral, and that the doll’s real name, all this time, was Gwendolyn’ (*Pr* 61). The success of Bishop’s ability to mark a point on memory lies in the recounting of the ritual re-enactment of the funeral and in the moment in which the doll is named, out loud, becoming Gwendolyn. The physical nature of the ritual re-enactment—like Heaney's counting—is important, as is the spoken naming of the doll. By comparison, the dolls named in Bishop’s unfinished poem, ‘Where are the dolls who loved me so’ (*EAP* 102), do not successfully become containers for memory or full poetical expression. In this poem, the dolls, one of whom is named for her mother – Gertrude – and another who is recalled in ‘Gwendolyn’ – Nokomis – have ‘hands of bisque’ but:

> Their stoicism I never mastered
> their smiling phrase for every occasion—
> They went their rigid little ways
>
> To meditate in trunks or closets
> To let [life and] unforeseen emotions
> glance off their glazed complexions
> (*EAP 102*)

Although there is, as Barbara Page notes (*EAP* 310), an undercurrent of anger in the poem at the poet's inability to 'master' the dolls’ stoicism, the dolls are also consigned to a life of lived entombment, where life and 'unforseen emotions / glance off their

glazed complexions.' The question arises: what quality of the doll made her more successful to Bishop in the story but not so in the poem? There was also a poem called 'Poem on Dolls' submitted to—and rejected by—*The New Yorker* in 1941 (*NYr* 6), but it is not this one, dated by Alice Quinn to the early 1950s while Bishop was in Brazil.

One possibility lies in the hinterland of psychoanalysis, specifically in the concept of the 'Transitional Object' as formulated by Donald Winnicott, paediatrician and psychoanalyst, in his book *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* (1964, 167–172*).* These objects are ones like a security blanket or special toy that help a child feel secure as they learn independence from the mother. They are objects that the child realises are not themselves; they are other. Winnicott also stresses the importance of play as being a key component in the development of the self. As Adam Phillips, psychotherapist and essayist, explains:

> Winnicott suggests that there is a continuity between the child's use of this first object and the adult's later use of the cultural tradition as it becomes meaningful for him. But unlike later and more sophisticated cultural objects, like works of art, the first Transitional Object is essentially idiosyncratic and unshareable. Winnicott, however, never makes clear how the child gets from the private experience to the more communal experience, from a personal teddy-bear to a pleasure in reading Dickens. (1988, 115)

The differences in treatment of the doll lies perhaps lies in Bishop's relationship with her mother, Gertrude. In the case of 'Gwendolyn', it is not the 'Gertrude' doll that successfully re-enacts the ritual of death; the Gertrude doll does not feature in the story. Rather it is Aunt Mary's doll who is the carrier for the story, and through whom the death and burial—real, remembered, and re-enacted—is carried out. However, in 'Where are the dolls who loved me so?' a similar transitional object, a doll, this time including one named 'Gertrude' cannot resolve the feelings of abandonment so clearly described in the first lines of the poem. Nor can the figure of the doll fully articulate

issues of femininity and sexuality—they have 'blank crotches'. It is perhaps pertinent that one of the gifts that Lowell sent Bishop was an 'ancient Dutch doll' (*WIA* 157), which she loved, and had in her study in Samambaia, where she 'looks extremely well in her sad way' (*WIA* 160). The differences in Bishop's treatment of dolls are not differences that I think can be resolved, only noticed; they speak to Bishop's twin powers of accuracy and ambiguity, and to the ties of friendship that sustained her throughout her life.

Just as 'The Monument' was described as being both an object, and a monument, both solid or hollow, so too do many of Bishop's objects reveal their inverse qualities in her poems. Thus the house in 'Jerónimo's House' (*P* 35) is conceptually solid, even though it is made of 'perishable / clapboards' and yet surrounded by a 'veranda / of wooden lace', and therefore pierced so as to become penetrable. In the poem, other objects, ones that might be considered static, give movement or the idea of movement. In the seventh verse, the house is inhabited not abandoned. Bishop writes:

> At night you'd think
>   my house abandoned.
> Come closer. You
>   can see and hear
> the writing-paper
>   lines of light
> and the voices of
>   my radio
>   (*P*35)

The spacing of the words on the page forms a pattern that imitates the lace of the veranda whilst also drawing the eye of the reader up and down the page. In this verse, the observer is invited to take the position of the outsider looking in, seeing the writing paper mottled by the stripe of light created by the gaps in the structure of the house.

The paper sits on the table, at one level weighted down by the light, and at another caressed by the continuous voices from the radio. Joelle Biele tells us that when Bishop sent Moore a draft of the poem in 1940, she illustrated it.

> Bishop drew a room with empty chair and table. Over the table hangs a lamp with electrical wires attached. It is similar to the other still lifes she had made, with decorative tablecloth and patterned chairs, all crisscrossing lines (2011 39)

The visual depiction of this room is part of the creative impulse behind the poem; for Bishop, imagination is also visual. Tethering of this type is frequent in Bishop; Lorrie Goldensohn (amongst others) discusses lines, cables and wires in Bishop's work and the way in which they can be read as 'essential energy, however intermittently curbed or damaged, as a flow of meaning, a writing' (1992, 35). The movement we see on the page in 'Jerónimo's House' is present earlier in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance′ where the birds above the courtyard are 'suspended on invisible threads above the Site, / or the smoke rising solemnly, pulled by threads' (*P 57*). The image of a tethered bird is double-edged; on the one hand the bird is restrained, on the other, they continue to fly, an inversion we notice the more because of the smoke—which rises naturally—having to be pulled up into the air. Mark Ford quotes Bishop's notebook entry (circa 1937) where she wrote:

> It is hard to get heavy objects up into the air; a strong desire to do so is necessary, and a strong driving force to keep them aloft. Some poets sit in airplanes on the ground, raising their arms, sure that they're flying. Some poems ascend for a period of time, then come down again; we have a great many stranded planes.'
>
> (Bishop, quoted in Ford 2007)

Flight, in all its variety (birds, planes, kites, balloons etc.) is a recurring trope in Bishop, but, for the moment, I want to remain with ideas of lines and tethers and their dual ability to restrict and enable flight. There is a moment in 'The End of March', a poem

published in *The New Yorker* in 1974, when Bishop, walking on the beach, likens the tide marks to

> lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string,
> looping up to the tide–line, down to the water,
> over and over. Finally, they did end:
> a thick white snarl, man-size, awash,
> rising on every wave, a sodden ghost,
> falling back, sodden, giving up the ghost....
> A kite string?— But no kite.
> (*P* 199)

As in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', tethers follow flight; the 'wet white string' comes after Bishop describes the disrupted formation of the 'lone flight of Canada geese' in the first verse. The looping of white tide marks as imagined string on the sand is a startlingly clear image, and an important one, not least because it demonstrates that lines in Bishop are not necessarily straight, nor uncomplicated, as indicated by the 'white snarl' they fall into. Nor does it always follow that a line tethers an object; there is no kite, as the poem notes in line 23.

This brief investigation of Bishop's use of lines demonstrates a paradox of observation; it may be detailed but it not prescribed. Nor is observation tied down or made linear by time. This may seem odd in the context of poems such as 'In the Waiting Room' and 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' where time or date takes a leading role in the poem, but Bishop often worked with an effect she called 'experience-time' in her technique of observation. 'Time's Andromedas' (*PPL* 641–659), her collage essay on the nature of time in prose, details her developing inquiry into the structure of time, and is where she outlines her idea of '*experience-time*, or the time pattern in which realities reach us, quite different from the hour after hour, day after day kind?' (*PPL* 659). Bishop's conceit arises from her reading of Dorothy Richardson's 'thought time' and Gertrude

Stein's 'continuous present'; Bishop concludes that time is actually experienced as a mixture of both. In the same essay, Bishop describes one of her principal difficulties with Proust as being a 'Puritanic conviction that so much thought *backwards* from a sitting posture, no matter what wonders it bought to light, must be a sin against the particular beauties of the passing minute' (*PPL* 650). Here it is not so much the fact of going backwards, but rather that it is done from a 'sitting posture' that horrifies Bishop. Key to the successful employment of 'experience time' is motion; motion is often one of the human faculties that Bishop's objects adopt, despite their static nature. Where 'Poem' follows a more classically ekphrastic outlook of graphic stasis yet narrative movement, 'The End of March' employs movement differently, but both explore time out of its linear boundaries.

To understand how motion is important in freeing the object under observation, it is useful to consider the influence of Paul Klee. Klee was one of the contemporary artists Bishop proclaimed she 'really liked' in her letter of January 1958 to Robert Lowell (*WIA* 250), and his wide-ranging influence on Bishop has been extensively researched by the literary critic, Peggy Samuels. In his *Pedagogical Sketchbook,* first published in 1925, Klee teaches by example. His first statement is:

> 1. An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake. The mobility agent is a point, shifting its position forward. (1968, 16)

Klee then illustrates his meaning with a series of drawings. This statement gives rise to Klee's often reported comment that 'drawing is taking a line for a walk'. In Bishop's terms, the key aspect of Klee's comment is the notion of activity allied to a line as well as the immediate understanding that the complementary forms of a line can take any form or body—like the 'thick white snarl' that was both kite string and tide mark. As

Peggy Samuels notes, Bishop may have been playing on 'Klee's "taking a walk with a line" in announcing "the end of [the] march"', also commenting on Klee's drawings of human figures that 'seem about to collapse into just line'(Samuels 2010, 223 note 1). In her college essay, 'Dimensions for a Novel', Bishop imagines another snarl, writing 'If I were to draw any more diagrams of the development of novels, the lines, although I again greatly oversimplified, I am afraid would look something like a bramble bush' (*Pr* 483). These lines and snarls give us partial moments of insight into Bishop's cognitive processes; think of her writing in 1955 to Lowell explaining her frustrations with prose. Bishop is pleased with the autobiographical stories she has managed to finish, as they satisfy a desire to 'get things straight and tell the truth'. However, this is not a simple process. As she says, 'It's almost impossible not to tell the truth in poetry, I think, but in prose it keeps eluding one in the funniest way' (*WIA* 161). Lines, tethers and snarls; in poetry they can be made to fly in a way that in prose is much harder to achieve.

In her essay on Bishop and Klee, Samuels describes how contemporary critics tried to explain what Klee was seeking to achieve in his artwork. One such critic, John Thwaites

> taught his readers to experience Klee's innovative deep space by feeling their way inside it. … Thwaites emphasized Klee's interest in conveying the object not as the stilled cubist object, frozen in time, but the object as it existed in multiple sensory dimensions. (Samuels 2007, 551)

If drawing is conceived of as taking a line on a walk, then lines, which may have initially been perceived as tethers or ties, are also a way of emphasising the nature of the object dislocated from its usual ambiance. Thwaites' identification of the object existing in multiple sensory dimensions is a natural extension of the idea that a static line can walk; here again motion is key to enabling the artist to capture sensation. As they indicate

movement, they also gesture to passing time. Motion also alters observation by changing the angle of perspective, both within the poem as well as the reader's perspective. In 'The End of March' it is a walk along the beach that prompts Bishop's vision of her 'proto-dream-house,/ my crypto-dream-house', an imaginary flight of fancy released in the swirls of the tidal marks. The poem ends by bringing perspective back to the source of the earlier imagery in the poem:

> The sun came out for just a minute.
> For just a minute, set in their bezels of sand,
> the drab, damp, scattered stones
> were multi-colored,
> and all those high enough threw out long shadows,
> individual shadows, then pulled them in again.
>
> (*P* 200)

In these lines, Bishop marks time on the poem very specifically and does it twice; but the repetition of 'just a minute' does not freeze the poem in time. It is Bishop's observation of the 'drab, damp, scattered stones' briefly transfigured, becoming multi-coloured, that renews time. There are the ripples of Wordsworth's 'Lucy' poems here, the rolling of rocks, stones, in 'earth's diurnal course' (1994, 135). Note the specificity of the action 'threw', which obliges the reader's eye to actively follow the extension and retention of the shadows as the sun moves in and out of the clouds. The overall sense is that as Bishop watched the stones, so too will her readers—past, present, and future, also watch the stones. Implicit in these lines is also the understanding that objects—like poems—are different according to the time, and perspective, from which they are viewed.

One of Bishop's poems to most clearly demonstrate Klee's influence is 'Roosters', begun in 1939, two years after returning from a trip to Europe. The poem was published in *The New Republic* in 1941. 'Roosters' marks a turning point in Bishop's relationship with Marianne Moore and became the pivot around which Bishop was able to clearly express her independence from her first mentor. At one level, Bishop articulates an oblique response to the Spanish Civil War in the poem (*OA* 96); at another it is also a response to the First World War. The poem is militaristic in tone, capturing what Bishop termed a

> very important "violence" of tone—which I feel to be helped by what *you* must feel to be just a bad case of the *Threes*. It makes me feel like a wonderful Klee picture I saw at his show the other day, *The Man of Confusion*. (*OA* 96)

As Peggy Samuels explains:

> "The Man of Confusion" displays the severed sections of a disintegrated human body, literally fallen apart and scattered over the surface of the canvas. … Bishop's invocation of Klee's painting to explain her use of triplets reveals her intention to replicate this "severing" through the triple rhymes that harshly break up the sentences (2007, 545).

Samuels goes on to suggest that the breaking up of the sentences draws 'undue attention to and therefore detaching each item so that it stands isolated at the end of the line'. Whilst I agree with Samuels' reading of Bishop's replication of the disintegration of the scene in her use of the triple rhyme scheme, I am more reticent in my reading of the isolation of objects. To my ear, the violence in tone is always balanced by a multi-sensory description of the object in question; so that whilst the auditory function of the word is emphasised, it is not totally detached. In a later interview, Bishop related her difficulties in writing 'Roosters', saying '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 the sonata imposed themselves on me and I got the thing started again' (Brown 1966, 25). Scarlatti was a Baroque composer whose sonatas for the harpsichord were written mostly in binary form, or two related sections, repeated, much as Bishop repeated her rhyme scheme over and over again in 'Roosters'. Just as Bishop found a freedom in her interpretation of M.W. Croll's analysis of Baroque authors whose purpose was to portray 'not a thought but a mind thinking', so did she also find a freedom in the aural repetition of sounds suggested by Scarlatti. The ferocity in tone is evident from the very start, where the dawn crows of the cockerels answer one another:

> then one, with horrible insistence,
>
> grates like a wet match
> from the broccoli patch,
> flares, and all over town begins to catch.

(*P 36*)

The half rhyme of 'insistence', first with 'horrible', and then again, against 'match', 'patch' and 'catch' has an onomatopoeic effect, grating the reader's ear just as the roosters' crowing tear into the peace of the early morning. However, sound is deadened by touch in the 'wet match'. Colour functions in a similar way; the roosters are crowing in the 'gun-metal blue dark' which in turn is touched by the green (or purple) of the 'broccoli patch' or the red of the 'flares' that are catching throughout the town. Similarly, the dead rooster is:

> [...] flung
> on the gray ash–heap, lies in dung

with his dead wives

with open, bloody eyes,

while those metallic feather oxidize.

(*P* 38, lines 74–78).

Here again there is the insistence on the rhyme scheme, in 'wives', 'eyes', and 'oxidise' but again it is balanced by the colour of the 'grey ash' and 'bloody eyes'. Taste and smell play a part here as well; the dead rooster lies in the dung and the sensation of taste is recalled by the image of blood, which is often described as having a metallic taste.

The roosters' cries mimic the random effect of an aerial bombardment on a village, possibly the aerial bombing of Guernica referred to by Bishop in her letter to Marianne Moore (*OA* 96) although on another occasion, Bishop suggested 'Roosters' was inspired by the sounds of cockerels in Key West (*OA* 316). The rooster is always looking down onto the scene below: 'A rooster gloats / over our beds / […] over our churches / […] over our little wooden northern houses' (*P* 37). When Bishop wrote 'Roosters' aerial photography would still have been a relatively recent development, and, artistically, aerial photography presented a challenge to the artist, as 'there are no axes around which to organise things and the visible world is let lose to fill the field of vision' (Harris, 2010, 26). However, Bishop creates an axis along which the bombs and cries of the roosters are given perspective. '"This is where I live!"' they scream, creating a line in the field of vision by which the reader can locate the source of the cry or the target of the bomb. The location of the falling bombs is further marked by:

marking out maps like Rand McNally's:

> glass headed pins,
>
> oil-golds and copper greens,
>
> anthracite blues, alizarins,
>
> each one an active
>
> displacement in perspective;
>
> each screaming, “This is where I live!"

(*P* 37)

Unlike the map in the preface to *Geography III*, this one, a Rand McNally (a U.S. company that specialises in maps for use by individual consumers), randomly, but accurately marks out where the bombs have fallen. The purpose of this map is to track location, which it does visually. Bishop's choice of ‘anthracite blues, alizarins’ carefully functions within the rhyme scheme whilst also presenting the reader with a mesmerising range and depth of colour captured within the glass headed pins. ‘Anthracite’ is a colour resembling coals of fire, echoed by ‘alizarins’, an orange and red substance. Both are contrasted by the ‘blues’, just as there is a flicker of blue at the heart of a flame. Recalling Klee’s line, a rigid (straight) pin nonetheless stands for an ‘active / displacement in perspective’; it conjoins both the sights and sounds of the rooster with the implied action of the falling bombs. Perspective is displaced. Although the pins are static, they break up the surface of the map creating pattern and shadows, encouraging the viewer to engage with different views of the scene before them. In a typical moment, the reader must momentarily become a viewer in order to fully engage with the different points of perspective framed in the static map that both marks and mirrors movement.

The format of ‘Roosters’ subtly reinforces the reader’s experience of changing perspective. The poem is divided into three; an initial 26 verses, each one separated by a single line space. There is then a double line space and a further 13 verses, where the commentary turns from the cries of the roosters in the backyard to the Biblical scene of the denial of Christ by St Peter described by the books of the Apostles. This interlude is then demarcated by a further double line space and the poem concludes after a further five verses where the action of the breaking morning is followed by the relative calm of the day. The double line space marking the interlude of St. Peter’s story is subtle but important; it is a way of pointing to a perspective that Bishop does not want to make completely ‘other’ but equally requires demarcation as different. One key aspect to St. Peter’s story is the ability of:

Old holy sculpture
could set it all together
in one small scene, past and future:

Christ stands amazed,
Peter, two fingers raised
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between
a little cock is seen
carved on a dim column in the travertine

explained by *gallus canit*;
flet Petrus underneath it.

(*P* 38, 39).

As discussed in the first chapter, the sculpture merges the biblical and historical past of Rome (Jones 2012) with what the viewer knows to have been the future; in this case the bombings of Guernica. The figure of the 'little cock' recalls the present, in its association with the immediate reading of the poem, but it also hints at an on-going future, uninterrupted by current events. The carving is placed on a 'dim column in the travertine'—travertine is a limestone quarried in Italy, and particularly associated with St. Peter's Basilica and the Colosseum in Rome. In the use of 'travertine', note Bishop's mellifluous working of colour in the contrast of dim with the white or light coloured limestone. The poem goes on to suggest that 'those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,/ his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness', (line 35, 36) with the figure of the cockerel on a weathervane 'outside the Lateran':

> […] to convince
>
> all the assembly
> that "Deny deny deny"
> is not all the roosters cry.
>
> (*P* 39, 40)

This part of the poem is often unsurprisingly read primarily as an affirmation (or denial) of Bishop's faith, but I want to make a different point in the context of perspective and lines of movement. The figure of the cockerel moves up from the column to the weathervane, in contrast to the earlier roosters who flew down from their perches to make 'sallies / from all the muddy alleys' (lines 37–38). The weathervane is positioned outside the Lateran; that is, outside the Pope's palace. In an earlier line, Bishop deliberately locates the weathervane on 'basilica and barn', enabling St. Peter's denial

to resonate beyond the purely religious. The subtle shifts in location function to enhance the various perspectives of the poem; the reader can view the cockerel from ‘inside’ a religious belief, or, as a non-believer, from outside the Pope’s palace. As Susan Stewart points out, ‘Via perspective, any material can be organized within the visual field; what unifies the space is the single viewer’ (2005, 139). Crowds are unusual in Bishop poems; what brings together all of Bishop’s various techniques of observation is the individual reader. It was Klee who, in his 'Creative Confession' stated that the purpose of art was not to ‘reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible’ a statement that resonates across Bishop's work. One small moment at the end of 'Roosters' is a demonstration of her achievements; as the rays of the rising sun are ‘gilding the tiny / floating swallow’s belly’, a momentary beauty is made visible to generations of readers. These small moments of edited observation skillfully pare down the experience rendered until it can be summoned in mind by the reader. Bishop's practice of observation is both a habit and a tool; her poems necessarily rely on the 'knowing artificiality' (Ravinthiran 2015, xvii) of her poetic language in which she manipulates rhythm, sound and the visual expression of text on the page to polish and finish her poems for publication. Bishop's correspondence often reveals a mind in action, sometimes enjoying a stream of consciousness, at other times penning a rendering of detailed visual scrutiny, or occasionally describing times of intense personal difficulty. The poetry shows the same mind at work, but heavily edited; reticence and ambivalence become key words in the description of her language. Poetic form is both respected and rent asunder; in her manipulation of form, we see her deep, almost subconscious knowledge of her poetic ancestors. I suggest that it is useful to remember Bishop's notes on Stravinsky's comments on containment being key to success when

considering why poetry became her more prolific form of writing to suit her gifts of observation and language. The concept of containment forces an exploration of ideas of interiority and exteriority; this is something Bishop develops and uses throughout her working life. As 'Poem' reminds us: 'Our visions coincided' (*P* 197). The 'our' is both Bishop and Uncle George, as it is also her reader and herself. One part of Bishop's skill is the momentary enablement of the reader's own experience to shadow—but not extinguish—that which is described in the poem. As Dalston reminds us in *Things that Talk,* 'matter constrains meaning' (2004, 17), and that matter is both interior (in the objects described in the poem) and exterior to the poem (in the experience of the subject, author and reader). In 'Poem', when she places 'Life and the memory of it cramped' (*P* 197), on a board before our eyes, it is both her life and memory in the scene depicted as it is also our life and memory that we pull to mind as we read. The materiality of the board is important; it stands for a moment of aesthetic union in and of the poem, and is part of what allows movement between surface and its depth. The ancient ekphrastic notion of rendering movement through stasis is a helpful indicator towards the importance of movement in observation; not just in surface and depth but also in the rhythm of the language, enabling poems to fly, not flounder.

Chapter III: The Interplay between Life Observed, Repeated and Remembered.

'"If what we see could forget us half as easily,"

I want to tell you,

"as it does itself—but for life we'll not be rid

of the leaves' fossils."' (*P* 29)

These closing lines from 'Quai d'Orléans' are contorted, but nonetheless consequential because of the suggestion that the locus of sensory perception and imagination are embedded in the other, rather than in ourselves. Every time I return to reread these lines, I find myself almost tripped up by trying to understand what they mean; and that action of tripping is accentuated by the insertion of the aside, 'I want to tell you,' a short, monosyllabic five-word line cutting into the unspoken soliloquy. Initially, the voice suggests that which is observed must try to forget the observer and itself. Then the scene of memory shift back to the speaker, whose stance is complicated to be both observer and observed by insertion of the first person plural 'we'll', a plural that reaches out to embrace the reader in the shifting sands of memory. The moment is memorialised and fossilised, making it impossible to entirely forget. As Borges (2000) reminds us in 'Funes, His Memory', the individual's ability to forget is crucial to a healthy, functional self. However, collective memory often becomes commemorative, and so forgetting is neither simple nor necessarily encouraged. The shift in the personal pronoun in 'Quai d'Orléans' where the 'I' becomes 'we' alters the act of remembering from being an individual experience, becoming a conjoined one.

'Quai d'Orléans', was written shortly after the car accident in July 1937 in France, in which Bishop's friend (the dedicatee, Margaret Miller) lost her right arm. Read literally, these lines are the summation of a moment in which two people stand on the banks of the river Seine, watching as leaves drift by. They leave an impression of a mediation on the interplay between the act of observation and the nature of memory. Being subjective, individual memory can never be entirely infallible, but, as suggested by 'what we see', Bishop, as is her custom, predicates the literal in this poem. This is not to say that Bishop invariably describes the literal from the speaker's perspective; she often conflates a myriad of stances within a poem. Consequently, a Bishop poem is rarely as simple as a first reading may suggest. Perhaps surprisingly for a poet who is famed for her literal descriptiveness, each one of Bishop's published poems avoids repetition of a subject from the same standpoint. This chapter explores ideas of sensory perception, repetition and the literal in Bishop's poems, with the intention of opening up a variety of possible readings on the use of sensation in the construction of her poems. This analysis is framed by 'Quai d'Orléans' but considers how Bishop works with ideas of literal accuracy and repetition in her early and late poetry. I touch on the relationship between her published and unpublished work and ideas of restraint, and the transforming ability of language to render experience memorable or forgotten. A brief discussion of 'Objects & Apparitions' begins to look at how translation studies can inform the layering of sensation within language and across art forms, returning to 'Quai d'Orléans' and the working of memory.

In 'North Haven', Bishop's poem in memoriam of Robert Lowell, death kills repetition. 'Nature repeats herself, or almost does: / *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise,*

revise, revise' (*P* 210) runs the lament, for Lowell can no longer do any one of these. Although remembering and repeating are often partners, they need not be, nor is one directly interchangeable with the other. Note Bishop's quiet acknowledgement that nature 'almost' repeats herself; life may be seasonal but always subtly different from one day or one year to the next. In fact, the heart of Bishop's lament for Lowell is that change is now impossible for him; he cannot make subtle changes to his words, nor to their shared repeated memories, nor even enjoy the change that a year brings in a repeat visit to a beloved place, such as North Haven. Repetition in the context of the literal is particularly interesting; initially the concepts can appear paradoxical. However, literal repetition is not bound by uniformity; repetition can function without the outcome being identical. At the level of the individual poem Bishop avoids absolute contradiction by working in subtle changes to that which is repeated; so the leaves that flow down the river Seine in 'Quai d'Orléans' are repeated, one after the other, but they are not identical. Similarly, in 'Sandpiper' (*P* 129), the bird is described repeatedly as running. Although the action is the same, the intention for each run is not necessarily so. The sandpiper is searching for 'something, something', but the meaning of what that something is changes with each repetition. Bishop also repeats a part of grammar—such as the adjective—as component of her toolkit for the construction of difference within a line. For example, in 'At the Fishhouses' (*P* 62–64) the beginning of the third verse opens with a steady drum beat of description; the water is 'Cold dark deep and absolutely clear'. Here Bishop deliberately omits punctuation between the trio of adjectives and inserts a comma after the fourth, at the line end. This has the effect of emphasising the repetition of description but simultaneously emphasising the individual qualities of 'Cold dark deep' which are then conjoined in 'clear'. The line 'Cold

dark deep and absolutely clear,' is itself repeated at line 60 but has a changed meaning, brought about by the preceding discourse about the seal, which has the effect of imbuing the poem with thoughts on mortality, morality, and music. In lines 79 to 81, the words are again repeated but released from their pattern. Here the poem constructs a description of knowledge as 'dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free / drawn from the cold hard mouth/ of the world', carrying with them their dictionary meaning as well as the thoughts and emotions created as they move through the poem. Vidyan Ravinthiran demonstrates how the beat of 'dark, salt, clear' in these final lines, the 'evocative, successively stressed monosyllables' (2015, 11), owe their parentage to the prose of Thomas Browne.

Stephanie Burt, in 'Elizabeth Bishop at the End of the Rainbow' (2019, 321–336), considers the totality of Bishop's poems, observing that 'the sense that we get from Bishop's published volumes - though, importantly, not from much of the unpublished work, - that each poem has been a perfect, unique construction, not just a thing with form, but a thing with its own, *unrepeatable*, potentially permanent, achieved form' (334). This insight rests on a necessary differentiation between the published and unpublished work, and allows repetition to function within the poems as part of observing change. Bearing in mind both these aspects of repetition, consider Bishop's comment to Dr Ruth Foster, her analyst. In February 1947, Bishop wrote to Dr Foster and credited her with helping her 'get over the fear of repetition' (VC 118.33). In this letter, Bishop considers the balance between needing to produce 'every single poem as something almost absolutely new' alongside her realisation that, as a result of her sessions with Ruth Foster, she has lost her fear of repetition and that her poems 'go on

into each other or overlap etc., and are really one long poem anyway.' As discussed in my first chapter, the context of these letters is important; she began seeing Dr Foster at a time when she was increasingly concerned about both her asthma and alcoholism (*OA* 163). The letters fall at a midpoint in Bishop's life, before she went to Brazil, and at time when she was also trying to reconcile herself to memories of childhood abuse and acceptance of aspects of her sexuality. Bishop may not have made the same assessment of her poetic work if asked at the end of her life; certainly the work done with Dr Foster and the move to Brazil played a significant part in 'releasing' or developing Bishop's sensory imagination to enable her later work. Bishop's 'one long poem' does not invalidate Burt's observation that each published poem has its own 'unrepeatable' form; the two concepts point to the different ways repetition functions in individual poems or as part of a collected entity. There is no doubt that Bishop grew in experience and expertise as a poet; repetition and memory in 'Quai d'Orléans' is very far from being as expertly worked as it is in 'In the Fishhouses' or, even later, in 'North Haven'.

Victoria Harrison suggests that it 'is necessary that we read every Bishop poem at the literal level, because the literal is always and essentially one of the subjects of her poetry' (1993, 43). This attention to, and appreciation of, the literal resonated early on in reader response to Bishop's poetry. Often the literal is conflated with Bishop's stance as an observer. 'I have seen it over and over', wrote Bishop in 'At the Fishhouses' (*P* 63), a line that Randall Jarrell repeated in his review of *North & South,* commenting 'all her poems have written underneath *"I have seen it"*' (1946, 180–181). In 'Quai

d'Orléans' it is the attachment to the literal—'what we see'—that underlies Bishop's poetical description of sensation and the memory of sensation

> '"If what we see could forget us half as easily,"
>
> I want to tell you,
>
> "as it does itself—but for life we'll not be rid
>
> of the leaves' fossils."'
>
> (*P* 29)

Bishop's use of personal pronouns is an important component in a reading at the literal level. Although the poem is largely written from the standpoint of a descriptive, discursive single voice, it opens with a dedication *'for Margaret Miller'*. Note that this dedication was retrospectively added by Bishop in her edition of *The Complete Poems* of 1969. The belated dedication signals that the poem is in some way in conversation with Miss Miller. It is only at line 17 that the description opens beyond a single observer to 'We stand as still as stones to watch'. In these lines, the speaking voice carries the poem and the reader from 'we' and 'us' to 'I' and 'you', then 'it' before returning to 'we'. Notwithstanding the paratextual influence of the dedication, the reader may begin the poem believing there to be a single speaking voice, but with the introduction of the speech marks, the voices multiply from the single to the many. This is then accentuated by the dance of different personal pronouns, stressing the existence of multiple notes of activity: listening, watching (reading), speaking, and remembering, none exclusive to the speaker. This sensory activity was necessarily always present within the poem, but becomes explicit in these last lines. All these generate sensation, both within the poem, and in the reader. The complexity of these multiple notes of activity is one of the components that challenges an assessment of Bishop's writing as mere description.

Another facet of the literal is the presence of the poet in the poem. In a letter to a Miss Pierson, written towards the end of her life, Bishop asks:

> why shouldn't the poet appear in the poem? There are several tricks —"I" or "we" or "he" or "she" or even "one"—or somebody's name. Somebody *is* talking, after all—but of course the idea is to prevent that particular tone of voice from growing monotonous.' (*OA* 596)

'Somebody is talking' is an implicit acknowledgement that voice, in Bishop's poetry, is usually (but not always) human. The 'several tricks' point to the ambiguity allowed to play within personal pronouns: 'I' is not necessarily the poet. The prevention of monotony is key; the speaking voice in 'Quai d'Orléans' may be puzzling, but it is not monotonous. There is, in 'Quai d'Orléans', an element of '"my Grandmother's Glass Eye"', Bishop's descriptor of the art of writing poetry, formulated in her draft essay, 'Writing poetry is an unnatural act' (*Pr* 327–331). In these notes she began to work out the fundamentals of writing poetry, thinking about '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*' (*Pr* 331). In the resolution of 'real' with the 'decidedly un-real' lies the hinterland of Bishop's sensory imagination, here symbolised by 'sight' or observation, the characteristic that came to define Bishop's writings. The employment of her sensory imagination to enliven 'the real', something others may regard as potentially banal, is a key constituent element in creating poetry defined by the other attributes she admires in her essay, namely '*Accuracy, Spontaneity, Mystery*' (*Pr* 328).

Returning to a literal reading of 'Quai d'Orléans', Thomas Travisano fills in the biographical detail to the poem in his biography of Bishop. He describes how Miller and Bishop often stopped at Quai d'Orléans on the Île Saint-Louis as they walked

through Paris. Travisano (2019, 146–147) then speculates on whether details in the poem, such as the 'giant oak-leaf' (line 3) and the 'leaves' fossils' (line 24), may have stemmed from a memory of marble on the toilet walls at Vassar College, where both Miller and Bishop were students. This very precise link to something *seen* by Bishop in real life chimes with Jarrell's assessment of *North & South*, quoted earlier. His assessment of Bishop's strengths is not unequivocally positive; there are limitations to her approach. Jarrell frames her work as being 'unusually personal and honest', based as it is on her depiction of life observed, but these are aspects that give the poems both their strengths and 'restrictions too' (1946, 180–181). Maintaining a successful equilibrium between using observation of the quotidian as the theme for poetry without constraining the scope of poem, is one of a key criteria in the assessment of Bishop's poetry. To paraphrase Bishop, the success lies in the mix of the real with the decidedly unreal. The literal is a vital part of every Bishop poem but it must not impede the poem from taking flight in other readings.

A literal reading of a poem rests on the depiction and arousal of sensation. Adapting Aristotle's definition of the senses as pertaining to their objects, it has become commonplace to reduce human senses to five—sight, sound, touch, taste, smell,—but any reading of the senses and sensation in Bishop's poetry necessarily quickly extends to include aspects such as temperature and movement. Memory, the repository of sensation, is a key component in my analysis of the working of sensation in Bishop's poetry. In her journals, Bishop wrote of her desire to have a

> junk room, store room, or attic, where I could keep and had kept, all my life the odds & ends that took my fancy… *Everything and Anything!* If one had such a place to throw things into, like a sort of extra brain, and a chair in the middle of

> it to go sit on it once in a while, it might be a great help— particularly as it all decayed and fell together and took on a general odor. (VC 72.A. 3, 36).

This is memory visually enacted and framed by the architecture of home, observed, absorbed, then decaying and meshing together to form a more generalised impression. The dual action of observation and then recalled observation, with its nucleus in a room, resounds throughout different poems. In 'Jerónimo's House', Jerónimo looks out from his 'fairy / palace, [...] /of perishable / clapboards' and surmises that there are only a few 'things', necessary in the creation of his home, carried with him as he moves from house to house (*P* 35). In 'Sestina' (*P* 121) each verse takes the same objects and plays and replays them from different angles, fossilising memory and sensation as the figure of the 'child draws another inscrutable house'. Perhaps the clearest echo of Bishop's memory junk room comes in 'The End of March', where Bishop describes her 'proto-dream-house, / my crypto-dream-house', to which she would like to retire

> [...] and do *nothing,*
>
> or nothing much, forever, in two bare rooms:
>
> look through binoculars, read boring books,
>
> old, long, long books, and write down useless notes,
>
> (*P* 199-200).

Here, the difference between the memorial room in the notebooks and the room in the finished poem is clear; the former is filled with clutter, the latter is empty. There are few objects in Bishop's 'proto-dream-house', mainly the tools of observation and writing. There are binoculars, books, notebooks, and '*grog à l'américaine*', a stove, and electricity, everything ready for the purity of observation without the weight of memory. That such a dream is impossible or inaccessible to Bishop is indicated by the house being boarded up; it is after all, a 'proto-dream-house / my crypto-dream-house.'

Decay, as acknowledged by Bishop in her description of her memory junk room, is not only negative, but also necessary, representing the process in memory that enables forgetfulness, itself a key component in the ability to formalise lived experience in poetry.

Although the word 'aesthetic' is now more commonly used to describe a philosophy of the appreciation of the beautiful, both the noun and adjective have a now obsolete meaning attributed in the OED online, that of (adjective)—'of or relating to **perception** by the senses; **received** by the senses' or, as a noun, 'the science of sensory **perception**' (my emphasis). My attention is drawn to the aspects of 'perception, reception' in this definition, with the poem acting as the conduit for sensation between these. It is often not the sense that Bishop describes but the perception of that sense. For example, 'Filling Station' (*P* 125–6) opens with a description of the 'dirty' filling station, in which oil has permeated through and over every surface, extending itself through the second verse into the father's 'dirty / oil-soaked monkey suit', and deepening into every nook and cranny in the third verse, where grease has 'impregnated' the wickerwork, on which lies 'a dirty dog, quite comfy'. Dirt in this poem is very visceral, both an object in and of itself, and a subject that is absorbed by its host object. It is assimilated by touch, sight, smell and taste—even by sound. The properties of sound in the 'family filling station' are significant; family and traffic presumably create sound but everything in the poem is soft spoken, muted by the black translucent oil that lies over every surface. The final verse accentuates sound; somebody has arranged 'the rows of cans / so that they softly say: / ESSO-SO-SO-SO / to high-strung automobiles.' The brand name ESSO is appropriately

capitalised, but Bishop breaks up the word to give it an echoing, melodic quality, calming the automobiles. This was one of the few instances Bishop identified as being a possible exception to her 'no notes' rule to poems. She wrote to John Frederick Nims, editor of *The Harper Anthology of Poetry*, stating that that not many of her readers still know that 'SO-SO-SO was - perhaps still is in some places - the phrase people used to calm and soothe horses' (*OA* 638). The noise around ESSO continues to escalate with the possibility of added environmental or capitalist influence. Bishop sought to distance 'Filling Station' from Brazil, saying that she 'hadn't thought of it as being an especially Brazilian poem' (*NYr* 158) and suggesting to Howard Moss that the title be changed from 'Station No.2- Route 101, Brazil' to just 'Filling Station'. Bishop then selected the poem to form part of the 'Elsewhere' section of *Questions of Travel*, rather than place it in 'Brazil'. However, the poem continues to gather further resonance when considered from a Brazilian context. George Monteiro outlines how the brand name ESSO stood as a symbol for 'Standard Oil's formidable presence in the Brazilian economy' (2012, 47), an insight that gathers additional significance in the wider context of the destruction of Amazonian rainforest by the forces of commercial progress. Read from this angle, the capitalisation of ESSO enforces the brand, but also increases the volume; it is as if someone is now shouting those words, calling to mind the destruction wrought forces of commercial exploitation. Thus, the poem builds the relationship between the senses and sensations, objects and reader, experience and suggestion. Bishop often capitalises words in her correspondence, sometimes for emphasis, or alternatively to indicate a shift in tone. In both the poetry and the correspondence, this sort of capitalisation emphasises the human tonal qualities of the voice. The final stanza of 'Filling Station' emphasises the interrelation of the senses into a human presence;

'Somebody embroidered the doily; / … / Somebody loves us all', a line that exposes a sentiment that is both life affirming or threatening depending on the social and cultural reading given to the poem. In any reading, the senses and sensations that open the poem and that then permeate the body of the poem are relational; they make up the many human presences that are within the poem, without being the specific subject of the poem. Consequently, the poem largely avoids the fate of being overtly familial or political.

It is a mark of success if a poem continues to be read long after publication. Longevity suggests that the resonance and meaning of the poet's perception of their subject has sufficient depth and charge to survive the assault of time. As a result of changes in cultural context, the poem sometimes represents a very different reality to the one the poet was thinking of. 'Filling Station'—which was first published in 1955—is a case in point. In an interview with Bishop in 1977, George Starbuck commented 'By the way, I've heard your "Filling Station" poem used as a feminist tract' (1977 89). Starbuck and Bishop discuss the 'woman's touch' suggested by the crocheted doily, with Bishop apparently negating an intentional feminist aspect to the poem, concluding 'I never… Isn't it strange? I certainly didn't feel sorry for whoever crocheted that thing!' (Starbuck 1977, 90). The absence of the woman who created the doily is read differently according to cultural and temporal context. A literal description succeeds in remaining relevant if it is not constrained by context; reticence is a tool that must be applied to both the description of sensation and to context.

Language is the key enabler for the poem to act as a bridge between perception and reception. It is the tool with which the poet fixes a momentary sensation, making

it accessible to others. Time and memory are necessarily aspects of the working of language. What was once so real will fade unless preserved by words. Susan Stewart elegantly and comprehensively describes this in in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, stating right at the beginning of her book that

> The poet's tragedy lies in the fading of the referent in time, in the impermanence of whatever is grasped. The poet's recompense is the <u>production of a form</u> that enters into the transforming life of language. (2002, 2, my emphasis)

My focus is not on the fading caused by time, but rather on the poets' choice of tools to enable the production of a form, within which they work. Like any artist choosing his tools, the poet chooses aspects of form to enable the description and inscription of a momentary sensation. One of Bishop's tools of employment of language is her habit of representing the subject through the various different senses within a poem. Recall the physical nature of water in 'The Bight' (*P* 59), which is variously depicted as changing states, appealing to different senses in turn. The water is 'Absorbing, rather than being absorbed', both wet and dry, then seen as the 'color of the gas flame turned as low as possible', smelt 'it turning to gas' or heard 'if one were Baudelaire' as music. The physical nature of water is repeated, but with difference built into repetition; with each repetition the reader is invited to absorb a different referent sensation to build an appreciation of the water. It is akin to the water itself being transformed into a multi-dimensional art object, which almost steps off the page and invites the reader to appreciate every aspect in ways beyond the textual form of the page. Another of Bishop's methods of grasping a moment is to structure a poem—or story—around a misstep, which is then repeated with subtle alternation. Lorrie Goldensohn comments that Bishop shared Freud's interest in 'the multi-dimensional flexing of words, loving

puns, and what Freud's translators magisterially called *parapraxis*, but which his plain German called *Fehleistungen* (mis-speakings)' (2021, 246, my emphasis). For Bishop, a misstep is not a mistake. For example, 'In the Village' opens with a 'scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village' which 'no one hears' (*Pr* 62). The scream has a form, a structure and presence, which precedes the events that then lead to its physical manifestation. The linear structure of memory is therefore subverted; 'the scream hangs like that, un-heard, in memory,—in the past, in the present, and those years between' (*Pr* 62). A few paragraphs on, the scream takes place, once only, during the dress fitting. It happens baldly, factually, the third line in a four-line verse poem embedded in the prose.

> *Clang.*
>
> The pure note: pure and angelic.
>
> The dress was all wrong. She screamed.
>
> The child vanishes.
>
> (*Pr* 63)

From the beginning, the un-heard (but seen and felt) scream hangs over the story. Once uttered, it becomes enmeshed in the warp and weft of the story, where it is constantly 'mis heard', presaged and echoed in the '*Clang*' coming from the blacksmith's shop, to Jock's harmless bark. The negative non-presence of sound is amplified as much as sound itself. On the night of the fire, the child Bishop is

> caught in a skein of voices, my aunts' and my grandmother's', saying the same thing over and over, sometimes loudly, sometimes in whispers:
>
> > [...]
> >
> > A door slams.
> >
> > A door opens. The voices begin again.

I am struggling to free myself.

Wait. Wait. No one is going to scream.

(*Pr* 75)

The morning after the fire, the child goes down to the kitchen where her grandfather is. He described the events of the night to her, 'but neither of us is really listening to what he is saying; we are listening for sounds from upstairs. But everything is quiet' (*Pr* 75). That single initial momentary non-scream and scream is repeated and replayed in silence as much as in sound. The act of listening becomes an act of 'mis hearing'; listening for something that is both always present and never exactly repeated. The decay of sound into silence is normally a function of memory; but here Bishop subverts the nature of forgetting by constantly remembering.

Where 'In the Village' manipulates the sound and silence of the scream into the warp and weft of the story, 'Roosters' is an example of Bishop's awareness of, and commitment to, the auditory quality of a poem. Writing in 1941 to Marianne Moore, Bishop defended her choice of end rhyme (*aaa* or *aba*), asserting that it enabled a 'very important "violence" of tone'. (*OA* 96). In this defence of her rhyme scheme, Bishop is signalling her awareness of how the poem sounds out loud, emphatically defending the spoken tone of the poem. I have written elsewhere (Mayson 2019 166–169) about the range and extent of Bishop's auditory imagination and how it plays a part in creating a poetry that does not 'sag' (*Pr* 474), a phrase taken from Bishop's writing on Gerald Manley Hopkins. The critical thinking around the auditory impact of reading poetry out loud is extensive. In this chapter, I focus on the importance of the physicality of reading aloud. Writing in 'Times Andromedas', an early essay on Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein, Bishop comments that:

> when I first read that Wyndham Lewis said Gertrude Stein's writing tired his throat, I accepted it as an idiosyncrasy, then after doing some reading for myself, as an inexplicable fact. And then an explanation presented itself. There are people, it seems, who possess auditory imagery to the exclusion of every other sort ' (*PPL* 657–8).

This is Bishop noting the physicality of reading, leading onto if not a criticism, then certainly a dismissal, of the lack of balance in Stein's writing between the auditory and other sensations. In 'The Moose' Bishop uses the spoken voice to create 'a gentle, auditory, / slow hallucination' (*P* 191), a crucial component in creating the haunting, almost dreamlike quality of the poem. Bishop's descriptive treatment of the voice is both specific and instructive; the reader is told how to read the verse, as well as given the meaning of what is heard, both in the spoken 'yes' as well as in the non-vocal breath that follows it.

> "Yes…" that peculiar
>
> affirmative. "Yes…"
>
> A sharp, indrawn breath,
>
> half groan, half acceptance,
>
> that means "Life's like that.
>
> We know *it* (also death)."
>
> (*P* 192)

One of the challenges of a literal approach to sensation is knowing how to avoid cliché. Bishop's approach was often to juxtapose apparently non-related ideas in order to avoid cliché. I will later discuss one of Bishop's most notable and successful pieces of juxtaposition in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance', but first raise a question of how to avoid one of the obvious pitfalls of juxtaposition, the creation of nonsense. The first of the 'Four Poems', 'Conversation', holds a warning about this. The poem describes the moment when a 'tumult in the heart' asks and answers

questions 'in the same tone of voice.' The problems of juxtaposition come with the second verse, when the tumult felt in the heart finds voice and

> Uninnocent, these conversations start,
> and then engage the senses,
> only half-meaning to.
> And then there is no choice,
> and then there is no sense;
>
> until a name
> and all its connotations are the same.

(*P* 74)

In this case, the emotional danger heralded by the 'uninnocent' conversations lies within the 'no sense', which visually recalls 'nonsense', as well as literally meaning 'no sense', or not making sense. Just as there was no change in the tone of voice, language—symbolised by 'name' or noun—loses the ability to indicate difference. Emotionally, the danger lies with only 'half-meaning' to engage the senses; the resulting juxtapositions end with a position where language is rendered unable to represent the myriad of realities that make up the human experience. Bishop constructs a simple definition of the sense of a word, conjoining 'name' and 'connotations', eliding a sense of meaning between the two. Sense and meaning are driven out when there is no room for choice, or difference.

The requirement to enable difference within the sense of a word is encapsulated in a later poem, 'Objects & Apparitions' (*P* 201–2). This poem fetes the artist Joseph Cornell for his creation of 'boxes where things hurry away from their names'. Paz later praised Bishop's work as a poet in similar terms in his essay 'Elizabeth

Bishop, or the Power of Reticence', lauding her ability to create a poetry where 'things waver between being what they are and being something distinct from what they are' (Paz 1977, 211). Recall the treatment of the water in 'The Bight' and Bishop's metamorphising of physical states. 'Objects & Apparitions' ends on a note of praise

> Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes
> my words became visible for a moment.
>
> (*P* 202)

This is a paradoxical moment where the reader is left to puzzle out what sense Bishop is intuiting in her connection between the interior of Cornell's boxes and the visibility of text. After all, poems by their textual nature are visible, as are the art works of Cornell. Do Cornell's art objects, by nature of their three-dimensional state, absorb or demand more of the ocular sense than a poem does? The answer is probably different for every individual who admires these art works. In the context of an analysis of sensation in Bishop's poetry, the connection between the different forms of art lies in the interplay in the shadows between Cornell, Paz, Bishop and the reader. 'Objects & Apparitions' is, on one level, a literal description of the act of looking at and appreciating Cornell's artwork. It is also a descriptor of a part of the poetic process, aptly illustrated by a consideration of the art of translation. Bishop's translation was widely regarded as a success, but some critics have disagreed with some of the choices she made. One of her choices, where she manipulates the personal pronoun, is especially illuminating in the context of literal description and sensation. In the fourth verse, Paz has 'Memoria teje y destejo los ecos' which Bishop translates as 'Memory weaves, unweaves the echoes'. However, As Lee Fontenella points out, 'Paz's Spanish means "Memory weaves, and I unweave the echoes"' (Fontenella 1997, 274, my

emphasis). Bishop misses out the personal pronoun, juxtaposing two pieces of thought, but also effectively changing the statement about the poetic process. In Bishop's version, the figure of the poet-creator slides into the shadows. The omission of the ‘I’ is an opening that acts as invitation to the reader to step into the poem, enabling them to take part in the invocation to memory, which follows in the sixth verse. Here the personal pronoun returns, when the ‘you’ of the ‘you constructed / boxes’ (*P* 201, lines 17,18) is no longer just Cornell, but becomes an amalgam of Cornell, Paz and Bishop herself. Where Cornell used his shadow boxes to frame his observations and commentary, Bishop used her poems as a safe framework within which a dynamic interchange of real and associated meaning is allowed to happen.

Bishop wrote and published only a few poems that explored a literal depiction of a sensate reality through an explicitly non-human voice. Amongst these are the triptych of prose poems, 'Giant Toad', 'Strayed Crab' and 'Giant Snail' that make up 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics', first published in *The Kenyon Review* in November 1967 and then in *The Collected Poems* of 1969. In *The Kenyon Review*, each poem was accompanied by a simple illustration of the toad, crab and snail. Speaking to Stephanie Burt's point that Bishop chose poems for publication to create a body of work that achieved a 'unique, … *unrepeatable*' form (Burt 2019, 334), these poems benefit from being read both individually and collectively. These prose poems are often considered as an adjunct of Bishop's interest in surrealism. However, they can also be read as part of Bishop's response to the vogue of confessional poetry. As Zhou Xiaojing suggests, for 'Bishop, indirection is necessary for effective expression' (1994, 76). In this sense, 'Rainy Season; Sub Tropics' also can be read as a reply to, or an exploration of, a poesis

that is not limited or exclusively identified with Bishop being a woman, or indeed with any other of the defining biographical aspects that make up her personal history. Each one of these prose poems is anthropomorphic, but each is different in the sensations they explore. They all make deliberate reference to the other animals; the toad to the snail and crab, the crab to the snail and the toad, the snail to the toad and the crab. Again, there are elements of repetition, but with difference. The 'Giant Toad' opens with a focus on the eyes, 'my one great beauty' (*P* 163), before moving on to the action of giving voice, recalling the single scream of 'In the Village'. The toad's voice hangs in the air, like the scream: 'Give voice, just once. O how it echoed from the rock! What a profound, angelic bell I rang!' (*P* 163). The 'Strayed Crab' describes the action of movement, the muscular strength needed to 'move with great precision' (*P* 164). It is the crab that states, 'I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself', and then, later, 'I admire compression, lightness, and agility, all rare in this loose world'. It is hard not to hear an echo of Bishop's admiration of *'Accuracy, Spontaneity, Mystery' (Pr* 328) in the crab's words, harder still not to take the two comments as an indirect statement on Bishop's own preferred method of composition. 'Giant Snail' explores different aspects of movement: 'Although I move ghostlike and my floating edges barely graze the ground, I am heavy, heavy, heavy' (*P* 164). The snail feels the tap of the crab on his shell and asks, 'What's that tapping on my shell? Nothing' (*P* 165), and, hiding from the tap of the crab on his shell, creates an atmosphere of house and home. Like the other two, the snail also makes a comment that can be read as a descriptor of an important aspect of Bishop's method of composition, saying 'All night I shall be like a sleeping ear', an ear that will wake to speak what it has heard. It is not difficult to imagine Bishop, from her position as observational outsider, looking

for a home which she finds both in the rock of her studio at Samambaia, but also within poetry itself. The ear of the snail also reminds us of her attentiveness to the oral/aural nature of poetry. Poems and words vibrate through her in times of rest, and she listens throughout her night to the words of those who have gone before her. Eventually, the snail, like the poet, will come out of the rock and both will again begin on the journey of observation and expression.

If 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics' is given a pure, literal reading, the three prose poems are, I think, slight and somewhat obtuse. To balance this, it is instructive to consider—as Harrison does in *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy*—how a pragmatic reading of Bishop's poetry gives an additional nuance to the purely literal. Harrison defines a pragmatic world as one where the relations between 'things are necessarily as real as the things themselves', where interaction is explored and enjoyed without the controlling presence of a higher authority (1993, 3). This echoes Paz's encapsulation of Bishop's skill as a poet, chiefly her ability to capture the waver between things as they are and distinct from what they are: 'things become other things without ceasing to be the things they are' (1977, 212). Both poet and critic rely on 'things' as a cornerstone of their readings of Bishop. As Harrison identifies, one way Bishop moulds and defines her voice amongst her contemporaries, is by a 'construction of subjectivities that are at their core relational. These subject-subject relations need not be and are often not between people, nor are they necessarily between clearly demarcated entities at all' (1993, 9–10). The subject-to-subject relations of 'Rainy Season; Sub -Tropics' can be read both literally as a descriptive connective discursion between the toad, crab and snail without the controlling hand of a higher authority, or

as a poetic soliloquy in which the imagination is given voice by three speechless beings, leaving the reader unconstrained in their interpretation of the poem. 'Filling Station' also demonstrates the relational dynamics between a set of non-human subjects. In the opening verses of this poem, dirt suffuses the atmosphere, appearing in each one of the first three verses; 'Oh, but it is dirty!', 'Father wears a dirty, / oil-soaked monkey suit', 'all quite thoroughly dirty' and 'a dirty dog, quite comfy' (*P* 125). Inanimate 'dirt' is both adjective and object, becoming subject as it gains context and weight by the web of relationships created, appearing in different guises throughout the verses. The warning at the end of the first verse 'Be careful with that match!' is not in speech marks, but is directed by and towards those who live or stop at the filling station. Each instance of a dirt object is contextualised by a human presence, even if that human is absent.

Any literal reading of Bishop's poems will, at some juncture, prompt questions about autobiographical details that may or may not be informative or influential. Biography makes clear that Bishop was a lesbian, something that is only very discreetly alluded to in her published poems. From an early age, her health was problematic; she suffered from various allergies, including a reaction to the fruit of the cashew nut (which kept her in Brazil) and debilitating asthmatic attacks throughout her life, as well as from alcoholism throughout her adult life. Where authorial dedications are present, biography explicitly informs a reading of the poem. In some cases, even where there is no dedication such as is the case for 'IV/ *O Breath*', authorial biography implicitly pervades the atmosphere of a poem. 'IV/ *O Breath*' is the last of 'Four Poems'; which like 'Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics', can be read both individually and collectively—hence the importance of the Roman numeral in the title, indicating the sequence of individual

poems. 'IV/*O Breath*' continues the theme of intimacy and conversation discussed earlier in the context of 'I/*Conversation*'. There are no footnotes or directives compelling the reader to approach 'IV/*O Breath*' from a particular perspective, but the poem invites a focus on the breath and breathing in a way that is very familiar to asthmatics. The open 'O' of the title visually and aurally mirrors the actions of an open mouth. Each line is spaced so that there is a clear break after two or three words, a visual pause that prompts questions of what to do with the breath before reading on. Sensation impregnates the poem. The white space in between the text could also allude to the meander of veins down the breast, lying just under the skin, the touch of the finger that as it traces a vein under the skin. The first lines read

> Beneath that loved   and celebrated breast ,
> silent, bored really   blindly veined,
> grieves, maybe   lives and lets
> live, passes   bets,
> something moving   but invisibly,
> and with what clamor   why restrained
> I cannot fathom   even a ripple.

(*P* 77)

As the fourth poem in a series of poems about relationships, it is likely that the loved and celebrated breast probably belongs to the Bishop's lover; or alternatively, that the poems are a series of works in which Bishop is attempting to come to terms with her sexuality and her body, including the illnesses that so constrained her (McCabe 1994, 109–114). However, if we imagine a reading without biography, it is remarkable how the poem depicts that which lies under the skin, inviting an awareness of the connectivity of the sensate world. To take only the opening lines, something is 'silent,

bored… blindly… grieves… lives…. moving…. invisibly… clamor', evoking all of the five major senses as it travels through the lines. This poem is also an exploration by Bishop of the emotive ability of a verb, rather than the explicit physicality of a noun. Bishop wrote to May Swenson in 1958, 'I don't like words like "loins", "groins", "crotch", "flanks", "thighs", etc…' (Bishop, quoted in Zona 2002, 103). This is a discussion similar to the one Bishop had with Marianne Moore earlier in her career, most famously over 'Roosters'. In the case of 'Roosters', Bishop defended her right to maintain '"water-closet" and other sordidities because I want to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism' (*OA* 96). In these discussions, Bishop maintained that her choice of vocabulary was not for prudish reasons. Rather, as she explained to Swenson, '"physical"' words present a specific problem:

> a problem of placement, choice of word, abruptness or accuracy of the image - and does it help or detract? If it sticks out of the poem so that all the reader is going to remember is: "That Miss Swenson is always talking about phalluses"—or is it phalli?—you have spoiled your effect, obviously, and given the Freudian-minded contemporary reader just a slight thrill of detection rather than an esthetic experience' (*OA* 361).

Bishop did not dismiss Freud. On the contrary, whilst in Brazil she read all of his works (*OA* 283), but her opinion on his theories remains shadowy. Her Key West notebooks contain a comment that Freud was 'the prefect interpreter of touch only, in all his (its) grammar and vocabulary for sight, sound, etc., draws false conclusions' (VC 75.4a, p.6) As Lorrie Goldensohn notes, Bishop seems to have only ever used one Freudian word, 'that of "transference"' (2021, 246), a concept she refers to in her letter to Ruth Foster (VC 118.33, last para of letter dated 'Saturday'). That question of a 'slight thrill of detection' that Bishop raises with Swenson personifies the threat to Bishop's poesis posed by an excessive reliance on obtrusive autobiographical or physical detail. To

some degree, her 'Rainy Seasons; Sub-Tropics' was a response to the vogue of the confessional. Prompted by Lowell's publication of 'The Dolphin', Bishop spelt out her thoughts on the confessional in a letter to him written in 1972. As she said to him, 'In general, I deplore the "confessional"' (*OA* 562), a dislike that persisted despite her respect for Lowell's poetry. Bishop's objection is founded on the moral impetus of the poet to be both accurate and truthful; to avoid distortion of what is being depicted. For Bishop the 'I' who is the poet inevitably shadows the poem, but the trick is to find a balance between the real and the 'decidedly un-real' to produce the desired aesthetic experience.

Thinking about Bishop's response to confessional poetry inevitably provokes questions about her treatment of emotions in her poetry. The boundary between emotion and sensation is blurred—deliberately—in Bishop's poetry. Writing in 1955 to Swenson, she described her 'Four Poems' as 'pretty mysterious… I hoped they'd have enough emotional value in themselves so that I wouldn't have to be more specific' (*PPL* 805). In this letter, Bishop is seeking to respond to a previous comment Swenson made; Swenson suggested that the poems in *North & South* and *A Cold Spring* engaged

> something other than the emotions. What is it? Something else, and something more important. They are hard, feelable, as objects — or they give us that sensation – and they are separate from the self that made them, rather than self-effigies as poems easily tend to be. (Swenson, 24 Aug.1955, WU, quoted in Harrison 1993, 29)

Bishop's response pivots around her philosophy of emotion and the synchronization with poetic thought; for Bishop, the reader's response is at least as influential as the poets. She professes herself to be puzzled by Swenson's suggestion that her poem do not appeal to the emotions, asking:

> What poetry does, or doesn't? And doesn't it always, in one way or another? A poem like 'Never until the mankind making' etc. one *feels* immediately, before one starts to think. A poem like *The Frigate Pelican*, one thinks before one starts to feel. But the sequence, and the amount of either depends as much on the reader as the poem, I think. And poetry is a way of thinking with one's feelings, anyway.' (*PPL* 809)

As Michael O'Neill aptly comments: 'Not, one notes, thinking about one's feelings, but thinking with them' (2019, 248). 'At the Fishhouses' (*P* 62) is an example of a Bishop poem where she deliberately sets out to make the reader 'feel' before thinking. The poem opens with a depiction of a scene by the water's edge, a scene that engages all the senses from the beginning. The reader 'feels' the cold of the place, the falling darkness, the smell of the place, in the opening lines; 'Although it is a cold evening', the darkness is reinforced by the net made 'almost invisible' by the gloaming, the evening twilight. The smell is next, carried on the evening air, a smell so strong 'it makes one's nose run and one's eyes water'. Note the use of the emphatic pronoun 'one's', charging the line with the energy to actively transmit the sensation from the page to the reader. The poem signals a change from feeling to thinking at the end of line 40 where the first verse breaks and the second opens with 'Down at the water's edge'. Then, at line 47, the poem begins to focus on directing the reader to think, opening with 'Cold dark deep and absolutely clear, / element bearable to no mortal'. The word 'mortal' is a clear pivot in Bishop's turn of feeling towards thought. Initially, Bishop carefully and deliberately activates this poem to engage the senses at the surface, so that the reader feels the cold on the skin, a cold that is repeated at line 47, as poem pivots into thought. Repetition aids the transition so that it feels a natural part of the rhythm of the poem. Sound is vital to the rhythm and metre of 'At the Fishhouses'. On one level, there is the talk between the poet and the old man, who 'was a friend of my grandfather',

establishing old familial links that reach back into time and over the land, evoking ancient rhythms of language, much as the insertion of the reference at line 54 to 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' (one of Martin Luther's hymns based on Psalm 46) also does. At a technical level, as Susan Stewart identifies, the 'poem moves brilliantly between speech and song', where Bishop has very deliberately created a structure so that:

> tetrameter and pentameter are established as the baseline of the poem. In other words, the poem's lines are, as it explains in a self-referential pun in lines 43 to 46, like "thin silver/tree trunks are laid horizontally / across the gray stones, down and down / at intervals of four or five feet. (2002, 139–40)

The structure of the poem is smooth, deceptively so, successfully directing the reader's experience of reading to mimic the movements between speech and song that the poem so enjoys. The reader is unwittingly drawn into thinking with their feelings.

Thinking with feelings can present a conundrum to the reader when the idea of re-reading a poem is considered. On the one hand, re-reading privileges the reader's knowledge of what the poem says, and so a second reading is able to be more alive to the hidden structure, the activation of thought through feeling. On the other hand, a re-reading of a poem can, I think, be more easily interrupted because of the activation of biography (either that of the reader's or of the poet's). 'At the Fishhouses' (P 63, 64) demonstrates a part of this conundrum. If the poem were to be read without biographical knowledge, the detail of the observed would, at the very least, point to a sense of place in the northern hemisphere, English speaking, with a Baptist heritage. It is a poem where the sea is becomes the personification of the experience of knowledge and of knowledge itself.

If you should dip your hand in,

your wrist would ache immediately,

your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn

as if the water were a transmutation of fire

that feeds on stones and burns with a dark gray flame.

If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter,

then briny, the surely burn your tongue.

It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:

dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,

drawn from the cold hard mouth

of the world, derived from the rocky breasts

forever, flowing and drawn, and since

our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.

(*P* 63-4)

The reference to 'rocky breasts' towards the end if the poem in line 81 is the point at which biography can interrupt a reading. It is both a figurative and allegorical allusion to femininity in all its myriad aspects. Much has been made of this allusion and it is a moment to heed Bishop's warning to Swenson about words that give the 'Freudian-minded contemporary reader just a slight thrill of detection rather than an aesthetic experience'. As Robert Lowell said to Bishop, it is 'a little too much in its context perhaps; but I'm probably wrong' (*WIA* 7).

Swenson's articulation of Bishop's poems being 'hard, feelable, as objects' is, I think, perspicacious and points towards Bishop's ability to sculpt words into forming 'a perfect unique construction' (Burt, 2019, 334). It is important to note Bishop's qualification of the reader's contribution to the process; the poem is both an object of, and conduit for, sensation. Her reply to Swenson closes with an assessment of her own

strengths, suggesting 'I don't think I'm very successful when I get personal,—rather, sound personal—one always is, of course, one way or another' (*PPL* 809–10). Bishop's emphasis on not sounding personal simultaneously emphasises the function of auditory imagination within her poems, while paradoxically enabling the figure of the poet to slip back into the shadows. How is it that Bishop holds herself back in her poetry? Restraint is a key notion in Bishop's poetics; Bishop was an alcoholic, asthmatic, lesbian, female poet, all aspects of an emotional life that are guarded or restrained in her poetry and collected works. Equally, Bishop poems are sometimes very revealing about her own personal history; think of 'In the Waiting Room' or 'One Art'. There is an ambivalence in Bishop's approach to the self that allows both aspects of revelation and restraint to function in her poems. As Kirsten Hotelling Zona identified, ambivalence is key, signalling 'the contingent, not coherent, nature of self' (2002, 69). This concept of a self being allowed to explore what it is to be contingent, rather than to obey an imposed coherence, is very helpful to a reading of how Bishop employs sensation in the poetry. To begin with, the tangential nature of contingency subverts the linear structure of time, echoing Bishop's own questions on the existence of 'a sort of experience-time, or the time pattern in which realities reach us, quite different from the hour after hour, day after day kind' (*PPL* 659). A contingent self is allowed to embrace the other myriad aspects of the self without any need of reduction to binary definitions. There is no need to quantify early Bishop versus late Bishop, lesbian (closet) Bishop versus lesbian (out) Bishop, etc. Rather, aspects of each inform the other. Secondly, the idea of contingency renews an appreciation of the strength of Stewart's identification of the transformative power of language, occurring both at the moment of experience and in the moment of recalling an experience. For Bishop, Swenson and

Moore, argues Zona, the process of recording observations is as important as the sensation itself; 'representation is not secondary to that which it depicts' (2002, 9).

Contingency does not excuse the self of immorality or of fault. As Randall Jarrell noted in his review of *North & South*, Bishop is 'morally so attractive' (1946, 181) because of her insight that the process of living enables an understanding, even exculpation of the faults of others, but not necessarily of your own. Bishop's strong moral code is explicitly and inextricably bound to the need to be accurate, truthful, proportional in her observations. It is nearly always problematical when the veracity of text is declared false by the poet. Telling the truth about a private fault is also a dilemma to a poet who values the power of reticence. Bishop directly addresses the question of what it is to tell a lie in 'The Country Mouse', her memoir of the time spent with her paternal grandparents in Worcester, Massachusetts. Asked by her friend Emma where her parents are, she answers (truthfully) that her father was dead but then:

> What about my mother? I thought for a moment and then I said in a *sentimental* voice: 'She went away and left me… She died too." Emma was impressed and sympathetic, and I loathed myself. (*Pr* 98)

Bishop is so disgusted with herself that she has to physically move to separate the lying self from the true self: 'I jumped up, to get away from my monstrous self that I could not keep from lying' (*Pr* 98). This is Bishop emphasising her dislike of both the act of lying, and of the motivation behind that lie, that of 'sentimentality' which seeks to distort the response given by the audience to the lie. In a similar fashion, Bishop asked Lowell to change the tone of a remark about her mother in his poem 'For Elizabeth Bishop 2. Castine, Maine'. 'She never did make it;' wrote Bishop, 'in fact I don't

remember any direct threats, except the usual maternal ones. Her danger for me was just implied […] Poor thing. I don't want her to have it any worse than it was' (*OA* 348). Again, Bishop's concern is twofold: first, the need to avoid reporting a situation inaccurately; and second, the distortion of the perpetrator and therefore the response of the audience. It seems that, for Bishop, for a contingent self to function without imploding, falsehood must be acknowledged and corrected.

However, as part of her manipulation of accuracy, Bishop often embedded error and correction into the text of her poems. As Colm Tóibín notes, this 'trick established limits, exalted precision, made the bringing of things down to themselves into a sort of conspiracy with the reader' (2015, 7). Bishop used this method from her early poetry onwards: for example, the qualification in the second line of 'The Map' which questions 'Shadows, or are they shallows' (*P* 5), or the opening of 'The Weed', where she writes 'I lay upon a grave, or bed, / (at least, some cold and close-built bower)' (*P* 22). Qualifications and corrections which are inset into the text help set the parameters around the poem, urging the reader to trust the poet's eye for accuracy, and creating a safe space for the suspension of disbelief. One of Bishop's last poems, 'Santarém' (published in 1977), demonstrates the full power of this technique, opening with a question in which the possibility of error and correction is foregrounded:

> Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
> after, after—how many years?
>
> (*P* 207)

This opening correction is attached to the fallibility of memory and the changes wrought by time, opening up the possibility of error. There is also, I think, an implicit invitation to the reader to enter into the body of the poem and insert their own 'correct'

memories within the experience of (re)reading 'Santarém'. Further on in the poem, there are other rectifications where Bishop emphasises and asserts the requirement for accuracy. In lines 13–16, Bishop corrects herself on the number of rivers in the Garden of Eden:

> Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
> from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
> and they'd diverged. Here only two
> and coming together. […]
>
> (*P* 207)

Here, she corrects both the number and the flow and action of the river. Bishop also twice mistakes the Cathedral for a church (lines 21, 58). The purpose of error is to juxtapose trust in the poet with trust in the fact that the reader's experience may be very different. The two need not stand in contradiction to each other. 'Santarém' is a poem that explicitly warns against 'literary interpretations / such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female'; the pivot of the poem comes earlier in 'I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place' (line 12). As Jonathan Ellis writes (2020, 155), the semicolon in this line enables Bishop to set up the idea that she may like the place and the idea of the place equally, or in different measures, depending on the moment. Note also the subtle distancing of the poem as that line unfolds; the first part is a personal recollection of Santarém, the second can be anyone's experience or imagining of Santarém. Inserting the possibility of error at the beginning of the poem enables the poet to open the poem very deliberately to other memories, other ways of seeing and interpreting a single place.

That error is different to falsehood was never in doubt for Bishop, as evidenced by her correction of Robert Lowell's description of her mother. However, she occasionally used the same technique of admitting to error to bridge the threat of falsehood in her private capacity as author. For example, in the case of 'In the Waiting Room', where she is aware that she deliberately confused the editions of *The National Geographic* referred to in the poem, Bishop wrote to Howard Moss at *The New Yorker* offering him the poem, but warns him 'It cheats a bit, and so you may not want it for your super-honest weekly' (*NYr* 319). The warning is followed by a description of her motivation for cheating 'a bit', and then closes with a gentle swipe at literary critics, saying 'I doubt very much that anyone else would look it up except a junior English major or something like that'. The poem went on to be published in *The New Yorker* who felt no qualms about *The National Geographic* referred to. In this instance of deliberate error, Bishop is right; the lack of accuracy in reference to the specific cover of *The National Geographic* referred to in 'In the Waiting Room' is not problematical for the reader. However, how to respond to a poem that is itself untrue, or contains a significant untruth, is more complex. For example, it is difficult to know how to read the declaration of falsehood in 'A Drunkard', a poem which pivots around Bishop's memories of the Salem fire and ends with a declaration of falsity. There is a caveat here, and that is that 'A Drunkard' is an unfinished, unpublished poem. It is notable that this poem also opens with the pattern of corrected error, inserted in parenethesis: 'When I was three, I watched the Salem fire. /It burned all night (or then I thought it did)' (*P* 317). As with 'Santarém' memory is shown to be potentially fallacious, made unstable by the process of time. Unlike 'Santarém' this pattern or error and correction is not repeated thorough the poem, which in fact proclaims 'I remember clearly,

clearly–' at line 40, before closing with the discomforting 'I'm half-drunk now ... / And all I'm telling you may be a lie…' (*P* 319). Bishop leaves the ellipsis in place, so that punctuation works against the purported veracity of the final lines to further create a sense of ambiguity around truth. These final lines are at variance with, and in opposition to, the sense of sincerity which imbues Bishop's finished, published poetry. As the possibility of being half-drunk is raised without a corresponding correction, the impression left is that the text is not reliable; the admission of a potential lie is uncomfortably direct and forces a re-assimilation of all that came before as being untrue. For the reader, the lies admitted to in 'The Drunkard' are further complicated by a knowledge of the poet's autobiography. It is difficult for a reader not to superimpose biography on the poem and create a palimpsest of different meanings on the poem, and, by extension, on the poet. Helen Vendler's (2006) memorable criticism of the publication of *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box*: *Uncollected Poems, Drafts and Fragments* centred around her objection to encouraging readers to think that these unfinished, unpublished poems represent Bishop 'herself as she wished to be known' (2006, 33). The drafts and fragment of poems in *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box* lay bare many feelings and emotions that Bishop took care to polish or omit in order to find balance in her published work; 'The Drunkard' and what it demonstrates of Bishop's construction of observational accuracy and her reliance on alcohol is an example of one such omission. Vendler takes issue with the suggestion that the book stands on a par with Bishop's own *Collected Poems* as a result of the title containing the word 'Uncollected', arguing that the poems are often slight, unsuccessful, or simply works in progress, and that they do not attain the status of Bishop's own choice of published poems. In the context of my reading of the literal, the crux is to consider

how language is transformative for lived experience. I agree that a part of the transforming power of language, at least for Bishop, is the power of editing, the power of cutting out or holding back a thought or feeling that may have been articulated in a first draft of a poem.

Despite her desire to do so, Bishop never published an elegy for Lota de Macedo Soares, whose death in 1967 in New York profoundly marked Bishop. There are fragments of work in *Edgar Allan Poe &The Juke Box* and in Bishop's unpublished papers and notebooks, alongside oblique tributes in Bishop's published work, but there is no direct poetic tribute in the way 'North Haven' addresses Robert Lowell. There were, despite Bishop's best intentions and efforts, certain moments in her life that seemingly resisted the transformative power of words. This resistance is more complicated than just a lack of accuracy. It seems that some aspects of accuracy are more important than others. David Kalstone noted that although Bishop objected to Lowell's mixing fact and fiction in *The Dolphin*, she did not object to his alteration of sequence or time. Kalstone (2001, 244) asks: 'Why does one kind of fictional rearrangement—being false to the real time scheme—not disturb her while another—altering Hardwick's letters—is constantly offensive?' Kalstone considers how Bishop manages to cope with suffering; the second type of fictional rearrangement 'touches Bishop's deepest fears about the intersection of suffering and the written word'. Kalstone refers to Lee Edelman writing on 'In the Waiting Room' and concludes that 'such "literal" representation kept almost inconceivable pain within bounds'. Certainly, for Bishop, the literal was one way of interpreting life and emotions that enabled her to write. However, the literal is not sacrosanct to Bishop; if necessary, she was capable of

subverting it, just as she did with the cover of *The National Geographic* and 'In the Waiting Room'. Certain aspects of literal accuracy are more sacrosanct than others. As she said to May Swenson, successful poems are not just 'lucky accidents'; rather they are:

> the indication that you have worked hard on all the others, and felt deeply, and somehow managed to create the right atmosphere in your own brain for a good poem to emerge. (*OA* 361)

Elements of the 'somehow'—a key word enabling ambivalence in Bishop, as are also 'someone' and 'something '—will always remain elusively mysterious.

Remarkably, Bishop only once sought to 'forget' or stand aside from one of her published poems; that poem is 'The Mountain', written in Brazil in 1952. Bishop sent the finished draft to Katharine White at *The New Yorker*, in accordance with the terms of her first reading agreement. However, she made it clear that should White reject the poem she would be pleased, as she wanted to send something to Karl Shapiro at *Poetry*, where it was duly published (*NYr* 81). Bishop included the poem in the first edition of *A Cold Spring* but removed it from future printings of her books, including *The Complete Poems*. In *Poems* (2011), 'The Mountain' is placed in amongst uncollected poems (1933–1969), rather than where it was originally published in *A Cold Spring,* between 'Letter to N.Y.' and 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore.' The subject of the poem is a mountain whose refrain is that 'I do not know my age', or 'Tell me how old I am'; an object by which Bishop can interrogate time. As Thomas Travisano notes, 'The Mountain' is Bishop's second Brazilian poem (2019 226), a poem in which a natural object is endowed with 'sentient life' (227); the mountain moves, touches, reads, listens, tastes. It has memory, and also cannot remember. Travisano reads the poem

as a companion to earlier poems such as 'Conversation', 'Argument' and 'While Someone Telephones'. If it is placed alongside 'The Shampoo' and 'Arrival at Santos', both poems written at a similar time, it can be read as a precursor to 'Song for the Rainy Season' or 'The Armadillo'. Holding in mind the 'House, open house / to the white dew / and the milk-white sunrise' of 'Song for the Rainy Season (*P* 99), a house that is kind to 'membership / of silver fish, mouse, / bookworms,' I turn to the second verse of 'The Mountain'. Here the reality of life on or as the mountain is different, more uncomfortable, but sharing a tonal similarity with 'Song for the Rainy Season', reading

> In the morning it is different.
> An open book confronts me,
> too close to read in comfort.
> Tell me how old I am.
>
> (*P* 227)

'The Mountain' does not have the polish of 'Song for the Rainy Season', but it shares the tonal longing for a home, for finding a place of belonging. It is less attractive than 'Song' partly because it is a poem of not knowing, of described insufficiency. Despite its great age, everything, even the children, leave the mountain too soon, or become hardened against their nature. The refrain of 'The Mountain' is a constant state of unknowing, a desire to know my 'age', age being that of years and of finding a place amongst cultural contemporaries. In part, 'The Mountain' speaks to Bishop's search for what Michael O'Neill termed her 'search for a language adequate for negative wonder' (2007, 28). If 'The Mountain' is read alongside other Bishop poems of the same period, I think it demonstrates one of Bishop's attempts at creating a voice that can come to terms with a Keatsian negative capability: the attempt to construct a form

where the poem can capture the moment when 'man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason' (Keats, 2014, 79). That Bishop retracted the poem is a clear signal that she did not find it successful.

'The Mountain' is, in part, a rehearsal for the language to say what cannot be said. In this, it is similar to 'Quai d'Orléans' a poem that works with the liminal language of dissolution, of the area between what is said and what remains unsaid, or unspoken. A second reading of 'Quai d'Orléans' brings to the fore the repeated emphasis on dissolution or disappearance; there are 'Mercury-veins on the giant leaves,' which 'extinguish themselves against the walls' of the banks, synonymously with the 'falling-stars' which come to their 'ends / at a point in the sky' (*P* 29). The image of 'mercury-veins' is a beautiful one, giving colour, light and movement threaded through the giant oak leaves that were, in the previous lines, momentarily shadowed by 'gray lights / on duller gray'. It adds an element of surprise and of hidden danger; mercury is the only metallic element that is liquid at normal conditions, an inverse of the usual. Colloquially known as 'quicksilver', mercury is an element that carries connotations of colour, liquidity, speed and toxicity. The poem creates echoes later heard in the body of sea of 'At the Fishhouses' where the colour gray and dashes of silver shoot between the watery depths of the two poems.

In 'Quai d Orléans' these images of quicksilver ripples and leaves:

> go drifting by
> to disappear as modestly, down the sea's
> dissolving halls.

(*P* 29)

At the end of the poem, just as the reader might expect the poem to also 'drift by' or dissolve, the poem does a volte-face. In fact, the leaves never do dissolve, being caught and preserved in the final lines, 'but for life we'll not be rid / of the leaves' fossils.' These are fallen leaves, denied the ephemeral nature of the dead, and instead caught and conserved. I will return to the interior monologue in the final quatrain of the poem momentarily, pausing to note that my reading of the 'leaves' fossils' weaves the visual reference to the design of the wallpaper at Vassar that Travisano identified, together with a heard echo of a reference to Ralph Waldo Emerson's statement that 'Language is fossil poetry.' This comes in Emerson's essay, 'The Poet', published in 'Essays, Second Series' in 1844, where he expounds on his theme of the role of the poet, describing the poet as the

> Namer, as Language-maker, naming things sometime after their appearance, sometimes after their essence… The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history, …… Language is fossil poetry. (Essays, Second Series, 7-8)

What Emerson expresses as 'appearance' and 'essence' is similar to Bishop's 'feelings' and 'thinkings'; Emerson's note of the weight and complexity in the meaning of each word resonates with Bishop. In 'Quai d'Orléans', Bishop uses language to layer her own memories of images and actions, to enable a 'fossilisation' of sensation that would otherwise be fleeting, ephemeral; or, to extend Stewart's definition, language has the ability to transform the ephemeral into the immortal. This experience does not belong wholly to the author; the reader is not a passive bystander. In the act of reading the poem, each reader absorbs both the literal definition of the word, adding their own layers of meaning born from the personal experience brought to the reading of the

poem. It is in the reading—and the re-reading—that the poem continuously adds to the layers of meaning attributed to the words.

Consider also the role of translation in the constant reinterpretation of meaning that even the most literal poem has to be subject. Bishop never formalised a theory of translation, but did predicate the literal in her comments on her translations (*PPL* 856). Bishop's emphasis on the 'literal' nature of her translations masks her appreciation of the challenges that a translator of poetry faces in trying to translate the multiple meanings that accumulate in a single word. Unlike Bishop, her collaborator and fellow poet, Octavio Paz, did formulate his theory on translation. In his essay 'Translation: Literature and Letters'(1971), Paz differentiates between the role of the poet, being to create a text from movable characters, and the role of the translator, being to dismantle the text, release the words, and then reassemble a text. The unifying aspect of the different theories and approaches to language is the ability of a word to capture and hold image and emotion. 'Object & Apparitions' is a poem that is as much about the ability of language to translate experience across art forms as it is an homage to Joseph Cornell. For Bishop, poet and translator, there is a mirroring and doubling to the poet’s action of using text to capture sensation. As poet and reader she carries her own awareness of what she perceives in the poem, and what she brings to the text. As poet-translator she is charged with dismantling the text and then reassembling it. In so doing, the text mirrors her action of writing, of making visible the meaning in her words; 'Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes / my words became visible for a moment' (*P* 202). I return to the liminal space between saying something and the restraint of not saying it, or wishing to retract from what was said. Emerson's sense of the poet being

the 'Namer, or language-maker', juxtaposed with Paz's sense of the poet translator working with language to fix, release and re-assemble the poem, illuminates another reading of 'Quai d'Orléans', privileging the sense of movement, dissolution and dissolving. The apparently contradictory notion of 'leaves' fossils' carries within it the marks of dissolving layers of language.

This sense of dissolving pervades all of 'Quai d'Orléans'. Bishop structures the poem around a very specific pattern of line lengths—'one line tetrameter and one line dimeter' (Cook 2016, 97). The presentation of the poem on the page visually reinforces meter; one longer line followed by a short centralised, indented line, possibly meant to visually mimic the movement of waves against the walls of the river bed, or, as Cook suggests, outlining the shape of the oak leaf on the page. The first 16 lines are concerned with a description of the scene; the poem then attempts a volte face as the observer bodily enters the poem;

> We stand as still as stones to watch
>   the leaves and ripples
> while light and nervous water hold
>   their interview.
> "If what we see could forget us half as easily,"
>   I want to tell you,
> "as it does itself—but for life we'll not be rid
>   of the leaves' fossils."
>
> (Quai d'Orléans, lines 17–24, *P* 29)

The plural of the personal pronoun indicates Margaret Miller standing alongside Bishop, whilst simultaneously creating a bridge out of the poem to include the reader, a second presence alongside the poet. A transposition follows; the watchers take on

the still, implicitly inanimate nature of the stones, whilst the human senses of nervousness and conversation are bestowed on the light and water. Why is the water nervous? Is this a moment of poetic recollection of the anxiety that she and the others must have felt during the interviews (note, not conversations) that took place after the accident? Or is it a delicate description of the way that ripples do pulse and fade in light? The introduction of the speaking voice causes another conundrum for the reader; no sooner is the spoken voice indicated by speech marks—'"If what...... "', than it then indicates an unspoken, interior monologue, '"I **want** to tell you"' (my emphasis). This moment of unspoken speech comes in the last four lines of the poem, as it attempts to move towards closure; but the spoken/unspoken words create a sense of opposition which remains unresolved. The exposition of memory also attempts to hold within it oppositional forces. The speaker does not wish to forget what he/she has seen, rather the inverse, hoping that what has been seen by him/her will forget. Memory is a function attributed to that which is observed, the water, stones, ripples, leaves, all objects which may bear the marks of time on them, but do not have the human ability to remember. Memory is triggered within the poet and reader by considering the material qualities of the objects seen.

Here biography provides an illuminating aspect to these lines and to the encapsulated conflict between the need to forget and the ability to remember. In her essay, 'The Closet of Breath: Elizabeth Bishop, Her Body and Her Art', Marilyn May Lomabardi cites from Bishop's Key West notebooks in which she describes the accident. Bishop wrote: '"the arm lay outstretched in the soft brown grass at the side of the road and spoke quietly to itself, 'Oh my poor body! Oh my poor body! I cannot bear to give

you up"' (VC KWN 1, 59, quoted in Lombardi, 1993, 46). Lombardi goes on to explore the ways in which 'Bishop is terribly drawn to and yet alienated from the unconscious life of her own body' (1993, 47), aspects of which I touch on in this chapter. What strikes me is the image of the arm imprinted in the 'soft brown grass', an image that would soon be forgotten by, or erased from, the grass itself when the arm was removed and nature changed the landscape. Compare this with the poem, where the natural landscape is not allowed to easily forget what it has seen; it can only forget itself. Neither the wind, nor rain, nor sun will be able to erase the imprint of the arm on the grass. The painful literal memory of what has been suffered and observed is displaced onto the landscape, where it unnaturally fossilises rather than dissolves into forgetfulness. The speaking voice interrupts this uncomfortable consideration of the nature of memory. 'I want to tell you', it says. Immediately it becomes clear that only the reader can hear the poet's speech; the observer has not been able to articulate their own feelings or thoughts to the figure standing alongside them. Within the poem, the human ability to speak has been transposed to 'light and nervous water', whilst externally the reader has to listen to an unspoken voice. In the unspoken voice, only one aspect of language is able to effect its transformation between experience and the recording of experience.

'Quai d'Orléans' is not one of Bishop's most memorable poems, but in the way it works with idea of sensation, repetition and literal depiction it prefigures many of Bishop's later, great poems, such as 'In the Waiting Room' or 'Sestina'. To give the literal primacy in a reading of Bishop's poems is, in my opinion, invigorating; it makes readers alive to the myriad of sensations therein depicted. However, the literal must

be edited by the poet in order to escape restriction by definition. A re-reading of the poems encourages and enables a further recognition of how repetition within the poem functions as a part of how that poem is made unique; things repeat and dissolve and are unrepeatable. In many ways, Bishop's poems are edging towards an instruction on learning how to forget. Repetition paradoxically enables a forgetting by overwriting the initial sensation with the palimpsest of sensations that come by the replay of repeated emotions.

Chapter IV: The Role of Dedications and Endnotes

'HERE AM I FOR WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING.'

(*P* 176)

On a first reading, Elizabeth Bishop's poetry is seemingly unencumbered by the weight of marginalia such as dedications or footnotes. The dedications Bishop gave to her books on publication (as listed in Candace MacMahon's *Elizabeth Bishop: A Bibliography, 1927–1979,* itself also dedicated to Dr Anny Baumann) are as follows. *Poems*: *North & South—A Cold Spring* is 'TO DR. ANNY BAUMANN', *Questions of Travel* 'FOR LOTA DE MACEDO SOARES' and *Geography III* 'FOR ALICE METHFESSEL'. All these dedications are presented on the page without embellishment, much as a simple tag on a present indicates who the gift is meant for. None of Bishop's prose pieces carry dedications, although 'Efforts of Affection: A memoir of Marianne Moore' (*Pr* 117) is explicitly for and about Moore. I speculate that this pattern of favouring poems over prose as carriers for dedications can be read as a hint that Bishop felt her poetry to be more accomplished, or more polished, thus more suitable for a dedication. Whatever the reason—which was never explained by Bishop—dedicatory practice is one of the differentiators between Bishop's published prose and poetry. Except for readings where dedications are attached to autobiography, critics have largely ignored Bishop's dedications. In each one of three books of poetry that have a dedication, the text was capitalised and printed in a smaller font than the title on the frontispiece of the book, but for ease of reading, I have not capitalised these dedications throughout this chapter. The simplicity of the vocabulary and the paratext is deceptive. Each one of these dedications is a carrier for, or a connector of, the intellectual processes and creative outcome that is Bishop's poetry. The latter two dedications—both to women

who were Bishop's lovers—are augmented by further quotations. The dedication on the title page of *Questions of Travel* is followed immediately by a quotation from Camões, left untranslated in the original Portuguese. The dedication to Alice Methfessel in *Geography III* is followed on the next page by an extensive epigraph from *First Lessons in Geography*, a child's textbook, where the text has been deliberately dissociated from the original imagery. All three dedicates were women—Dr Anny Baumann was one of Bishop's doctors, a mainstay in her life—and that two of the women were her lovers is important, although not to the exclusion of other aspects hiding behind the text of the dedications. The quotation in my title, 'HERE AM I FOR WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING', is neither a dedication, nor does it refer to a person (except possibly indirectly in the figure of Lilli Correia Araújo to whom the poem is dedicated); rather it is a bumper sticker similar to ones Bishop observed in Brazil, and incorporated into her poem, 'Under the Window: Ouro Prêto' (*P* 175). The archives at Vassar include a page of notes titled 'Truck Bumpers' (VC 68.5), written in English, and listing a series of aphorisms that caught Bishop's eye and ear. There is no indication of whether they were originally in Portuguese, although it seems possible given the tone and sentence structure. I find this quotation compelling, partly because of the deliberate capitalisation of it within the poem, giving it a proclamatory nature so that it cannot help but be noticed. The structure is also revealing: 'Here am I' rather than 'Here I am'. The former speaks to the arrival of an individual self, presaging 'In the Waiting Room' whilst the latter echoes the arrival of the tourist or traveller trope that Bishop explored so often. The grammatical structure suggests a direct translation from the Portuguese, but that is speculative. These ideas of connectivity across distance, of

arrival, and of physical presence, are concepts that linger in the background of the dedications that Bishop choose to adorn her poems with.

The typology and format that Bishop chose for the dedications merits attention. That Bishop thought about the structure and look of her poems on the page with an artist's attention to detail is in no doubt. As her correspondence with *The New Yorker* attests, she was equally particular about the format and wording of the dedications. The OED defines a literary dedication as 'the form of words in which a writing, engraving, etc., is dedicated to some person'. These words are conventionally found on the title page of the book or under the title of the poem and their intention—according to the OED—is to 'set apart', 'devote', or 'commemorate' the work for (or to) the named person. Dedication stems from the verb, 'to dedicate', the etymology of which goes back to the Latin 'dedicat', which itself has 'dicare', to say, at its root. To dedicate a work, is, in part, a statement that the author has found a voice and is able to speak it. There is, by implication, an understanding that the dedicatee will read, or can 'hear' what is written, or spoken, even though it is not uncommon to dedicate works 'in memoriam' to someone who has died. In this respect, as in others, dedications are not dissimilar to letters. Dedications are also therefore part of a complex web of communications between the author and the dedicatee(s); in Bishop's work this is clearly (but not uniquely) seen in the exchange of dedications between her and Robert Lowell.

In the past, works were often dedicated as an aspect of financial patronage, sometimes in recognition of the patron's support for the artist and sometimes as a result of the cost of publishing and disseminating a work. Dedications to honour direct

financial patronage is not a feature of Bishop's poetry, although there are readings of her friendship with Lowell that could incorporate this aspect. However, patronage—in all its forms, including artistic and financial—should not be dismissed; it forms part of the discussion of the dedicatory relationship between Bishop and Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, and Louise Crane. Financial support also casts a shadow over Bishop's encouragement of other, younger artists, such as Kit Barker and May Swenson. In this chapter, with the exception of Robert Lowell, I do not go into detail about the many poets that have dedicated a work to Bishop both during and after her life, but I do briefly explore the friendship she had with Ilse and Kit Barker through the lens of patronage. My intention is to raise some questions about the ostensibly simple and familiar nature of a dedication, and then, borrowing from the more familiar critical visual arts framework that is often used in reading Bishop, explore what these dedications might reveal not just about Bishop the person, but also about the intellectual processes that foreshadow the poetry, as well as what the presence of the dedication may do to influence the experience of reading the poem.

Dedications are often prefaced with the word 'to' or 'for' someone, a marker for the relationship between the author and the dedicatee, just as Bishop has done in the three book dedications listed above. To dismiss the choice inherent in this small grammatical point as chance seems foolish, particularly in the light of Bishop's reputation as a wordsmith, and the importance she placed on accuracy. What difference, if any, does the choice of preposition makes to the reader's understanding of the dedication? There is a moment in 'Letter to Two Friends', a draft poem dating

from 1957 (*EAP* 113 & 317) written in Brazil, when Bishop describes what it is like to be becalmed:

> and sometime during the night
> the poem I was trying to write
> has turned into prepositions:
> ins and aboves and upons
> [overs and unders and ups]—
>
> what am I trying to do?
> Change places in a canoe?
>   method of composition —
>
> (*EAP* 113)

The two friends are Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell. In the poem, Bishop goes on to ask 'Marianne, loan me a noun! / Cal, please cable a verb!' (*EAP* 113). As well as being a plea for connectivity to friends and to the US, the poem speaks to Bishop's writing process, finely attuned to the grammatical structure and movement in language. The poem suggests that it is inherently difficult to change methods of composition, in moving between letters, translations, prose, poetry, perhaps from letter to poetry or vice versa. Each individual grammatical component of language has its own strength, and all must be kept in balance. The vast majority of Bishop's published dedications are 'for'; only *A Cold Spring* is 'to Dr. Anny Baumann', and two poems—'Anaphora' and 'North Haven'—are 'in memoriam' (see appendix I). In this brief summary of choice of prepositions, I have only included Bishop's own published works. The dedications in Bishop's incomplete and unpublished works, the dedications in her translated poems, specifically 'Travelling in the Family' and 'Objects &

Apparitions', as well as the myriad of other parenthetical information that Bishop inserts in her published work, below or alongside the words of the title or poem, such as '[On my birthday]' in 'The Bight', have not been counted in weighing up the prevalence of 'for' or 'to'. The extent of this list of exclusions hints at the surprising complexity of considering the weight of dedicatory adornment to Bishop's poetry.

The choice between 'to' or 'for' as a prefix to the dedications is very similar. Both hold a sense of directing the words that follow at someone, but 'for' also carries the connation of gift giving, in the sense that the book or poem is a gift for the dedicatee. This sense of 'gift giving' is the emotion that Bishop ascribed to her decision to dedicate 'Under the Window' *'for Lilli Correia de Araujo*' (*P* 175). When Bishop first offered the poem to *The New Yorker* in September 1965, her editor, Howard Moss, tried to persuade her to remove the dedication, because it meant nothing to the reader (*NYr* 279). Bishop replied with a spirited defence of the dedication, conjoining strands of argument which she termed 'objective ones and personal ones together' (*NYr* 281), in defence of the dedication. Her reasoning is tripartite, first alluding to the touch of 'mystery' added to the poem by a Brazilian name, then repudiating what she sees as a 'new' policy, citing previous examples of dedications, and finally, ending with the personal, stating that this dedication is 'almost the only re-turn my friend Lilli will let me make for endless hospitality and kindness' (*NYr* 281). In the word 're-turn' there are shadows of financial language, such as a return on investment. Millier states that Bishop stayed at Correia de Araujo's house in 1965 (Millier 369); the letter to Moss at *The New Yorker* suggests some transactional undertone to the dedication. However, just as the exchange of gifts and tokens that Bishop shared with Marianne Moore or

Robert Lowell underscores the intensity of their relationship, so, too, is a poem a gift offered by Bishop to the dedicatee, a symbol of the personal relationship that stands behind the dedication. In 'Under the Window: Ouro Prêto' the emphasis of the dedication remains on the personal relationship between the two women; the poem recounts a series of conversations overheard from a bedroom window and as Bret Millier notes, 'the bedroom overlooking the fountain was Lilli's own' (Millier 369). However, the poem is more ambiguous; the poem invites the reader to begin reading believing that it the poet listening at the window, and reporting back on what is heard. At the end of the poem, who is doing the listening, and from what perspective, is more ambiguous. 'The seven ages of man are talkative / and soiled and thirsty' (*P* 176), states the penultimate verse, recalling Shakespeare's 'All the world's a stage' from *As You Like It*. This echo casts a shadow on the panorama depicted in 'Under the Window: Ouro Prêto'; it now difficult to watch or listen without some involvement in the seven ages of man therein depicted. The closing lines of the poem depict the pools of oil lying in the puddle 'like tatters of the *Morpho* butterfly' (*P* 176), suggesting that we are all simultaneously players and spectators in the destruction of the natural world we see around us.

The questions involved in trying to understand both the choice between 'to' and 'for' in dedications and the implications of that decision are more complex than may initially appear. For example, another layer of complexity lies within Bishop's choice of titles, some of which use either 'for' or 'to', therefore constructing what may be read as a hidden dedication within the title itself. The range of reference alluded to by 'Song <u>for</u> the Rainy Season', 'Letter <u>to</u> N.Y.' and 'Invitation <u>to</u> Miss Marianne Moore' (my

emphases) explicitly suggests that each poem carries with it the weight of speaking to, or commemoration of, a place or person, although only 'Letter to N.Y' also carries a specific dedication, *'for Louise Crane'*. The variants of the title of 'Song for the Rainy Season' considered by Bishop and her editors at *The New Yorker* are discussed in more detail below; but I note here that the subscript footnote appended to the poem in its publication in *The Complete Poems, 1927–1979* and replicated in further editions *(P* 342, note 9*),* gives the address of the house that Bishop shared with Lota de Macedo Soares, much as it would be written on a letter, right side justified in the bottom right corner of the poem:

> *Sítio da Alcobaçinha*
> *Fazenda Samambaia,*
> *Petrópolis*
> (*P* 100)

The poem when first printed in *The New Yorker* did not have this footnote. This later version of the poem explicitly pinpoints the poem to Samambaia, exactly locating the poem in Brazil, something Bishop was initially unwilling to do (*NYr* 232–3), despite her editor, Katherine White making a specific request to do so. Another title of a different, earlier poem evoking the spirit of correspondence, 'Letter to N.Y' (*P* 78) makes clear that, in this case, the poem is about, or for, the city of New York, as well as being a poem about relationships. It is another poem that holds a double dedication, in that it is specifically dedicated to Bishop's friend, Louise Crane. Bishop used images and language of doubles extensively in her poetry; these oblique double dedications add another aspect to consider. In the early poems such as 'The Weed' or 'The Gentleman of Shalott', doubles and mirrors are complicated, mysterious actions that threaten—

and do—divide the self. In chapter V I discuss how the mirror in 'To Be Written on the Mirror in Whitewash' is impeded from reflecting the viewer's image by the writing that has been inscribed on it. Dedications are another entry into a consideration of the world of doubles and the split of the self in Bishop. In 'The Weed' the dreaming Bishop imagines asking the weed:

> '"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."
>
> (*P* 23)

If we ask of dedications the same question, their ability to both split and double a reading of a poem simultaneously provides an uneasy answer to what they have to say on the construction of a poetic self. I return to this later in the chapter, pausing only to note that, when first published by *Harper's Bazaar* in 1940, 'Letter to N.Y' had no specific dedication; the *'for Louise Crane'* was added by Bishop in the 1969 edition of *The Complete Poems*.

The 1969 edition of *The Complete Poems* is notable for the number of dedications that Bishop retrospectively added to previously published poems, setting a precedent followed by the further publications and editions of Bishop's poetry. The act of retrospectively dedicating a poem to a person is in itself revealing. My instinct is to assume that a retrospective dedication indicates a completeness or finality in the mind of the author about the person to whom the poem is dedicated; but this is intuition, not reported fact from Bishop. It seems more useful to limit the parameters around

the question of retrospective dedications. If a dedication is an integral part of a poem (a stance that is not always without some controversy), then what does this temporal gap between one edition of the poem and another signify for the experience and understanding of a reading a poem like 'Letter to N.Y.?' Does the presence of the dedication to Louise Crane somehow foreshorten the experience of reading the poem, so that her figure and the relationship she had with Bishop inevitably limits the reading of the poem to being explicitly connected to that relationship, rather than to the wider experience of living in a city? Or is the poem unencumbered by the weight of personal allusion cast by the dedication, which only works to underscore what the poem already makes clear, that this is a poem about relationships? In addition to the dedication to Louise Crane, Bishop also added the dedication to Margaret Miller ('Quai d'Orléans'), Thomas Edwards Manning ('Little Exercise'), and Marjorie Carr Stevens ('Anaphora') to the 1969 edition of *The Complete Poems*. In the case of another poem also dating from the late 1940's, 'Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore', the title explicitly opens a dialogue with Marianne Moore, and establishes her as the subject of the poem, although the poem does not carry a distinct dedication to her. In this case, perhaps the lack of specific dedication—retrospective or otherwise—came as a relief to Bishop, who was upset to learn that some of her contemporary readers found the poem to be 'mean', a reading far from Bishop's intentions (*OA* 160). These are all instances of poems that proclaim some sort of dedication 'to' or 'for' a place or person, which are, in the first instance a proclamation of a voice and then an indication, by Bishop, of the connectivity of the poem to something outside of itself, beyond her as author; the dedications explicitly link the poems to people and place. The questions posited by the insertion of dedications multiply. I began by exploring aspects of authorial intention, the impact of

different propositions and now move to considering the effect of the insertion of a dedication or endnote on the reading experience. As the reader explores the poem and its various speaking voices, the wealth of possible interpretations multiply, becoming increasingly complex given the paratextual questions both of the single poem, and of the poem as a part of a collection.

As is the case with 'Song for the Rainy Season', there are a number of poems that do not carry a dedication per se, but do have additional paratextual information that enable the insertion of a different speaking voice to the poem. Bishop's poems contain multiple examples of such authorial paratextual interjections, such as '[*On my birthday*]' from 'The Bight', or '*[Brazil. A friend of the writer is speaking.]* from 'Manuelizho', or '*[Rio de Janeiro]*' from 'Pink Dog'. Are these insertions supposed to be read in a similar way as a direct dedication? And further, are dedications and parenthetical notes poetry and thus part of the poem, or are they something other? Writing about 'Manners' (which carries the dedication 'for a Child of 1918'), Jonathan Ellis explores some of the questions raised by Bishop's dedication and parenthetical notes. 'Manners' was originally published in *The New Yorker* where it appeared with the dedication; it was not one suggested by Bishop's editors at the magazine (*NYr* 151 n2). Tracking how Bishop then placed the poem in her various collections of poetry begins to illuminate the subtle ways in which these aspects influence a reader's perception of a poem. Chronologically, publication in *The New Yorker* of 'Manners' in 1955 followed that of 'In the Village', in 1953. As Ellis notes this order is originally maintained; 'Manners' was originally placed after 'In the Village' in Bishop's 1965 edition of *Questions of Travel*; its history is then 'erased' by the structure adopted by

the 1969 *The Complete Poems* (Ellis 2019a, *P* 342 note 11) because of the removal of 'In the Village'. From here onwards, it is easy for the reader to (incorrectly) assume that 'Manners' was Bishop's first response to Nova Scotia from Brazil, rather than her second. Ellis also questions why Bishop linked the poem to 1918—a date when she was already living with her paternal grandparents in Worcester Massachusetts—and not to the earlier period when she was in Nova Scotia. The poem is anchored in Nova Scotia; the answer is, says Ellis, 'not because Bishop didn't remember where she was living in 1918 but because she remembered too well that she wasn't a resident of Great Village' (Ellis 2019a) any longer. One reading of the poem is that of a double elegy; both for the childhood Bishop lost when she was moved from Nova Scotia, and in commemoration of the unhappy child of 1918 who went on to suffer the abuse chronicled in the letter to Ruth Foster (VC 118.33). That this depth of close reading is only available to readers who have biographical knowledge of Bishop's history is a point I shall address momentarily; but it is the date of 1918 that Bishop gives the poem which opens up these readings and remains pivotal to the poem.

Returning to the question of whether the dedication is part of the poem or something other, we could ask if removing it significantly changes our reading of the poem. I expect that each reader will give a different answer; my view is that in the case of 'Manners', the loss of the dedication makes the poem coalesce more firmly into a relatively simple balladic memorial for times gone by. The placement it is given in Bishop collections following the structure of *The Complete Poems* of 1969 already downplays the role it originally had as Bishop's second response composed whilst in Brazil about her childhood in Canada; a further lack of date stamp discourages the

intimacy of questions as to 'why' Bishop marked it with 1918, and the deletion of 'for a Child' removes the indication to the reader to think about whether this poem really is for a child—any child—or the child that Bishop was in 1918. Ellis quotes Anne Greenhalgh, who followed conventional practice in her *A Concordance to Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry,* noting that 'the concordance does not include: titles or Roman numerals numbering poems; dedications, quotations, or explanations introducing poems; or dates and footnotes at the end of poems' (Greenhalgh, cited in Ellis, 2019a). As Ellis points out, this seems 'relatively uncontroversial until you begin thinking about what is left out from this categorisation of a Bishop poem' (Ellis 2019a). In compiling appendix 1 detailing all Bishop's parenthetical notations to her published poems, I quickly came to agree with Ellis's conclusion that it is 'almost impossible to dismiss' all this other information that surrounds Bishop's poetry; each one of these distinct pieces of information stimulate a locus of attention with the poem for the reader. That this locus of attention is usually biographical is inevitable; but the stimulation the reader feels brings to mind a point made by Heather Treseler in her examination of Bishop's various literary tropes. Treseler points out that Bishop's employment of these allows her to create 'a space within the lyric poem in which private faces might be worn in public places with some measure of impunity' (Treseler 2019a, 263). The private worn in public, so oblique as to be almost a mask; the dedication to 'Manners' and the knowledge suggested by the biographical hinterland that shadows the poem is a case in point.

The striking authorial intervention given to 'The Bight' (*P* 59) is another example of where a para-literary trope combines with a dedication as part of the structure of

the poem to allow Bishop to create space within the poem for the public and private self to co-exist. This poem has, as a subtitle, or parenthetical note, the italicised and bracketed words '[*On my birthday*]', centralised and placed directly under the title. This is not, strictly speaking, a dedication, and yet the position on page and the formatting of the note present it to the reader very much in the format of a dedication, in this case from Bishop to herself. Treseler's identification of 'para-literary media' (2019b) come in to play here, and not just in the idea of a birthday card. Writing to Lowell in January 1948 Bishop described the scene in Key West, Florida, saying: 'The water looks like blue gas—the harbor is always a mess, here, junky little boats all piled up, [...] It reminds me a little of my desk' (*WIA* 23). These are all images that found their way into the poem, building up to the line 'The bight is littered with old correspondences', a clear evocation of the deep connections between Bishop's epistolary practice and her poetry, as well as a visual image where the white surf of the waves recall the white of overlapping pieces of paper. Bishop's parenthetical insertion of *'On my birthday*' invites the reader to look for the personal within the poem. Is the poet's birthday the day of publication? Or another day? Before exploring these possibilities, recall that the note is italicised, in contrast to the main body of the poem. This formatting adds to the notion of the invitation towards the personal; many—but not all—of Bishop's dedications and parenthetical information are italicised (see appendix).

The exhibition 'On Writing' at *The British Library* (2019) reminds the viewer that writing developed not only in response to human needs but also as a result of 'internal ergonomic, human kinaesthetic and aesthetic factors' (Clayton 2019, 10). One aspect of a human factor that influenced the formation of writing is that of speed; Stan Knight

tells us that italics, a result of a cursive script probably devised by Niccolò Niccoli, came into being not only to improve legibility but also allow for faster writing (Knight 2019, 63). Visually, the slanted aspect of italics recalls the presence of the human hand that is also behind—albeit more distanced—the standard typed font. When 'The Bight' first appeared *The New Yorker*, the note was not italicised; it was formatted as 'On My Birthday' and centralised directly under the title of the poem. Bishop probably choose to return the note into italics when it was collected for *A Cold Spring, (*although this change is not noted in *A Bibliography*) a choice that has since been followed. Like Bishop's positioning of the address of Samambaia in 'Song for a Rainy Season', the decision to return the note '[*On my birthday*]' to italics is noteworthy, because it is a deliberate visual prompt to the reader to notice the difference between this line and the main text of the poem. The register of the lyric voice of the poem is not uniform between italics and standard font. In the case of 'The Bight', the change from standard font to italics enhances the suggestion that this note is also a dedication, imitating, as it now does, the habitual format of dedications. In this case, the dedication is a self-dedication; one of the pivots for 'The Bight' is the commemoration of a point in time, in this case, Bishop's birthday and—or—day of birth. The doubling caused by the suggestion of a single date is similar to that I have described around the '1918' in 'Manners'. Bishop's birthdate was February 8th 1911, a fact that she does not share with her readers in the poem. When *The New Yorker* accepted the 'The Bight' in 1948, it withheld publication until February 1949 (*NYr* 38), possibly in order to give the poem further context. The parenthetical note under the title complicates, rather than simplifies, the temporal reading of the poem; is the poem commemorative of the day and year of Bishop's birth, or, alternatively, is this a note to the reader that it is her

birthday on the day of writing (or reading)? Perhaps the date is a distraction, and the real issue behind the decision to include the note is a mark not so much of what is present, but rather, that which is absent. By marking the day of her birth, the poem alludes to the figures of Bishop's parents, who were largely absent from Bishop's life. In this sense the parenthetical note is one more example of what Heaney terms Bishop's markers of loss, which 'both proclaimed and contained the forces that it took the measure of' (Heaney 1995,165). The note marks loss, but also affirms survival. These three words '*On my birthday*' proclaim Bishop's arrival into the world and her existence in the world, thus foreshadowing the evocation of the self in Bishop's later poems, echoing the 'Here am I' of the bumper sticker in 'Under the Window', and the 'you are an *I,* / you are an *Elizabeth*, / you are one of *them*' (*P* 180) of 'In the Waiting Room'.

These parenthetical notes, part dedications, part not, allude not only to the formation of the self, but also to the structure of a sense of place. 'Twelfth Morning; or What You Will' has, in italics, smaller font and right justified, the marker of *'Cabo Frio' (P* 109) at the end of the poem, emphasising its geographical location in the 'Brazil' part of *Questions of Travel*. Similarly, Bishop's later poem to her 'proto-dream-house, / my crypto-dream-house,' 'The End of March' is dedicated as 'for John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read: Duxbury' (*P* 199). Place names are not ephemera in Bishop's poetry; recall the 'excitement' felt by the printer in 'The Map' (*P* 5) resulting in maps where names overrun their boundaries. When originally published in *The New Yorker* in the March 24 1975 issue, the place name, 'Duxbury', formed part of the title, which read 'The End of March, Duxbury'. This was a suggestion made by her editor, Howard Moss,

(*NYr* 361–363), in part to try to persuade Bishop to drop the dedication to John Brinnin and Bill Read, as well as to make it clear that it is a place name. These changes chimed with Bishop's drafts of the poem (V.C. 60.1) which demonstrate the movement of the place name around the body of the poem. Bishop had included 'Duxbury' as part of the dedication from the second draft onwards (there are 11, excluding the magazine proof). The place name appears and disappears, sometimes handwritten, sometimes typed, both centralised and placed on the right margin. In at least one version of the poem, Bishop had the place name as part of the title and not attached to the dedication. The dedication to John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read first appears on what seems to be the fourth draft of the poem. When Bishop replied to Moss's suggestion for the placement of the place name as a part of the title of poem, she agreed that 'Yes, I think that putting DUXBURY in the title is much better—I forget it isn't known the world over' (*NYr* 363), implying that the label indicating place name was intended to be informative, rather than necessarily a dedication to a specific place. However, when the poem appeared in the first printing of *Geography III,* the place name had been moved out of the title into the dedication *(*MacMahon 1980, 106*)*, adding weight to a commemoration of moment in time composed by people and place. The archives at Vassar further hint at the care and meaning Bishop invested in these seemingly small parenthetical notes and dedications. For example, Bishop's notes on the presentation of the preface to *Geography III* (VC 60.3) demonstrate her attention to detail. She stipulates that the preface is 'To come after the dedication page — / Underlined questions shd. be printed in italics, in a smaller type face than the replies' (VC 60.3). These many instances of small alterations to the text of a poem are not surprising; they demonstrate the great care Bishop took over her published poems and her awareness

of the impact of the poem as a single entity and as a part of a collection, as well as her thoughtfulness concerning the impact of presentation on the reading experience. Being attentive to these questions prompts an awareness in the reader that it is not always wise to consider a specific version of a poem as 'canonical' or absolute; the hidden hand of the editor (even if the editor is also the author) is always at play. In Bishop's lifetime, a sense of awareness of other presentations or formats is critical in respecting her own 'second thought' (*NYr* xlvii) habit.

The flex of interpretation inherent in a 'second thought' habit lies in the shadows of Bishop's use of place names. Although a sense of place is key to Bishop's poetry, the place labels themselves need to be allowed some ambiguity. 'Song for the Rainy Season' is a case in point. This poem first appeared in the October 8, 1960 issue of *The New Yorker*, as 'Song for a Rainy Season' (my emphasis) and without the subscript endnote detailing the address at Samambaia, referred to earlier in this chapter. Katharine White, Bishop's then editor at the magazine, wanted to '*place* this rainy season in the title, or the subtitle' by including the locating word, 'Brazil' (*NYr* 232). Bishop's reply was clear; refusing this suggestion, she commented that 'I would very much like to avoid labelling more poems "Brazil"[...] I don't want to become a local colour poet any more than I can help'. Her suggestion instead was to alter the title to '"Song for *a* Rainy Season" perhaps that would help disassociate it from Brazil in the minds of any readers who do associate me with Brazil?' (*NYr* 233). This disassociation that Bishop sought is emphasised by readings from critics such as Peggy Samuels, who notes that Bishop creates an '"open container"' in verse, where the poem 'becomes a kind of "house" for the objects named in the poem' (2010, 142). I have discussed

elsewhere the reverberations of Bishop's attempts to not become a 'local colour poet' in the context of the (mis) appropriation of Brazilian voices; here I am limited to noting the 'labelling' that Bishop is attempting to avoid affixing to her poem. When 'Song for the Rainy Season' was first published, Bishop emphatically did not want her poem constrained by place; when *The Complete Poems 1927–1979* was compiled, the subscript footnote giving the address as at 'Sitio de Alcobaçinha' has been added (*P* 342, note 9; also *The Complete Poems*, 102). By the time the 1965 edition of *Questions of Travel* had been compiled, the title had returned to 'Song for the Rainy Season' (MacMahon, 58); it is possible that this is also the point at which Bishop added the subscript address to the poem. The ripples of alteration caused by the change from the 'for/ a' of the title and the addition of the subscript address to the end of the poem impacts the delicate balance of needing to be open to a myriad of interpretations whilst still retaining a sense of place. One of the functions of the footnote is, in Heaney's words, to both proclaim and contain loss; the accumulation of time enables this poem to speak directly to Bishop's deep sense of loss articulated in 'One Art' where Samambaia is probably one of Bishop's 'three loved houses' (*P* 198) that she had since lost.

At the same time that Bishop was discussing her desire not to be labelled as a 'local colour poet' with Katharine White, she submitted another poem, 'From Trollope's Journal' (*NYr* 230) to *The New Yorker,* which the magazine refused. Bishop requested that the poem be used in 'January or December—or late November—of this year' (*NYr*230), partly because the poem carries a parenthetical note, '*[Winter, 1861]*' centred below the title. The poem, is, according to Bishop, 'an anti-Eisenhower poem,

I think—although it's really almost all Trollope' (*WIA* 594). My purpose here is not to explore aspects of Cold War politics—although that is the overwhelming theme of the poem—rather it is to explore Bishop's aside to Lowell that 'the whole thing should really be in quotation marks,[...], the reason it doesn't sound like me is because it sounds like Trollope' (*WIA* 333). Eleanor Cook reads the poem as an example of a found poem (2016, 171), which, in my opinion, is a suggestion that can be extrapolated to give the poem something of the status of the translation of 'Objects & Apparitions' (in that the original lies with another author) in Bishop's corpus. The idea that 'From Trollope's Journal' takes the voice of another to enable Bishop to speak is given a compelling reading by Heather Treseler. Treseler's emphasis is subtly different; she summarises the poem as being a moment that exemplifies Bishop's manipulation of a private face in a public place in that she situates 'her Cold War critique in the Civil War experiences of a British novelist penning modified Shakespearean sonnets' (Treseler 2019a, 261). Time, culture, history, and poetic form, all but the English language are transmuted by Bishop in her construction of 'From Trollope's Journal'. What does 'From Trollope's Journal' tell us about Bishop's use of reference, as opposed to allusion? The two share characteristics but they are not the same; a reference directly refers back to another work, but an allusion is usually only indirect or implied. Furthermore, as Christopher Ricks reminds us in his preface to *Allusion to the Poets*, 'a source may not be an allusion, for it may not be called into play; it may be scaffolding such as went to the building but does not constitute any part of the building' (2002, 3). Ricks goes on to suggest that authorial intention must also be weighed in the scales between allusion and reference, as too must a reader's understanding. It is not unusual to find either allusion or reference in Bishop's published and draft work. In the case of 'From Trollope's Journal'

Bishop used the title of the work to direct the reader to read with Trollope in mind and in ear, an experience that does not preclude her poem from being an original response to a topical situation. Perhaps the most insightful point about Bishop's borrowing from Trollope is the arc she draws between a prose work resulting in a poem. Bishop accesses both another voice and another format in order to give her the ability to articulate her own impressions of the political reality of her time. This echoes her later thoughts on the possible need, when translating Russian authors, to consider changing format, from poetry into prose (see chapter V on translation). The question of reference and allusion to other works becomes one tainted by the value given to, and the problems of originality. In setting the parameters around allusion and reference, Ricks quotes T.S. Eliot, including a moment in 'Philip Massinger', in which Eliot defines the need to make that which is borrowed distinct from the original, and that which is referred to is left opaque in order to be more successful (Ricks 2002, 4,5). It is worth returning to Eliot's exact formulation in 'Philip Massinger' where he is examining the success—or not—of Massinger's 'indebtedness' to Shakespeare. Eliot writes:

> Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; … The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that which is was torn; … A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. (Eliot 1932, 206)

Bishop's own advice on how to write poetry is not dissimilar. In response to a letter from a Miss Pierson in 1975, Bishop writes that she may be:

> reading too much *about* poetry and not enough poetry. Prosody—metrics—etc. are fascinating—but they all came *afterwards*, obviously. […] Read a lot of poetry—all the time—and *not* 20th century poetry. […] Even if you try to imitate it exactly—it will come out quite different. (*OA* 596)

At this late stage in her career, Bishop is able to see the process of originality as coming out of immersion in the works of another, which in turn facilitates the process of creation by practising through imitation. Bishop's advice was to read poets remote in time and her practice of translation demonstrated her own ability to borrow from poets whose language was other than English. To paraphrase Eliot, the question is whether the immature poet can mature from imitation, move through theft and defacement and refine their craft to improve on what came before, thus in the process creating something unique. The lines quoted from Wordsworth—distinct in time (time being a web between Defoe, Wordsworth and Bishop), and torn from their original genre—in 'Crusoe in England' (*P* 184) are a direct quotation, where the empty gap of the missing word—solitude—speaks also to the palimpsest of predecessors that Bishop layers on her work to simultaneously expose and protect her own private persona, as it does also to Crusoe's condition of solitude. The line from Hopkins that Bishop inserted below the dedication to Jane Dewey in 'A Cold Spring', functions in a slightly different manner. It is again another specific quotation, this time fully attributed, and again speaking across time. The line reads 'Nothing is so beautiful as spring. —Hopkins', written in a standard Roman font under the italicised dedication *'for Jane Dewey, Maryland'* (*P* 55). The attribution of the quotation to Hopkins deliberately evokes his presence, both doubling and splitting the presence of the named dedicatee from one to more than one but not quite two. This effect of a palimpsest of figures at the forefront of a poem is also evoked in 'Objects & Apparitions' where Paz and Cornell stand in relief, and, in 'Letter to N.Y.' where the city of New York and the person of Louise Crane inhabit each other's skin. Neither allusion or reference is constrained by form; Bishop both borrowed from

and alluded to artists who work in different mediums, for example, the artist Max Ernst in 'The Weed' and the singer Billie Holiday for 'Songs for a Colored Singer'.

Bishop also borrowed from artists who worked in different mediums; Peggy Samuels has identified how collage, and specifically 'Kurt Schwitters' use of dissociation' (2010, 106) was relevant for Bishop in her work to give individual objects (such as Crusoe's knife) powers of expression, both in and out of their context. The reference to the blues singer, Billie Holiday in 'Songs for a Colored Singer' (*OA* 478) is acknowledged by Bishop in a letter of 1967. In the same letter, Bishop demonstrates her delight when others find allusions in her poetry; she writes of 'The Man-Moth' that 'I am amazed at the obvious reflection of Herbert in the "one tear" stanza. I am sure you are quite right, but it had never occurred to me at all' (*OA* 477). Recalling Ricks' formulation above, the question of whether Herbert is a source or scaffolding depends on the reader's perception and Bishop's intention. In either reading, Bishop's open generosity towards different readings and her enjoyment in the connectivity readers find is one of the delights of reading her poetry. Allusion, imitation, and referencing are all part of her poetic voice.

Eliot identified the creative impulse behind 'borrowing' from poets who were 'alien in language', and translation was certainly a tool Bishop used to explore unfamiliar voices and forms, as well as being a method for continuing to practise writing during difficult or fallow periods of her life. 'Object & Apparitions', Bishop's translation of Paz's poem, is, like the original, framed by the figure of Joseph Cornell. The dedication reads 'To Joseph Cornell'; the final line reads 'Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes / my words became visible for a moment' (*P* 202). Thus, the name of Joseph

Cornell is both the threshold over which the reader must pass to enter the poem, as it also the end stop to the poem. The figure of Cornell is joined by the shadow of Octavio Paz: the poem carries an endnote 'Translated from the Spanish of Octavio Paz'. The shadowlands of 'Objects & Apparitions' reveal multiple levels of the tautological celebration of 'words becoming visible'. Paz's original verse uses 'Y' as the conjunction; the ampersand of the translated title was also used by Bishop in *North & South;* it is a symbol that developed from 'joining **e** and **t**: et is the Latin word for "and". These kind of factors lie behind the way many script systems develop' (Clayton 2019, 10). The ampersand in 'Objects & Apparitions' points also to the mechanics of handwriting and to the reader's ability to change symbols into linguistic meaning. By definition the written word is always visible, and always has an orality/aurality traced through it; the title calls attention to the versions of the written word, and to the human presence behind typography.

One of the most richly suggestive shadowlands of the written word in Bishop's work is the dedication, left in the original Portuguese, to *Questions of Travel.* Bishop dedicated this book 'For Lota de Macedo Soares' (*P* 83); published in 1965 it preceded Lota's death by overdose by two years. The dedication is followed by a quotation from the Portuguese poet, Camões. The dedication on the frontispiece of *Questions of Travel* reads

> FOR LOTA DE MACEDO SOARES
> *...O dar-vos quanto tenho e quanto posso,*
> *Que quanto mais vos pago, mais vos devo.*
> —Camões
> (*P* 83)

Camões is revered as the Portuguese national poet. Written in the sixteenth century, his epic poem, *Os Lusíadas*, describes Vasco de Gama's discovery of the sea route to India. Bishop's chosen quotation comes from a love sonnet, which begins 'Quem vê, Senhora, claro e manifesto' (Camões 2010, 205). The lines Bishop used can be translated as 'By giving you what I have and what I can / the more I give you, the more I owe you' (my translation); the provenance and another translation of the sonnet can be read in George Monteiro's *Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and After* (12–13). As Monteiro notes, the quotation is taken from a sonnet where the poet is wearing the guise of 'poet-lover' (2012, 14); it is part of the tradition of gifting a poetic offering to a loved one. In the sonnet, the voice of the loved one is silent throughout; this quotation gives voice to Bishop but does not allow Macedo Soares a voice. (Something similar happens in the dedicatory note in *Geography III* to Alice Methfessel, also one of Bishop's deep loves, discussed later in this chapter). The quotation chosen from Camões is ambivalent; there is something unsettling in its commemoration of a moment in which giving can never be enough. The suggestion is that that to give does not satisfy, but rather intensifies a lacuna. Even when the barrier of language is overcome, the meaning of the quotation is puzzling. The decision to leave the text in the original Portuguese rebuffs readers who are not fluent in the language; it is again a way of wearing a mask, or being reticent in public, enabling Bishop to simultaneously celebrate and disguise her lesbian partnership with Macedo Soares.

The earlier reception of 'The Shampoo' suggests that Bishop was wise in the ways in which she affirmed her sexuality and her love for Macedo Soares. 'The Shampoo'—which carries no dedication—was refused by *The New Yorker* in 1953 (*NYr*

112), eventually being published in *The New Republic* in 1955 (*NYr* 114, note 1), and then included by Bishop in *A Cold Spring*. It was refused, at least in part, because it was a 'personal' poem. As Victoria Harrison notes, 'the direct address to "Meu amor," which preceded the last two lines in an early draft had to be removed' (1993, 71). The poem is a love poem; Harrison notes that in their exchange of letters Swenson remarks on her feeling that 'something has been left out' (Swenson, cited in Harrison 1993, 71) of the poem. The poem omits a direct naming of sexuality, just as both Swenson and Bishop avoid any explicit sexual commentary about Bishop's relationship with Macedo Soares in their letters. As Harrison explains, the placement of 'The Shampoo' at the end of *A Cold Spring*

> ushered in a confidence about representing her own intimacy that was new to Bishop's writing, yet when she selected poems for *Questions of Travel* … she included … 'Arrival at Santos' but left out 'The Shampoo'. (1993, 72)

Bishop maintained her ambivalent stance, both in her omission of 'The Shampoo' and in her choice of dedication to *Questions of Travel*, where her avowal of love is oblique, hidden under the cloak of Portuguese. To her friends, Bishop defended the quotation from Camões as being very well-known in Portuguese (Monteiro 2012, 13).

MacMahon's *Elizabeth Bishop: A Bibliography, 1927–1979* was a work with which Bishop cooperated and corrected, although she died just before it was published. Bishop's feelings towards the retrospective nature of the *Bibliography's* compilation of her works are not straightforward. As she commented in the Forward: 'I am rather pleased to see I've written so much when I've always thought I'd written so little; on the other hand, I am rather appalled by how bad some of the things I've written actually are' (1980, ix). This theme of quality and quantity runs through some of the interviews

Bishop gave a later stage in her life. The foreword is not a dedication; rather it is a public note by the author, functioning to proclaim both her pride in her work and her ambition for the future. As both the notes to Appendix II of *Poems* (342) and the *Bibliography* make clear, alterations to dedications (particularly Bishop's retrospective decisions to add dedications to already published works) represent a significant volume of the changes that Bishop made to her poems as they moved from publication in magazines and periodicals to collection in her books of poetry. Writing to Houghton Mifflin, the first publishers of *Poems* in December 1954, Bishop specified that

> the acknowledgements should also ALL be in front of the second part of the book, ie. In front of *A Cold Spring* as well as the dedication to Dr Anny Baumann. This is extremely important, since all the things I am thanking people for were received after your publication of *North & South*. (VC 41.2)

The *Bibliography* also helps to remind us that many readers (both at the time of the poem's initial publication and today) will first meet one of Bishop's poems in isolation in a magazine or anthology. Alternatively, other readers will approach her work in the form of one of her collections of poetry or in a posthumously published collection, such as *Poems*. These different approaches will inevitably emphasise different aspects of the poem, be they thematic or other. I state no preference between one reading experience and another, noting only that the experience will be different. Bishop was fond of remarking that she encouraged readers to read a poem with nothing but a dictionary to hand; the poem should be able to stand as a single complete entity. On the other hand, in a letter to Ruth Foster, she also remarked that her work was, in some way, 'one long poem' (VC 118.33). The additions of dedications as Bishop reviewed and published her books of poetry are a part of her finishing her poem so that it is able to

stand, in Stephanie Burt's words, as a thing with 'its own, unrepeatable, potentially permanent, achieved form' (2019, 334).

It is important to pause and briefly consider the effect of reading a collected work on the assimilation of dedications. Recall that of Bishop's books, *A Cold Spring*, *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III* all had dedications (the *Bibliography* was also dedicated 'for Dr Anny Baumann' but it is unclear whether this was MacMahon or Bishop's choice.) In a collected works the independence of each book structure, as designed for publication by Bishop, is diminished. It is naturally tempting to emphasise the interrelation between the works; a reading that can only be done retrospectively in time. Where a reader is more likely to notice a dedication on the front piece of single book, the dedications—even if correctly preserved and placed—can be more easily missed in a collected work, such as *Poems,* because of this lesser identification of individual book structure. A reader who does not approach the book's contents in a linear fashion is more likely to miss the dedication to that book. Alternatively, reading a collected works in a linear fashion makes it easy to pick up on the dedications and to notice that the more emphatic ones—those that preface the individual books—are all to women, and that many of the individual poems are also dedicated to women. The question is not so much whether this matters; but what is the significance for the reading experience? Just as reading drafts enables the critics to note repetition and accumulation of image, thought or theme, so too does reading a collected works enable the reader to notice repeated themes. For the publication of *The Complete Poems* in 1969, Bishop added dedications to the following poems; 'Quai d'Orléans (for Margaret Miller)', 'Little Exercise (for Thomas Edwards Wanning)', 'Anaphora (in memory of

Marjorie Carr Stevens)' and 'Letter to N.Y. (for Louise Crane)'. The added dedications can be mapped onto Bishop's work through a variety of critical lenses, such as psychological, feminist, textual, temporal, etc., and in so doing, suggest or reveal hitherto 'unread' or 'unknown' aspects of the works and biography of the author. As Deryn Rees-Jones reminds us, the rhythms and repetitions in Bishop's works can be read as 'as a negotiation of nagging emotional impasse but also as a signalling of artistic movement and creation' (2019, 133). Rees-Jones explores these ideas through an analysis of the various drafts of 'Questions of Travel', but a similar impulse can be tracked in Bishop's dedicatory practice. I have noted already how many dedications in Bishop's works are to women, from which we can read the simultaneous pull of impasse versus artistic creation subtly expressed.

It is useful to pause and look at 'The Armadillo' and 'North Haven', both of which are dedicated to Robert Lowell, and then at the dedications to Dr. Anny Baumann in *A Cold Spring* and in the draft poem, 'Belated Dedication'. 'The Armadillo' first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1957 without a dedication (but with an added place marker in the title which read 'The Armadillo—Brazil' (NYr 182), and then later, on re-publishing it in *Questions of Travel*, in 1965, Bishop added the dedication, 'For Robert Lowell'. According to Lloyd Schwartz, Bishop did this, 'she said, to return the compliment of his dedicating "Skunk Hour" to her—not because it was about Lowell' (2004, 120–124). Lowell wrote 'Skunk Hour' in 1957, and it was published in *Life Studies* two years later, in 1959. Some eight years later, in 1965, Lowell sent Bishop a draft of his 'sentences' (*WIA* 580) for *Questions of Travel* in which he suggested that on reading Bishop 'we enter the classical serenity of a new country' (*WIA* 580). The dedication of 'The

Armadillo' was Bishop's response, announced in her reply to him (*WIA* 583), where she also says that there is another 'grimmer' poem (possibly the unfinished 'Apartment in Leme' (*P* 307, *EAP* 330) that she wants to dedicate to him. Schwartz theorises as to why Lowell and Bishop chose these two poems to dedicate to each other, but as he says, the key point about the dedications between the two poet friends is their 'deep ongoing mutual indebtedness—and competitiveness' (2004, 123). Their letters trace the ebb and pull each exerted on the other's creativity; Bishop was further indebted to Lowell who sometimes acted for her much as a patron would, supporting and championing her works. One example is the moment in 1960 when, having complained to Lowell about her financial situation, he responded by directing her to write for a grant at the Chapelbrook Foundation (*WIA* 324), enclosing a letter of support from Archibald MacLeish. Bishop replied ebulliently, 'Heavens Cal! That was SERVICE. I feel as if just held out my hand to the skies' (*WIA* 326), and duly received the award in 1960. Inevitably, as time passes the fact that 'The Armadillo' was first published without a dedication fades; and it is now customary to read both 'The Armadillo' and 'North Haven' together as representing Bishop's public affirmation of her regard for Lowell. Nor is this interpretation wrong. As Joelle Bielle reminds us, this pair of poems became the subject of ongoing discussions between Lowell and Bishop, even after they had been published (*WIA* xiv), and Lowell certainly loved the poem, calling it 'your greatest quatrain poem, I mean it has a wonderful formal-informal grandeur — I see the bomb in a very delicate way' (*WIA* 591). Richard Wilbur recalls Lowell carrying Bishop's 'The Armadillo' with him, 'as you'd carry something to brace you and make you sure of how a poem ought to be' (Fountain & Brazeau, 108). The act of retrospective dedication to

'The Armadillo' is less about the subject matter. Reflecting more on the fact that Lowell loved the poem, the dedication is a mark of deep friendship.

'North Haven', the poem for Lowell that Bishop wrote his death in 1977, is both an elegy and eulogy to Lowell from Bishop. The poem was dedicated *'in memoriam: Robert Lowell*' from the first. As Bishop says in the poem: 'Nature repeats herself, or almost does: / *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise*'; the tragedy of his death being that 'The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change' (*P* 211). The poem salutes the ultimate impasse Lowell has traversed in death, and yet, taking Rees-Jones's thoughts on the activities of revision and repetition, it is clear that the poem recognises their ongoing presence in Bishop's artistic creativity. That Bishop can still repeat and revise herself is a key component in enabling her to complete her elegy for Lowell. As I will discuss, elegies were a difficult form of expression for her. The whole poem functioned as a sort of protective amulet for Bishop; Ilse Barker recalls how on finishing the poem, Bishop 'could hardly bear to put it down, that it was part of her. She put it beside her plate at dinner' (Fountain & Brazeau, 344). 'North Haven' also expands on the role of patronage in Bishop's poetry. Just as Lowell and Bishop were mutual supporters of one another, Bishop also acted as a patron to other artists and poets, in this case, Kit Barker, who she commissioned to illustrate the limited edition broadside of 'North Haven'. In the archives at Vassar, there are some of the letters between Bishop and the Barkers, including one from Ilse Barker (with a note from Kit) on February 2, 1979, in which both profess their 'delight' at the prospect of illustrating the poem. In a later letter, dated June 27 1979, Ilse writes again to thanks Bishop for the '££££££ which arrived y'day', presumably the monies referring to the illustration,

or possibly a loan or gift for another reason (VC 1.9). However, what this brief exchange with the Barkers show is Bishop as artistic supporter, encourager and financial patron.

Bishop adopted elements of the role of patron with different artists and poets throughout her lifetime. Perhaps one of the most extensive, and as yet largely unexplored, is the friendship that between May Swenson and Bishop. Swenson, who was only a few years younger than Bishop, published her first major collection in 1954 and went on to become a major voice in American mid-century poetry. The as yet unpublished correspondence between Bishop and Swenson reveal Bishop in different guises as poetic mentor (sometimes sharp, usually supportive) to Swenson, and Swenson as an acute reader of Bishop's poetry, with penetrating insights into Bishop's crafting of sexuality and intimacy in her poetry (Harrison 1993, 29, 174, 177; Zona 2002, 95–120; Hoak 2019, 99–114). The pair met at Yaddo in 1950, and corresponded until Bishop's death in 1979. The early letters show Bishop acting as a sponsor for Swenson's application for a Guggenheim, and by 1953 Swenson was loosely employed by Bishop typing out Bishop's prose works for eventual presentation to Houghton Mifflin. Swenson proved to be as astute a reader of Bishop's work as Bishop was of hers. In 1955 Swenson wrote a poem 'Dear Elizabeth', subtitled 'A reply to Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil', published in *The New Yorker* in 1965, in which Swenson takes phrases from their letters and weaves them into a poem. Writing to Bishop after publication (the letters are available on a website of Washington University of St Louis, titled 'Final Versions: May Swenson's and Elizabeth Bishop's (Re)Writing of "Dear Elizabeth"'), Swenson reports happily that the public reception of the poem has been largely positive, partly because 'as I always say, *you* wrote it, mostly' ('Final Versions' website, 6 November

1965, page 4). Bishop professed herself honoured by the poem, remarking that Howard Moss at *The New Yorker* must also have liked it enormously as 'he just wrote me that I couldn't use a dedication line in a recent poem of mine — and yet he let you get away with a very obvious dedication...Thank you very much, May.' ('Final Versions' website, 10 November 1965, page 1). Bishop's reaction to the insertion of comments from her letters was very different in this case to her disapproval of Lowell's appropriation of Elizabeth Hardwicks letters in his collection 'The Dolphin'.

Returning to elegies and the part they play in a consideration of dedications it is clear that the form presented difficulties that Bishop found hard to surmount. In 'Bishop's Buried Elegies', Charles Berger coins the term 'quotidian verbal amulets' (2012, 49) to describe the repeated phrases from her grandmothers that Bishop began to work into her draft poem, 'The Grandmothers'. Berger's description, 'verbal amulets', strikes me as being a wonderful encapsulation of what these phrases—'My day will come', 'Nobody knows', and 'Ho-hum, Ho- Hum, hum-a-day' (*EAP* 108–108) meant to Bishop; as an amulet, they are protective (but also dangerous, as amulets can both kill or cure), and portable, physically worn on a chain around the neck and mentally, through the exercise of repetition. There are other phrases that Bishop used in this way: 'Nobody knows', 'I, too, dislike it', (from Moore's 'Poetry') and 'awful, but cheerful', the final line of 'The Bight' which also features on Bishop's gravestone. Like the written dedications that adorn her poems, these phrases are gifts that pass from one person to another, but unlike the dedications, they are gifts from others to Bishop herself; her employment of them in her poetry equate to minor elegiac poems.

Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke Box makes available drafts of several elegies, which remained unfinished despite Bishop's desire for completion and her emotional attachment to the subject. Charles Berger writes about 'Bishop's Buried Elegies' in Edgar Allan Poe, exploring why Bishop may have chosen to hold back poems such as 'For M.B.S., buried in Nova Scotia' in her desire to flesh out a second book of poems (2012, 43). Key amongst these is the draft of 'Aubade and Elegy', the elegy Alice Quinn states (*EAP* 342) that Bishop intended for Lota de Macedo Soares. Perhaps released by her successful completion of 'North Haven' in July 1977 (Millier 532), Bishop included a suggested new project in her application for a Guggenheim in October 1977, which was to be a volume of poems titled *Grandmother's Glass Eye*, and 'a book length poem called Elegy, which she indicated was "partly written"' (Millier 538). 'Aubade and Elegy' is an example of poem stuck on a 'nagging emotional impasse', borrowing from Rees-Jones's analysis of repetition (Rees-Jones 2019, 133), which, in this case is signalled by the repetitions in first line 'No coffee can wake you no coffee can wake you no coffee', in itself is twice repeated and revised ending on the last line as :

No coffee can wwake you   no coffee can wakeyou no coffee
        can wake you
                                        No coffee
                                                        (*EAP* 149)

There is a handwritten insertion of 'no coffee can wake you' in the lines above. The repetition is always in threes, an important number for Bishop (Mayson, 2019). The juxtaposition of Bishop's handwriting with typewritten text unintentionally give the words the appearance of italicised text. This and the emphatic bold text, the typing errors, the gaps in the line, are all a testament of Bishop's emotional state when the

poem was written. In this case, the process of repetition and revision, have not yet successfully enabled Bishop to voice her elegy for Lota. In a further instance of repetition signalling both emotional impasse and release, stands the figure of Dr Anny Baumann. Baumann was Bishop's physician, treating her for her asthma, eczema, depression, alcoholism and associated conditions throughout most of her adult life. Like Lowell, Anny Baumann was the intended recipient of multiple dedications from Bishop, except that unlike the poems for Lowell, Bishop was only able to dedicate her book *A Cold Spring* as being 'To Dr. Anny Baumann' (unless the dedication in the *Bibliography* was suggested by Bishop, not MacMahon, a fact I have not been able to verify). Bishop never succeeded in in repeating her gesture to Anny Baumann in the more minute, yet perhaps more personal, form of a dedicated poem. Alice Quinn presents two drafts of poems possibly meant for Dr Anny Baumann; one 'For A.B.' (*EAP* 46, 269), which Quinn notes there is only a single, crossed out copy of, the other called 'Belated Dedication' (for A.B.) (*EAP* 159, 348) of which there is only one draft. It is this second poem, 'Belated Dedication', that is of most interest to me in the context of repetition. Pulsing through the draft poem is a desire to thank Baumann, 'that you are there to thank, / and thank you with all my heart', as well as a meditation on looking and being looked at, and on being cared for, or held, 'under the promised hand' (*EAP* 159). In *The Biography of a Poetry*, Lorrie Goldensohn defines this poem as a 'stillborn poem' (240). As Goldensohn observes, 'the drafts stand as signposts to a might-have-been' (241), reminding us that given Bishop's great capacity to pause and wait that had she lived longer she may yet have managed to turn the emotional turmoil of the draft into a finished work. Nonetheless, as an unfinished draft, the poem defies a definitive reading.

Like 'Aubade and Elegy', this draft of 'Belated Dedication' is composed of a mix of typed and handwritten lines, and it is to handwriting that I now turn. If dedications function as a form of formal gift giving from the poet to the dedicatee, then the script in which they are written informs the context of the gift just as a gift tag would. There is a visual resonance linking an italicised typed dedication to a handwritten gift tag. As Alice Quinn transcribes in *EAP*, the handwritten notes on the right of the opening lines of 'Belated Dedication' read 'everything / had to be *close*/ (Zoology study)/ In the laboratory / I looked down / & / / the / under the lenses/ & copied them with a hard grey pencil' (*EAP* 349). Notice the 'hard grey pencil', which resonates with Bishop's appreciation of the physicality of her craft. Her letters bemoan the differences between typewriters, noting her preference for one over the other (see the extensive listing for 'typewriters' in *NYr* 420); her notebooks and drafts have appended to them drawing and sketches, for example of the monument in 'The Monument' or of the stage set for 'The Birds'. One aspect of trying to decipher 'Belated Dedication' is watching the hard grey pencil guided by the author's hand make its mark on the paper. The ability to write is a complex skill, in which manual dexterity, hand eye coordination, spatial awareness, posture and the ability to see detail all play an important part. As the recent exhibition, 'Writing' at the British Library reminds us, the English verb 'to write' has connections to:

> the word "wright", as in shipwright, meaning to make, and "rite", meaning a ritual or ceremony that changes us in some way. These coincidences can suggest to the imaginative mind the idea of writing being a kind of making that has the power to transform things. (Clayton 2019, 12)

However, as 'Writing' also reminds us, what we think of in Europe as writing, essentially alphabetic writing, lacks 'everything associated with the physical presence of the

speaker' (Clayton 2019, 13). In reading the drafts of Bishop's work, it is in this attempt to build on the link between handwriting, emotions and physicality of the human body and the marked text on the page that leads to two very different evaluations of the work contained in *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke Box*. Readers can either, like Charles Berger, welcome the introduction of 'these tantalising uncollected pieces' whilst accepting that only a few 'are strong enough to stand up against the published poems in the Bishop "canon"' (Berger 41). Alternatively, readers can form an opinion closer to that of Helen Vendler's in her review for *The New Republic* in April 2006, where she suggested that the book should have been subtitled '"Repudiated Poems"' recommending that 'students eagerly wanting to buy "the new book by Elizabeth Bishop" should be told to go back and buy the old one, where the poet represents herself as she wished to be known' (2006, 33). In her review, Vendler discusses 'Aubade and Elegy', commenting on the repetition of 'no coffee can wake you' and the insertion of the handwritten phrase. Vendler goes on to ask—but not answer—'Was it a hand shaking from drink or from weeping that could no longer type anything but its single obsessive phrase of loss, mistyping as it went along?' For Vendler, the question is moot. Like many readers she wishes that 'Elegy and Aubade' had been finished but, in her opinion, 'Crusoe in England' stands as Bishop's elegy for Lota. As far as the handwriting is concerned, looking past the biographical questions of why Bishop's hand may or may not be shaking in 'Aubade and Elegy' brings the discussion back to the broader discussion on Alice Quinn's editorial choices in the reproduction of the drafts, and the impact of illegibility on the reader's perception of Bishop's poetry. As Christina Pugh points out, 'if legibility is allied with the production of poetic voice, then the facsimile productions cannot keep such strict aural measure; on the contrary, they graphically

capture one of our most obsessively legible poets in her transitional or self-cancelling moments of illegibility' (2012, 277). The danger is, as Pugh points out, that illegibility is allowed to co-opt Bishop's voice, thus making her open to a raft of readings that she did not embrace in her published work.

Instances of handwriting when they are present in Bishop's published works, such as the moment in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' when the 'eye drops, weighted, through the lines / the burin made' (*P* 57), are carefully framed within the text of the poem and held within the structure of the page. There is a moment in 'Roosters' that is suggestive in this discussion of handwriting in Bishop's published works. 'Roosters' is not a poem that carries a dedication; nor was one ever suggested for it. However, it does have a moment which functions like an embedded dedication, framed within the verses of the poem. Towards the end of the poem, at verse 30 (*P* 39), just after the poet begins the visualisation of the temporal conjunction between past and future, Christ and Peter, set together by 'Old holy sculpture' comes these verses:

> But in between
> a little cock is seen
> carved on a dim column in the travertine
>
> explained by *gallus canit*;
> *flet Petrus* underneath it.
> There is inescapable hope, the pivot;
>
> (*P* 39)

In the context of dedications, it is the italicised '*gallus canit; flet Petrus'* that caught my eye, the explanation for the scene just described. Literally translated, it means that as the cock crowed, Peter wept, capturing the pivotal moment of the realisation of the betrayal of Christ, transposed into the self-betraying depiction of humanity portrayed by Bishop in her description of war. These words are carved into or on the column, which also holds the imagined scene of 'old holy sculpture' that Bishop suggests holds both past and future. These lines demonstrate an explicit awareness of the act of writing—or carving—to record and explain a moment, or multiple moments, in time. In *Deep Skin*, Peggy Samuels writes about the impact of a book, *Arts of the South Seas*, on Bishop. This book was a gift from Margaret Miller in 1946 (2010 88). Samuels reads the impact of this book in the first part of her chapter 'Modulation' (87–102), exploring the relevance of what the book may have shown Bishop on what Samuels terms the 'problem of disconnection — the problem of "'and' and 'and'" (2010 88) captured in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance'. Samuels suggests that *Arts of the South Seas* was fundamental to Bishop's understanding that creative art, whether that be

> carving on stone, houses, sticks, bark and skin: drawings that were also writing; and writing that is also carving—bought the physicality of the format for poetry, typed on its piece of paper, into relation with all such practices. (2010, 95)

This book made it clear to Bishop that the gap between three dimensional art and 'flat' writing was not substantial, but rather imaginative. As Samuels suggests, a shift of focus enables us 'to see writing as a real physical practice that manipulates the material properties of words on paper' (2010 95). Hence in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' the problem of disconnection is held tight within the

physicality of the 'heavy book' (*P* 58) of The Bible. I recall also the 'hard grey pencil' making its marks in 'Belated Dedication'.

Perhaps one of the most richly suggestive dedications Bishop gave was the one in her final book of poems, *Geography III* (published in 1976) which is 'For Alice Methfessel'. On the pages following on from the table of contents, Bishop has inserted an epigraph, taken from 'First Lessons in Geography', a child's first textbook on geography, in which various questions are posed and answered, but all without the original accompanying images. As Lorrie Goldensohn reminds us, the last lines of *Geography III* 'point to Bishop's increasing interest in architecting book as well as poem' (1992, 242); Bishop's letters (*OA* 602, 605) indicate the depth of thought and care given to the sequencing and position of the poems. The two components—the dedication and the epigraph—interweave delicate and suggestive readings that cast their shadows over the book. To begin with the dedication, Alice Methfessel was Bishop's friend and lover in the years before her death and is the person who is at the heart of the fear of loss of 'One Art' (Travisano 2019, 367–369). She became her literary executor after her death. Endings and loss are both marked themes within the book, which contains not only 'One Art' but also 'Crusoe in England' and 'Five Flights Up', whose last two lines close the book on a melancholy, dissonant note:

> —Yesterday brought to today so lightly!
> (A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)
>
> (*P* 203)

By the time 'Five Flights Up' was written, the loss of Methfessal had been averted. It is tempting to read the last lines of the poem as a sort of 'ars poetica' but this would not do justice to the careful structure of the book where the painful reality of living with

past loss and past trauma is balanced by the stoicism of 'One Art', the diurnal rhythms of 'Poem' and the shafts of sunshine of 'The End of March'. Just as with the dedication to Lota de Macedo Soares, the delicate subject of a lesbian love is both frank but also hidden, remaining only implied and yet also explicitly placed at the frontispiece of the book. Where the epigraph to Camoēs provided the subtext for a deeper reading of the dedication, the quotation from 'First Lessons in Geography' also underscore the dedication to Methfessel. Like the dedication to Methfessel on the front page, the question and answers are direct, bold, and yet hide a deep hinterland: *'What is Geography*? / A description of the earth's surface. / *What is the Earth*?/ The planet or body on which we live…' (*P* 178) Ostensibly simple, the questions become more involved, until they are released in what is almost a stream of consciousness:

> *In what direction is the Volcano? The Cape? The Bays? The Lake? The Strait? The Mountains? The Isthmus? What is in the East? What is in the West? In the South? In the North? In the Northwest? In the Southeast? In the Northeast? In the Southwest?*
>
> (*P* 178)

Without the accompanying images of maps, the reader is disorientated, paradoxically cast adrift in the midst of searching for coordinates, and yet the cover of book (designed by Cynthia Krupat) uses the tools of cartography—an image of a globe, manuscripts and a telescope—to frame the contents therein. The book from which the quotations are taken is still available as a reprint; albeit with a slightly more extended title than that indicated by Bishop, *First Lessons in Geography: On the Plan of Object Teaching: Designed for Beginners.* Note the link to 'object teaching' discussed earlier in chapter II. These questions are direct quotations from Monteith's text (12, 16), but what is important is their dual function of code and commentary. They are code in that

they refer to familiar themes in Bishop's writing, such as the place of the individual in their wider world, and the impact of geography on human society. They echo the final verse of 'Questions of Travel':

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?

(*P* 92)

Goldensohn uses the term 'overture' (1992, 243) to describe the quotation from Monteith's, a term which perfectly conjoins the multiplicity of theme, rhythm and a sense of expectation contained in these lines. The underlying commentary on the experience of reading the book is also a question: is *Geography III* going to resolve the sense of dislocation and disconnection that the overture sets up, or are we, as readers, being taught how to live with the discomfort of dislocation? It is probable—although this remains a suggestion—that the original copy of Monteith's primer was sent to Bishop by John Ashbery. The archives at Vassar hold a letter (April 23, 1976) from Ashbery who writes about his enclosed gift:

> ... I picked up the enclosed little book in an antique shop — I got it to send to you because it reminded me of your poetry....— though, since you are about to publish Geography III this geography will probably seem like ancient history to you. Sorry it's so grubby -a condition of survival no doubt. (VC 1.6)

Geography III was published on 28 December 1976. In the preceding months, Bishop had worked closely with her publishers, Farrar, Straus & Giroux to achieve the presentation that she wanted for the book. The archives at Vassar contain a handmade copy of what she imagined the book to look like (VC 60.3), also mentioned in a letter to Dr Anny Baumann, where she writes 'yesterday I actually got out my watercolours and

designed my own book jacket' (*OA* 602) At Vassar there is also a copy of the sheet on which Bishop had typed the quotation, with her instructions. Her instructions to the publishers deal very specifically with typography and placement. The epigraph is to 'To come after the dedication page - Underlined questions shd. be printed in italics, in a *smaller* typeface than the replies' (VC 60.3). Bishop was far from being the first author to preface a work rooted in geography in such a way; Jonathan Swift famously prefaces each one of the books that make up *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (*Gulliver's Travels*) with maps copied from the cartographer, Herman Moll, altered and distorted to mirror his satiric text. Like the quotation from Camōes in *Questions of Travel*, which hides love under the guise of a different language, the epigraph to *Geography III* simultaneously disorients and guides the reader through one of Bishop's shortest, and yet most complex and rewarding collections of poetry. The subtle changes that Bishop made to her poems by retrospectively adding dedications or by altering typography between one publication or another alert us both to the emotional attachments underlying the poems and to the polish Bishop applied to her finished work. To ignore all the paratextual information contained in Bishop's dedications, end- and explicatory notes to her poems is to sheer them both of context and of meaning; they function as a part of her quest for accuracy as they also provide a framework for the reader to step over and into (or out of) the experience of reading a poem.

Chapter V: Matter made Legible & the Practice of Translation

'When matter becomes annoyed,
who knows the malice of things?'
('Family Portrait', *P* 249)

Bishop translated several of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's (1902–1987) poems in the 1960s and 1970s. Her translation of 'Retrato da familia' ('Family Portrait) appeared initially in *An Anthology of Brazilian Poetry*, co-edited by Bishop and Emanuel Brasil, and published by Wesleyan University Press in 1972. The poem considers ideas of change; change as people age, change between generations, change wrought over time to nature and objects, all framed and held within the depiction of a family portrait. In a first reading of 'Family Portrait' I glossed over the lines 'When matter becomes annoyed, / who knows the malice of things?' (*P* 249). It was only on a second reading that I began to appreciate the weight of the question posed in these lines, which appear in the eleventh verse, towards the end of the poem. In this context, 'matter' refers backwards to the changes in the people depicted in the portrait, as well as to the alteration of the objects in the background and in the house where the portrait hangs. The line also foreshadows the 'strange idea of family / travelling through the flesh', the final line in the poem. The suggestion that flesh, or objects, can become annoyed and hold malice (amongst other emotions) is more than just a conceit. It is a fulcrum of both Drummond de Andrade's poem and of Bishop's practice of translation.

Richard Zenith, also one of Drummond de Andrade's translators, writes that 'Drummond, a kind of literary Cubist, apposed and intersected temporal as well as spatial frames' (2015, xiv). In these intersections, Drummond has much in common with Bishop, as he has also in his 'stress that poetry is made of words' (Zenith, 2015, xii)

and that these words stand for things. As Marilyn May Lombardi (1995, 136–165) reminds us, Bishop's affirmed fidelity to literalness in translation was also a demonstration of respect and sympathy for the foreign, an extension of her approach to all that she encountered in her travels. Lombardi explores a reading of Bishop's translations through the trope of the female body and Brazilian literature and landscape, stating: 'If there is any one quality that defines Bishop as a translator, it is her refusal to pacify the landscape of Brazilian literature' (1995, 138). In her respect for faithfulness and fidelity to the original in translation, Bishop demonstrated her desire not to be defined as a coloniser of the foreign, although an assessment of how successful she was in this varies considerably depending on one's critical perspective. Nonetheless, respect is a key attribute to hold in mind when considering Bishop's translations and translation per se. 'Family Portrait' warns of the dangers hidden in the chiaroscuro of the composition of the portrait poem: memory is fallacious. The poem suggests that the movement of light and dark over the shapes and bodies in the picture shift and change according to time and perspective.

Both the poet and the reader must be attentive to what is hidden in the shadows of memory or in the shadow of the text. In 'Family Portrait' it is in the shadows cast by matter that emotions such as malice or annoyance can find the space to play their part in creating the many different textures to Bishop's poem. This requirement to be attentive to, and respectful of, the shadow or hinterland of the described object is a familiar one to Bishop readers; after all, in 'The Map', the poem that opens *North & South*, the question comes in the second line:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.

Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges

(*P* 5).

In 'The Map', Bishop encourages her readers to be aware of the changing nature of boundaries, a theme she extends throughout her poetry to include the frames that hold a piece of art, or the time and context of a memory of a person. A desire to respect the original is balanced by the need to respect accuracy in observation; and what is observed alters according to time and perspective. Bishop became a master at looking into the shadows, As Helen Vendler noted, in 'Poem', the place is 'described three times'; once visually, then mentally, with the moment of recognition, and finally it is seen 'not by the eye … but by the heart, touched into participation' (1980,103). Vendler makes this point in the context of observation, but I repeat it here because, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter, these techniques of observation function in similar ways in Bishop's methods of translation; accuracy, recognition, a double transfiguration as the text is worked on to move from one language to another. Translation shows Bishop shadow boxing with aspects of language and the poetics of observation that are hidden in the depths of her own poetry.

I emphasise Bishop's activity of translation as a 'practice' for two reasons; first, translation was a mode of authorship that enabled Bishop to rehearse themes and styles of writing that she could then extend – or not – into her own poetry and prose. Secondly, although Bishop did not typically define herself as a translator, it was an activity that she carried out throughout her working life. My use of the word 'practice' in the context of translation criticism is informed by Lawrence Venuti's essay, 'The Translator's Invisibility' (1986), in which he examines the translator's intervention in the text, where 'practice' connotes the translator's work in transforming the text from

one language to another. Venuti develops two lines of thought: first, an investigation into the translator's role in 'an active production of the text' which recreates the text in another language, and second, a 'technique of critical reading in which the productive process of translation can become visible in certain ways, even to readers who are ignorant of the [source] foreign language' (1986, 181). Venuti concludes his essay by describing his critical approach to translations as focusing on ‘notable linguistic discrepancies, taking them as the signifier of the strategy at work in the translated text and, ultimately, of the cultural determinations that influenced the choice of that strategy’ (1986, 208). Discrepancies, suggests Venuti, are inevitable, a result of attempts to reconcile two different cultural contexts. My reading of Bishop’s practice of translation is informed by these insights, which are helpful in exposing some of the theoretical conundrums that can be glimpsed in the hinterland of Bishop’s approach to translation, particularly in the context of ‘linguistic discrepancies’ as a foregrounding of strategy. I go on to explore this further in Bishop's decision to include (or exclude) personal pronouns in her translations, specifically 'Object & Apparations' and 'Family Portrait'. However, Bishop never formulated an explicit theory of translation. Therefore, in my opinion, whilst theoretical readings such as Venuti’s are useful to provide the reader with different optics for questions about translation, they remain necessarily limited by Bishop's own preference for a certain reticence or ambiguity, and by a corresponding respect for the texts that she made her own.

A first foray into translation

Bishop translated from Greek, Latin, French, Portuguese, and Spanish into English at different times in her life. In 1937 Bishop replied to an announcement placed by the poet and translator Rolfe Humphries, offering her services as a translator of 'Spanish War poems into English. [...] I can read French, also a very little Spanish, and I should be very glad to attempt verse translations to the best of my ability' (*OA* 60). This first attempt in finding translation work did not succeed. Faced with the poem 'Francisca Solana' she reported to Rolfe Humphries that in her opinion the poem was 'not really worth the time and work of putting it into English ballad form. [...] I feel that the dullness of the original would only be increased by the translation' (*OA* 60). In her extensive study of Bishop's translations, *Elizabeth Bishop and Translation*, Marina Machova places this request for translation work in the context of Bishop's attempted engagement with poetry that spoke to politics (Machova 2017, 20), both that of the Spanish Civil War and in general. It is reasonable to assume that Bishop's search for a voice with which to respond to politics played a part in her refusal to translate 'Francisca Solana', as did her stated assessment of the poem in the original. Two facets constantly come into play in Bishop's writings about translation. One is her desire to stay faithful to the original, and the other is her interest in words as the building blocks of poems. In 1956 Bishop wrote a review of William Jay Smith's translations of Jules Laforgue, titled 'The Manipulation of Mirrors' (*Pr* 268), in which she briefly engages with translation studies, noting the question of limiting (or not) 'words and phrases to the period of the text' (*Pr* 268). Bishop goes on to counter the general contemporary critical dismissal of poetry translations (*Pr* 270) and then praises Smith for his largely

accurate translations. In this review, her engagement with these various strands of translation criticism remains superficial; she acknowledges them but does not delve deeply into them nor do more than hint at her own position. Bishop suggests that it is impossible to translate poetry 'or perhaps only one aspect can be translated at a time, and each poem needs several translations' (*Pr* 270), which remains, in my opinion, the most telling résumé of Bishop's approach to translation. Bishop continues her review with an assessment of Smith's loss of the 'quickness, the surprise, the new sub-acid flavor' (*Pr* 270) of the original French language. I sense that trying to pinpoint where this loss occurs is the pivotal point for her; she extends her reading with quotation from Mr Smith, where he describes the work of translating poetry 'like converging on a flame of with a series of mirrors', from where she gets the title of her review. Bishop does not condemn his efforts; rather, as she says, the translation of poetry lies with 'sensibility and skill, it depends (about 50 percent, I'd say) on luck: the possibilities of the second language's vocabulary' (*Pr* 270). Vocabulary, luck and a flame; those are the precepts that Bishop was working with in 1956. Bishop is using vocabulary as a portmanteau word for aspects of language, as her reaction to some of Robert Lowell's translations will later demonstrate. The unconscious depth of vocabulary of the writer's mother tongue is an undercurrent to her work of translation; as she explains in a later letter of 1972 Juju Campbell (who was translating poems from English into Portuguese, including some of Bishop's):

> it is almost impossible to write *good* poems in a language not one's own— the vocabulary is not already there, inside you, waiting to pop up with the right word, the way it is in one's own language—a half unconscious procedure. (*PPL* 888)

Bishop's ability in her own work to wait for the right word to 'pop' up – or, as Lowell put it, for the 'unimaginable phrase' (1973, 198), has already been celebrated. I suggest that in the context of translation, this lack of spontaneity Bishop may feel in the source language is partially balanced by her insistence on accuracy. Counterintuitively, it seems that for Bishop, accuracy did not restrict the translator, but rather enabled the translator, because by being accurate, the translator can work with the ambiguity in words, 'their earlier sense, or double meaning' (*PPL* 888). Tellingly, she ends her letter to Juju Campbell with a recommendation to read Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which, she says, will 'give you some idea of the problems of language in translating, or just reading, poetry' (*PPL* 888). Preferring to always categorise herself as a poet, not a translator, Bishop never fully elucidated a theory on translation. Her question of how the author, translator and reader can or must respect the original text is pertinent to my reading. Finally, drawing on Bishop's ideas of accuracy and ambiguity in translation, I want to explore how words become objects in the construction of text, particularly in the context of the collaborative translation work done by Octavio Paz and Bishop.

I began this chapter with a nod towards the part translation plays in Bishop's poetical engagement with the politics of the Spanish Civil War. After her attempt to work with Rolfe Humphries, it is not until the 1950s when Bishop was living and working in Brazil that translation is again at the forefront of Bishop's work, and the mix between translation and politics arises again. As Marilyn May Lombardi reminds us, 'Bishop's requirements for translation were her requisites for poetry as well. The poet, like the translator, must faithfully render the material before her eyes' (1995, 163). In the context of Bishop's time in Brazil, one of the key words Lombardi balances alongside

Bishop's desire for accuracy against is 'authority' (1995, 144–155), specifically the question of poetic authority of an outsider sometimes considered a cultural go-between or interloper. Lombardi reminds us that '*translation* carries with it an aura of traducement from the Italian *traditore* for violation or betrayal' (1995, 144). In the background of her analysis are the feminine figures of 'Hudson's elusive bird-girl, Rima' (146) and Lispector's 'smallest woman in the world' (1995, 149), as well as the abundance of the natural world that Brazil delights in, and thus ideas on the preservation of the natural world and the impact of colonialism. Before going on to explore my ideas about the authority of the text in translation, I want to pause to consider the resonance of Bishops unpublished poem 'To Be Written on the Mirror in Whitewash' (*P* 273). The poem is short enough to quote in its entirety:

> I live only here, between your eyes and you,
> But I live in your world, What do I do?
> —Collect no interest—otherwise what I can;
> Above all, I am not that staring man.

The poem was written circa 1937, when Bishop sent a copy to Marianne Moore, and is often read as both as comment on Bishop's sexuality, as well on the 'specular economy' (Lombardi, 1995, 60). The poem's subversion of the reflexive surface of the mirror-whitewash will impede the mirror from reflecting the speaker / writer standing in front —and the fixation of text in paint, sends a tangential message to Bishop's future activity as a translator in Brazil. Years on from when this poem was written, Bishop, living with Lota de Macedo Soares in Brazil, is in the position of living 'between your eyes and you', an uncomfortable cultural go-between, striving to balance respect, accuracy and ambiguity to her works of translation as well as in her own poems. Translation

presented Bishop with the opportunity to extend and challenge her poetical abilities by exploring themes and voices that were out of her natural register, but it also placed her in an uncomfortable position where she did not want to be assessed as 'that staring man'. Writing to Anne Stevenson in 1964, Bishop commented that:

> I don't think much of poetry translations and rarely attempt them,—just when I see a poem by someone I like that I think will go into English with less loss than usual. This means it isn't necessarily one of the poet's best poems. My translations are almost as literal as I can make them, [...] I wouldn't attempt the kind of "imitation" Robert Lowell does. (*PPL* 856–7)

If the success of translation is assessed according to the lack of discrepancy between the source and the translated text, and if the goal of the translator, is, by extension, to be invisible, where does that leave Bishop working on translation in Brazil, thrust uncomfortably 'between your eyes and you', with a mirror which cannot perform its reflective purpose accurately?

Bishop's (mis) translating pen & the choice of poetry, prose, drama

Not only did Bishop translate from different languages into English, she also experimented with different forms of writing in her practice of translation. For example, during her time at Vassar she undertook a verse translation of Aristophanes' *The Birds*, one of her few experiments with drama and stage. While in Brazil, she undertook not only the translation of an autobiographical book, *A Minha Vida de Menina* (published as *The Diary of Helena Morley* in 1957), but also that of a book on architecture, *Arquitectura Moderna no Brasil* (published as *Modern Architecture in Brazil* in 1956). Thus, translation allowed her not only to experiment and learn from different languages, but also to experiment in different genres. Machova presents the

art of translation as a sort of '*basso continuo* beneath the voice' (2017, 3) of Bishop's own poetry. The musical term beautifully evokes how translation functioned for Bishop. It is a part of her voice, but translation is not reduced to vocabulary; rather knowledge of other language and forms adds to Bishop's perception of metre, rhythm and rhyme. Aspects of translation allowed Bishop to explore ways of voicing the experience of people outside her own milieu. Although she struggled with the Portuguese language (Basford 2019, 198), she made considerable efforts to master it correctly, purchasing numerous textbooks and dictionaries (Basford 2019, 198–99). I commend Douglas Basford's essay 'The Burglar of the Tower of Babel' (2019) to any who are interested in the unexplored material on Bishop's Portuguese translations at Vassar; it includes facsimile copies of Bishop's translation practise and other previously unpublished material. In the archives at Vassar College, there are extensive pieces of translation work that are neither complete nor ever intended for publication, such as vocabulary and grammar lists ('We will go if it doesn't rain / Iremos se não chouver' (VC 68.4) and translations of newspaper articles such as one about the procession of St George from *O Globo* April 29 1963. This piece reappears at least twice (VC 53.7, 68.5), in both cases beginning with what appears to be direct translation of the events as reported by *O Globo* and then moving into direct personal reportage or opinion. The vocabulary list is covered in both Bishop's writing and someone else's handwriting; language learning is a collaborative process and Bishop's purpose in learning Portuguese was to communicate directly with the community around her, particularly Macedo Soares' friends and relatives. The piece of translation practise on *O Globo* never quite makes it into a piece of prose but remains interesting because of the indications it gives of Bishop's processes of working out not to be 'that staring man'. In

the piece in the archive Bishop inserts one telling line 'O GLOBO leaves out a good deal' (VC 53.7). Her own experiences in Brazil have led her to witness more than that reported in the paper. One difficulty for the translator lies in how to translate words such as 'macubeira' (from 'macumba', which Bishop translates as 'voodoo—witches, witches, that is bad or good' (VC 53.7), and '"the faithful"'. This latter phrase Bishop enclosed in quotation marks, indicating that the phrase is not hers. The question of which pieces of translation work Bishop chose to complete for publication is a marker of her own judgement about the success or not of the translation. The archives at Vassar hold not only numerous newspaper article translations, but also drafts of partially translated poems, such as 'The Dead in Frockcoats' and 'Quadrille' (VC 38.8), both by Drummond de Andrade, that remain incomplete.

In many examples of incomplete translation work, Bishop struggles with the question of how to find a translated voice which is both respectful to the original, and yet bridges aspects of culture to appeal to her North American readership. As Justin Read observes in his analysis of 'To the Botequim and Back' in 'Manners of Mistranslation' the decision to not translate certain words is an indication of the other; so that:

> translation serves as a deformative (rather than informative) exercise, marking the distance between linguistic codes, cultural codes, *here* and *there*, *them* and *us*. (2003, 312)

Read ends by celebrating Bishop's work, particularly in the poems published in 'Brazil' in *Questions of Travel*; my purpose is only to note that in the hinterland of Bishop's translation there are these fascinating questions of non or mistranslation that reveal the figure of the translator despite their best intentions. Bishop made the choice in her

translation of Manuel Bandeira's poem, 'Brazilian Tragedy' (*P* 242), to anglicise most of the street names in the poem. In so doing, the poem's translation moves closer to her North American readership and further away from Brazil. Recall the lines in 'The Map'; 'more delicate than the historians' are the map-makers colors' (*P* 5); sometimes it seems that the map-makers colours are also more delicate than the translators' choices.

As Lombardi (1995, 60) hints at in her discussion of 'To be Written on the Mirror in Whitewash', in the word 'interest', there are connotations of profit in a monetary sense, as well as meanings of respect. Translation is not just a side-line for writers, but a profession with its own monetary value. Bishop, who was aware of her own value as an author, also accepted translation work not just to be published, but also to earn income. Her negotiations for payment for translation work remain frustratingly opaque; I infer from her discussions with *The New Yorker* over her pay grade that she would have applied a similar interest to other publications and pieces. In January 1950, Bishop wrote to Katherine White at the *New Yorker* telling her that she had been commissioned to translate some of Max Jacob's poems for *Poetry* (*NYr* 48, Machova 2017, 23). By 1953, having travelled to Brazil, Bishop had begun her translation of *A Minha Vida de Menina/The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, which she eventually published in 1957. Bishop began the work of translation of *A Minha Vida de Menina* with the idea of publication in mind, writing to Lowell in July 1953 that she was translating, 'a young girl's diary, that I'm positive will be a success if we can sell it to a U.S. publisher' (*WIA* 141). Around the same time, she also wrote to Katherine White that she was considering doing some translations of Manuel Bandeira (*NYr* 110). White replied that

although *The New Yorker* rarely bought translated poetry, if 'Bandeira-plus-Bishop proved to be right for us, that would be very exciting' (*NYr* 111). As Douglas Basford notes, archival material at Vassar points towards the 'financial concerns' that would always be present for Bishop including in her translation work (Basford 2019, 203). The Bandeira translations were eventually published by Bishop in *An Anthology of Brazilian Poetry* (1972). By 1962 *The New Yorker* had changed its stance on translations (NYr 252), asking to see (but, in the event, not publishing) Bishop's translations of the Lispector stories. When the magazine eventually published Bishop translation of Paz's poem, 'Objects & Apparitions', in 1974, the fee was split equally between Bishop and Paz (*NYr* 358), as was the norm for the magazine at that time. This, together with Bishop's translations of Joaquim Cardozo's 'Cemetery of Childhood' (1971) and Vinicius de Moraes's 'Sonnet of Intimacy' (1971) were the only works of translation by Bishop that the magazine published.

Bishop found publication for many of her translations in other periodicals (see Appendix 2), as well as placing them in *An Anthology of Brazilian Poetry* (1972). Bishop had initially approached the *Anthology* project with some reluctance, but her approach changed over time, perhaps exacerbated by the death of her lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, in 1967. Her editorial judgement on which poets to include in the *Anthology* is illuminated by the unpublished correspondence with Lota's nephew, Flavio de Macedo Soares. After Lota's death, Flavio and Bishop continued to correspond, primarily about poetry and translation. Flavio also translated some of Bishop's poetry into Portuguese. Their correspondence does not track discussions Bishop may have had with Emanuel Brasil, but reads instead like a background hum of conversation sharing mutual interest

in Brazilian poetry. Flavio also acted as a cultural 'courier' for Bishop when she was not in Brazil, someone who informed her about developments in Brazilian literature, as well as sending records and books that she needed in order to continue building her library of Brazilian material. In 1968, Flavio wrote to Bishop from Rio de Janeiro that 'I couldn't find some of the records you asked for – the children's ones and "A Banda" which is now a rare item indeed' (VC 10.1). These pieces may have been background for the *Antholog*y, or ideas germinating around Lowell's suggestion for a little book on Brazil (*WIA* 453); the typescript for the lyrics of 'A Banda' forms part of Bishop's papers for the presentation on Brazilian poetry and popular music that Bishop gave with Ricardo Sternberg in 1977. The *Anthology* was eventually published with a number of Bishop's translations; some, but not all, were new translations. As Machova suggests, the *Anthology* can 'be placed among Bishop's books, as a step between *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III*' (2017, 73), one more aspect of connectivity to consider in the continuing development of Bishop's own voice, and further indicative of the way in which *Geography III* is in dialogue with Bishop's earlier books.

One voice meets another

Throughout their long friendship, Bishop and Lowell delved deeply into their own reactions to reading poetry in languages other than English; they shared an especially profound interest in French poetry. They discussed the success—or failure—of both their own translations as well as those done by others, such as Marianne Moore's work on La Fontaine. Lowell also responded to Bishop's interest in Brazilian poetry and in Brazil; they worked together to consider how to present Lowell's work to a Brazilian

audience during his visit in 1962. Bishop wrote one of her multi-layered letters to Lowell (*WIA* 397–404), a letter that interweaves preparations for his impending visit to Brazil with comment and criticism on the typescript of *For the Union Dead*. Having discussed his visit and touched on her emotional state, she writes 'Back to letter II. "Caixa" is pronounced *ky*-ish-a—*x's* are like *sh*— and it's *box*, the French *Caisse*. I like Texaco pronounced Teschaco. (Also, here Buick rhymes with quick)' (*WIA* 399). Note the deliberate volte-face in returning to 'letter II' and Bishop's preoccupation with the sound of language. The humorous comments about pronunciation only work from the perspective of the outsider or visitor to Brazil; it is the difference in sound, not similarity that she emphasises. Lowell's presence is important; the letter functions because he is able to hear what she says and understands the register at which her remarks are intended to resonate. In translation, the context of a 'collaborative ear' refers to two translators working in conjunction with one another on a literary text. It rests on the idea of a shared language sensibility. In the words of one translator, work choices are ultimately subjective; thus, collaboration only works if the two translators 'hear' the same way, both the author's voice and their own (Paul 2009, 25). The letter then moves on to more extensive comments and criticism on Lowell's *For the Union Dead*, into which she then inserts:

> ”Jonathan Edwards” came at just the right moment […] (all this nostalgia and homesickness and burrowing in the past running alongside trying to write articles about the Brazilian political situation—I can't—translating some Portuguese poems, etc.—are other writers as confused & contradictory? Or do they stick to one thing at a time?) (*WIA* 403)

On reading her lines about 'homesickness and burrowing in the past running alongside trying to write articles about the Brazilian political situation', I am reminded of the Man-Moth's third rail, 'the unbroken draught of poison,/ runs there beside him. He regards

it as a disease / he has inherited the susceptibility to' (*P*17). For Bishop, translation is not wholly simple. Working with Octavio Paz is an example of the success of the collaborative ear; but draft pieces such as 'To the Botequim & Back' are more problematic. As Read notes, in this piece, Bishop emphasises the sound of the drink, 'Orange Crooshy' (*Pr* 141), not the brand name *Orange Crush* (Read 2003, 312), something which may be read as either 'mildly humorous or, upon closer inspection, severely anti-social' (313). Whilst ultimately praising Bishop's translations, Read finds in them instances where she fails to understand the social concepts in the source culture and thus her translations breach ethics of translation. Translation may bring access to parts of her own story and to the voices of others that she would otherwise not reach, but it also complicates and presents contradictions that she cannot resolve.

Thinking about how to present Lowell in Brazil casts a shadow over her own position as cultural intermediary between Brazil and the U.S.A, a position she was not comfortable in. Writing in 1969 to Robert Lowell, she remarked: 'it is awful to think I'll probably be regarded as some sort of authority on Brazil the rest of my life' (*WIA* 660). In my opinion, Paulo Brito—critic and translator of Bishop's work into Portuguese—summarises Bishop's position perfectly when he says that she was 'a most ineffective (and reluctant) cultural intermediary; in fact, all she asked of Brazil was a home — a place where she would be loved and understood and where she could write in peace' (Brito 200, 496). As he goes on to say, this is generally what Bishop got from Brazil, up until the turbulent 1960s. 'What truly mattered', writes Brito, 'were her lover and the magnificent natural environment around her' (Brito 2000, 496). It is important to remember this wider perspective of Bishop in Brazil whilst considering some of the very

specific aspects of her Portuguese translation practice. In 1963 Bishop wrote to Lowell about Drummond de Andrade's poetry, asking if he would mind if she translated 'The Table', which was a poem they both liked. She writes 'of course I'd do it my painful literal way, anyway—so if you wanted to do a lively Lowell version at any time, I don't think mine would interfere with yours at all—they'd be so different' (*WIA* 449). It sparked an interesting and insightful response from Lowell, who replied that he hoped Bishop would do the translation and then suggested that she consider doing a 'little Brazilian book' with the all the authors she had been translating and a preface 'written more or less the way you write letters? I think this would really give a piece of Brazil' (*WIA* 453). Lowell notices and encourages the multiplicity of register of voice to paint a picture of the country; the poets and writers that Bishop translated in Brazil were all very different, and the intimate, chatty voice of her correspondence was unique. The idea of a 'little Brazilian book' ebbed and flowed through Bishop's correspondence. In 1967 she wrote to Dr Anny Bauman saying that she had the idea for a wonderful children's book on *Brazil* (*OA* 459), but no book ever materialised in either of these formats.

Keeping Lowell's suggestion in mind, I pause to consider the self-imposed restraints that arose from Bishop's insistence of working towards a literal translation. This gave her the freedom to work with two voices whilst nominally silencing her own. However, translation for the translator is never just a text. On one level, it is a service that a translator's expertise can render to a text, but is also an activity that aims at the production of text from the perspective of internal knowledge, and thus the translator's voice is never completely absent from the conversations. From the perspective of

internal knowledge, translation was implicitly a conversation Bishop had with herself. As Machova suggests, Bishop experiments with different genres of writing, including those that lie 'on the border between fiction and nonfiction' (Machova 2017, 8). In his assessment of Bishop's translation work in Brazil, Douglas Basford helpfully details the lengths to which she involved herself in the process of compiling the necessary materials to publish *The Diary of Helena Morley*. Basford informs us that Bishop guided input from 'authors, family, native informants, photographer, archivist, agent and publisher' (Basford 2019 203) for *The Diary of Helena Morley*, and in so doing, was not 'invisible' as a translator at all. This is a view echoed by Magadelena Edwards, whose doctoral thesis, 'The Translators' Colors: Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil and Elsewhere', describes the editing and alterations Bishop carried out as part of the process of translating 'The Diary of Helena Morley'. Edwards notes that Bishop edited out 'more than 35 complete entries and additional sections within entries' (58) and posits that *The Diary of Helena Morley* should be read as a rewriting of Bishop's own childhood in Nova Scotia. Visible or invisible, the translations carried out by Bishop whilst in Brazil, are, as Victoria Harrison notes, most engaged when her 'voice meets another', whether the subject is 'an actual guide or a guidebook with which to banter' (1993, 173). Lowell, in his suggestion for Bishop's 'little book on Brazil', wants to hear *her* voice as it meets his (or any of her other close correspondents). This would have required Bishop to accept the presence of her own voice in translation, something she was seemingly unwilling to do. There is a caveat here, and that is that in the 1969/1970 edition of *The Complete Poems,* compiled in Bishop's lifetime and thus with her oversight, *Questions of Travel* is divided into four parts, not two, as previously published in 1965 (an editorial decision followed by the editors of Bishop's *Poems*, 2011). In *The Complete Poems*, the

four parts that make up *Questions of Travel* are '*I. Brazil. II. Elsewhere. III. Translations from the Portuguese. New and Uncollected Work'* (*P* 341). The translations chosen were a selection from Bishop's work on Drummond de Andrade and João de Cabral de Neto. Bishop did not choose to incorporate these poems into the main body of her work, as she would with 'Objects & Apparitions' in *Geography III*, nor did she append them to her section on Brazil. There remains the possibility that Bishop's placement of them in *The Complete Poems* can be read as an acknowledgement of her own voice in her work as a translator meeting the voices she encounters in Brazil.

The line between an original and a translated work has long been muddied by Bishop's decision to publish 'Objects & Apparitions' in *Geography III* alongside her own original poems. Only 'Objects & Apparitions' carries the end note, 'Translated from the Spanish of Octavio Paz'; her other Paz translations note 'Translated by Elizabeth Bishop with the author', the emphasis shifting from the language change to the collaboration with Paz. Both Paz and Bishop celebrated the insertion of 'Objects & Apparitions' in *Geography III,* a moment that is illuminated by Paz's writing on translation. In his view, poets are rarely good translators, because:

> they almost invariably use the foreign poem as a point of departure toward their own. A good translator moves in the opposite direction: his intended destination is a poem analogous although not identical to the original poem. He moves away from the poem only to follow it more closely. (1971, 158)

In September 1975, Paz wrote to Bishop that he had received her translation and that he liked it very much:

> so much that I prefer it to the Spanish original. I could say, and with better reason than he, what Valéry wrote to Jorge Guillén on his translation of *Le Cimetière Marin*: je m'adore en espagnol. (VC 17.5)

Language is a cloak that the work wears. Recall Bishop's appreciation of how her work sounds in Italian and French, or Drummond de Andrade's appreciation being 'clothed by English' (9 September 1963, VC 1.5, my translation) in Bishop's translation of his poems. For Drummond de Andrade, translation into English was, in part, a return to his distant geographical roots (VC 1.5). Paz's evocation of Valéry adds another translucent layer of culture and language to his appreciation of Bishop's work. Valéry is an important poet to Bishop's Brazilian translations, as her exchange of letters in May 1963 with Lowell demonstrates (*WIA* 453, 456). In translation, poems wear cloaks of language; Bishop overlays the Spanish or Portuguese with English and in so doing, recalls an influence of a French poet. Translation is not a reductive process but rather a process that reveals and enhances the complexities of the text in this flow of voice and language. As Paz says in his analysis of Bishop's own poetry: 'Poetry is the *other voice*. The voice that comes from *there*, a *there* that is always *here*' (1977, 211).

One of the other voices in Bishop's life and poetry was that of Lota de Macedo Soares, Bishop's Brazilian lover. In 1951, Bishop accepted Macedo Soares's offer to build her a studio behind the Modernist house she was then constructing at Samambaia, in the hills above Petrópolis. The studio and house at Samambaia came to play a crucial role in providing a space in which Bishop could construct poems where the *here* and *there* of her poetry could meet. The love between Bishop and Macedo Soares lies in the shadows of Bishop's agreement to translate Henrique Mindlin's *Arquitectura Moderna no Brazil* (*Modern Architecture in Brasil*), which she undertook in 1956. In a letter to Randall Jarrell in 1955 Bishop explained her motivation for doing the translation, explaining that that she has to:

> do it to help out a friend and because I live in one of the examples of it, so feel somehow involved, but since my knowledge of architecture is probably a little less than my knowledge of Portuguese, if that's possible, it is rather hard going. (*OA* 311)

The house is Samambaia, designed by Sergio Bernandes with Macedo Soares's extensive input and awarded an architecture prize by a group of judges who included Walter Gropius. Bishop's driving force in translating *Modern Architecture in Brasil* does not seem to have been the acquisition of knowledge or of language; here the figure of Macedo Soares and her achievement in architecture stand out starkly. Perhaps the real focus of the translation was both Bishop's love of Samambaia and Macedo Soares. If this was the case, then this work could be read as an example of what Roman Jakobson calls 'creative transposition', that is a work of translation that is not intralingual or interlingual transposition, but rather 'intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another,' (1959, 151) or, in my understanding, a translation of the home into words by way of architecture.

Theories of translation

Bishop never completed her intended talk on translation tentatively titled 'Remarks on Translation – of Poetry mostly' (VC 54.12), which she had planned to give at Boston University in 1979. Her notes show her continued insistence on the need for accuracy and her overriding feeling – written in block capitals for emphasis – that 'TRANSLATING IS HARD, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE'. The notes also begin to describe her attempted formalisation of her inner debate about what can translated or 'transferred' from one language to another. She recalls the story of Mallarmé and Degas, presumably Valéry's

anecdote of Degas and Mallarmé in conversation. Degas tells Mallarmé that he had written some poems, not good ones, but ones with lots of ideas. Mallarmé is said to have replied: 'But my dear Degas, poems are not made out of ideas. They are made out of words'. This anecdote resonated strongly with Bishop; she quoted the same comment in a letter to Marianne Moore in 1940 (*OA* 94). Making something out of words is the crux; it carries with it a heavy undertone of respect and responsibility for the qualities of words. An excessive emphasis on the literal limits translation, and this is where Bishop's notes for her talk begin to show the workings of her internal debates. Her notes allow for the possibility that it might be better to radically alter the form of a translation, from verse to prose. She considers this change in the context of the difficulties faced by translators of poetry when they work on a text whose linguistic structure is significantly different to the free verse English usually employs. The examples she gives are those from Russian into English, or languages with an alternating feminine or masculine rhyme scheme. In these cases, Bishop suggests it might be better, or in her words 'more polite', to consider using a literal translation in prose. She allows for the possibility that structure might have to be radically altered to carry sense across language, but she never executed this in her own translations. In her notes, there is also the first draft of what may become a poem, titled 'Translation', and which encapsulates the frustration and difficulties imposed by the activity of translation on the translator. The first (and only complete) line of the draft reads 'Oh! (or, possibly, ah! or oh…)' a wonderfully succinct line where gentle good humour dramatizes and vocalises the difficulties faced by the translator in their evaluation of tone, literal definition and syntax when working from one language to another. Bishop's choice of 'Oh!' to begin her poem can seem simplistic on a first reading but in

fact is anything but. ‘Oh’ is both the verbal sound of the letter ‘o’ and thus a part of language; it is also a textual indication of a breath, or pause or exclamation in speech. Deryn Rees-Jones writes of it as being an invocation of 'both an internal sound and an external other' (2019, 135). ‘Oh’ appears in Bishop’s poetry 38 times, sometimes quietly – such as in the longing expressed in the last line of ‘Sleeping on the Ceiling’—‘But oh, that we could sleep up there’ (*P* 30)—and sometimes noisily, disturbingly, such as the '*oh!* of pain’ (*P* 180), the exclamation from her aunt that is also the internal voice in the young Elizabeth in 'In the Waiting Room', the pivotal meeting of internal and external sound that sends the poet spinning into her realisation of selfhood and femininity. ‘Oh’ can be a question, such as in ‘Questions of Travel’ where the poet asks ‘Oh, must we dream our dreams / and have them, too?’ (*P* 91). That Bishop chooses ‘Oh! (or possibly, ah! or oh…)' to begin her poem on translation is an active expression of the choices a translator makes both in terms of the literal meaning of the words, and in their sound, and the requirement to translate sound and rhythm as well as meaning. These choices are also the choices of the poet, who uses the variations in 'oh' to evoke the movement between the internal and external self, between presence and absence that mark some of Bishop's poems. A footnote to the perusal of ‘oh’ in Bishop’s poetry; ‘ah’, her other possibility in ‘Translation’, appears only four times in her collected poems.

Returning to Bishop's attempts to formalise her theories of translation, it is helpful to return to the writings of Octavio Paz, specifically his essay, 'Translation: Literature and Letters'. Paz opens the essay by asserting that:

> When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate; the child who asks his mother the meaning of a word is really asking her to translate the unfamiliar term into the simple words he already knows. (1971, 152)

Before moving into the specifics of translation, Paz discusses language and how the subjectivity of the translator makes a purely literal translation not impossible, but rather a 'glossary' of words. Translation, maintains Paz, demands a transformation of the original. The role of the poet and the role of the translator are similar in action, but different in intent. The poet, Paz writes, fixes words to construct his poem, whilst the translator begins not with 'language in movement' but rather the

> fixed language of the poem…. His procedure is the inverse of the poet's: he is not constructing an unalterable text from mobile characters; instead, he is dismantling the elements of the text, freeing the signs into circulation, then returning them to language. (1971, 159)

Thus, the translator works with the same constituent parts as does the poet—the words—in the process of (re)creation of a poem, but in a process that is markedly different to that adopted by the poet. In a 1978 interview, Bishop was asked the following: 'you write about a man who was forced to record every flora or fauna [in 'Crusoe in England]. Is this intended to suggest the poet's duty or his burden?' (Johnson 1978, 102). Bishop's answer is intriguing. She replies: 'I'm not sure. It's true that many poets don't like the fact that they have to translate everything into words'. The interview comes four years after the publication of 'Objects & Apparitions' in *The New Yorker*. Bishop's reply, is, to my ears, an echo of the opening words of Paz's essay, that 'When we learn to speak, we are learning to translate…'(1971,152). Bishop makes this comment in one line of a conversation and Paz's remark is the beginning of a considered and long statement on translation. I am therefore wary of making too much of Bishop's brief remark by dint of her working relationship with Paz. However, I think

there is here a hinterland in Bishop's thinking that merits attention. On one level, this hinterland directs us to questions about the acquisition of language and possibility that words require sound to become language and fully articulate experience (recall the role of 'oh'; or, in 'Primer Class' Bishop's memory of being satisfied with knowing her letters up to *g*, as 'My alphabet made a satisfying short song, and I didn't want to spoil it' (*Pr* 80)). On another level, translation directs us to think about the un-translatable experience, something that words either cannot capture or in doing so, misdirects the reader. I have described occasions of misdirection in Bishop's letters to Lowell about his visit to Brazil, or in 'To the Botequim & Back'. In the context of the un-translatable experience, another poem that should be considered is 'The Riverman' (*P* 103–107). Bishop gave an usually specific and detailed note to this poem, making it clear that it is a poem based on *Amazon Town* by Charles Wagley. Setting aside judgements about the merit of the poem, the paratext and text encourages the reader to step into the skin of another culture. The poem presents questions of anthropology, of language itself and what it is to possess language, of the ability to understand but the impossibility of speech to consider and explore. These are issues that any translator is familiar with, and whilst Bishop was not translating Wagley, who wrote in English, she was transposing his work from one medium to another. To make the poem effective, she has to listen—through Wagley—to the voice of the indigenous people, and then create a shared language sensibility with her readers in order to give them access to the voice in the poem. It is a difficult balancing act, and whether readers feel the poem a success or a failure depends largely on their understanding of how well Bishop listened, and how effectively she then translated and transposed what she heard.

In the poem, the speaking voice is in the first person, a conceit Bishop uses to enable the riverman to ostensibly speak directly to the reader. However, the poem is ambivalent regarding whether he is ever able to speak to the river spirits as he so intensely desires. The central anthropomorphic image of the dog who can understand but not speak the language of Luandinha, the river spirit (*P* 104, lines 51, 52), provides the visual prompt: what is it to listen if we cannot speak? The riverman is caught in the midst of his transformation; he has been called by Luandinha but he is not yet one of her tribe. Dialogue may be blocked, but the poem enacts another act of change, and that is to the quality of listening. The last lines of the poem describe the figure of the mythical, unreachable riverman saying, 'I hear your voices talking' (*P* 106), but the water creates a barrier between him and the speaker, at once transparent yet also opaque. Who now is like the dog, able to understand but unable to speak? Do we, the readers, join the godfathers and cousins who speak to each other but cannot speak to the riverman? Or is there a more fundamental change in the quality of listening? To hear is defined by the OED as being able to perceive sound, or having the sensation of sound, whilst the transitive verb, 'to listen', has the meaning of hearing attentively, or paying attention to what is said. Although the riverman can hear, does the impenetrability of the river mean that not only is there no dialogue between him and his once fellow men, but that he can now only hear sound, rather than listen to language? In this poem, the resistance enacted by the text and mirrored by the water, is not a failure of translation but instead an attribute. Like the ever present scream of 'In the Village' or the internal and external 'oh' of 'In the Waiting Room', it serves to represent the many different levels at which language and sound function. As the poet Mahmoud Darwish puts it in the preface to *Poesie: La terre nous est étroite*

> The translator is not a ferryman for the meaning of words but the author of their web of new relations. And he is not the painter of the light part of the meaning, but the watcher of the shadow, and what it suggests. (quoted in Paul 2009, 15)

Bishop's translation practice was a key attribute in helping her refine her ability to watch the shadows cast by words, and to then evoke layers of meaning in the choices she made.

As a translator, Bishop inhabited the position of the reader before she took up the action of the writer or transcriber. For Bishop, the fundamental acts of reading and writing as part of the process of translation was both distinct from, and yet central to, her own poetical process. It was when writing to Anne Stevenson that Bishop wrote her often quoted disclaimer about not attempting translations unless she identifies a poem that 'I think will go into English with less loss than usual' (*PPL*, 856). The loss that Bishop invokes is a textual and linguistic loss; the sense that somehow the translated poem is a lesser object as a result of the change wrought upon it by a change of language. This notion that translation involves a loss is a partial refraction of one of the key elements of the debate about translation theory, one that also lies in the historical background leading up to Venuti's essay. In 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher read his treatise 'On the Different Methods of Translating' at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin. In this treatise he raised what become one of the defining questions of twentieth-century translation, stating:

> Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer towards the reader (1813, 42).

Schleiermacher establishes his terms in a tripartite sliding scale where the writer, the reader, and the translator are all specific, yet interrelated players. There is a nexus of

connectivity between each term that informs the interrogation of the individual terms. I suggest that Bishop's thoughts on translation are influenced, even if only by refraction, by the terms of this debate on translation theory, specifically the idea of moving either the writer or the reader in the translation of text. In her letter to Stevenson, having stated that she prefers to only do literal translations, Bishop goes on to suggest that the most 'satisfactory translations of poetry, I think, are those Penguin Poets, with a straight prose text at the bottom of the page' (*PPL*, 857). Bishop goes on to discuss Russian poets, including Evtushenko, Pasternak and Esenin, mentioning only that that she can read just 'enough Russian to tell how they rhyme, usually' (*PPL* 857). This prefigures Bishop's thinking that at times it is acceptable to alter form in translation, moving the writer closer to the reader.

That Bishop was a proficient linguist of the written word is clear. Machova makes the point that 'literary translation can be seen as a form of creative reading' (2017, 4), where the reader has to participate in fashioning the text. In Brazil, Bishop had also to do some 'creative listening' to understand the mix of language all around her; she often writes of the difficulty she had in speaking Portuguese. It was not just translation per se that was heightened during Bishop's time in Brazil, but also an awareness of other voices flowing beneath Bishop's expressed voice in English; the 'basso continuo' earlier identified by Machova. When translation is an act of creative reading, it also becomes a trigger for the creative process that sparks a new poem or piece of art. In 'Elizabeth Bishop at the Water's Edge' Mark Ford writes persuasively of the links between Bishop's short story, 'The Sea and Its Shore', the poem 'Sandpiper'

and Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', suggesting that the newspaper pages appear to the

> inebriated Boomer like strange kinds of bird he must pursue and kill....Bishop's sandpiper is pictured as questing after another kind of Romantic vision, one that, like Baudelaire's conception of "correspondences" makes the world legible (2003, 237)

It is Ford's depiction of 'making the world legible' that echoes the model of translation that I am considering here. This is not limited to the alteration from one language to another, but includes an act of language acquisition (in adulthood, in Boomer's case) in the process of trying to equate words with things, or the connection between humans and nature. In this discussion, I am taking only a small aspect of Ford's essay which probes the connections between Bishop and Baudelaire extensively. My focus is on the symbiotic balance between reading and writing that is so elusive to Boomer. For the world to become legible there must be both an authorial action as there must also be an act of reading; however, both acts may be conjoined by and in the same person. Single person author/readership can be problematic, both as a translator, or, as Bishop depicts in 'Crusoe in England' where the subject has to negotiate the dual position of author and reader. In this poem, Bishop has her Crusoe, prior to Friday's arrival, enact a writing, and a reading, of the island he finds himself on. The difficulty Crusoe faces of being both author and reader is poignantly rendered by his lament in the sixth verse:

> Because I didn't know enough.
>
> Why didn't I know enough of something?
>
> Greek drama or astronomy? The books
>
> I'd read were full of blanks;
>
> the poems—well, I tried
>
> reciting to my iris-beds,

"They flash upon that inward eye,

Which is the bliss …" The bliss of what?

(*P* 184)

The figure of the poet-reader is required to fill in the blanks of Wordsworth's line; the words Crusoe cannot recall are 'of solitude'. His forgetfulness points to an absence that indicates two of the key themes of the poem: the creation of a self and memory. The reader must also fill in the blanks, an act of active, creative reading, echoing Machova's identification of Bishop's translation practice. The key point for Crusoe is the understanding that being both author and reader of his story is that he has to 'actively participate' in the creation of the textual narrative, an action that is blocked to him by his forgetfulness, an oblique result of his solitude. The success of this moment in 'Crusoe in England' depends on Bishop's reader actively inserting the missing word 'solitude' in order to complete Crusoe's narrative for him. By this, I am not making a claim that the poem is a direct comment on translation, but it does demonstrate that creative reading is more expansive than just as a translation tool. For Bishop, creative reading is a key component of translation that is transposed across her different authorial modes, underwriting the importance of the figure of the reader/author in the creation of a narrative to make the world legible. 'Crusoe in England' directly addresses the question of the attribution of meaning to words as descriptors of the natural world and man-made objects; it also implicitly requires the reader to consider the impact of social, cultural and historical precepts that alter those meanings as the words and objects traverse culture and language in moving from the island to the museum. In part, 'Crusoe in England' is a direct attempt by Bishop to

reconfigure her own narrative odyssey through old world and new world. These are all aspects of the translator's skill as they are also of an author's skill.

Writing to May Swenson in November 1968, Bishop comments that:

> I really haven't written a poem since I can't remember when. However—one always does start again, it seems. Stevens says in his letters (just read them all) that translating is a waste of time—but I don't agree with him completely. It gets one to going through dictionaries, and that is a helpful activity. (*OA* 501)

It is dictionaries in the plural, as translators use both a foreign language and their own language, analogous to Paz's identification of translation as being like learning to speak and developing a knowledge of vocabulary. In the same spirit of safe exchange with the other, I recall Tom Paulin's categorisation of Bishop's correspondence as having a 'dynamic textuality' (1996, 216) which informs her correspondence with others, as it also shapes her own internal dialogues. On one level, the letter to Swenson is an example of how translation is a tool that informs Bishop's own reading process. Dictionaries help Bishop cross a language barrier into a language that is not her native English. At a more fundamental level, the action of going through dictionaries is not just done as a reader, but also as a writer; it is a 'helpful activity' because it refines knowledge and accuracy on the meaning and etymology of words. The dynamic textuality that Paulin finds applies not only to the relationship Bishop had with her correspondents, but also to a conversation she had with herself, as writer and reader of texts. Like Crusoe, Bishop often worked with gaps in the drafts of her unfinished poems, but, unlike Crusoe, she was able to wait until she was ready to fill them. This authorial quality was celebrated by Robert Lowell in his 'Four Poems for Elizabeth Bishop', where he depicts Bishop's noteboard hung with words, waiting to fill the gaps in her poems. His depiction of her authorial process is both textual and artistic; her

words 'hang' (1973, 198) in the air, like the mobiles of Alexander Calder, the sculptor whose works were admired by Bishop, Lowell, and Macedo Soares. The words and gaps glued to the notice board recall the works of Joseph Cornell or Bishop's own shadow box, 'Anjinhos', the making of a piece of collage, or the dismantling of a poem in translation in order to reconstruct it in another language. Bishop hangs her words in the air, making them objects, that like the figures of the family in 'Family Portrait' would 'know how—if need be—to fly' (*P* 249). Lowell's poem is a depiction of the creative poet at work; this reading of his poem extends the image beyond the figure of the poet to include the shadows of an artist at work.

The perils of translation: accuracy and overwriting

In 1948 Bishop wrote to Lowell with a comment on Marianne Moore's translations of La Fontaine, which she said 'has a sort of awkwardness & quaintness that's quite nice - & sounds very much like her, of course; I'm not sure how much like La Fontaine' (*OA* 160). The problem of accuracy and authenticity in translation, resurfaces years later, when Lowell published *Imitations*, a collection of loose translations of poems, including works by the French poets Baudelaire, Heine, and Rimbaud and dedicated to Bishop. Bishop wrote a series of letters to Lowell (*WIA* 351–358, 803) in which her response begins with delight at the dedication, and interest in the works of Montale, then flows with increasing strength through a series of reactions to Lowell's accuracy and style, to what she terms his 'over-riding' of the originals. As she says 'I just *can't* decide how "free" one has the right to be with the poet's intentions' (*WIA* 357). Her objection is twofold: both inaccuracy—she asks him to 'forgive my sounding like the teacher of

French 2A' (*WIA* 356)—and the 'over-riding' of the original. In translation, it is not just accuracy that must be respected, but also authorial intent. For Bishop, there is a limit to the creative reading that a translator can indulge in.

David Kalstone suggested that Bishop and Lowell's disagreements about translations were almost a 'parody of their temperamental differences about poetry' (2001, 207). Kalstone grounds this suggestion in Bishop and Lowell's differing opinions on tone and on the validity of the original transcribed into their own writings. In translations, Bishop's voice becomes more engaged when it finds another. Justifying her reading of what she calls inaccuracy, or 'mistakes, whether or no' (*WIA* 354), or '*changes* that sound like *mistakes*' (*WIA*, 356) in her letters to Lowell forces Bishop to wrestle with the points raised by her close reading of the poems in order to offer a constructive criticism. That this moment caused her great thought and anxiety is clear by the frequency and sequencing of the letters. As Bishop says, her criticism focuses primarily on two aspects, changes and mistakes. All three versions of the letter about *Imitations* focus on a mix of what she reads as mistakes in the dictionary definition of the meanings of words, such as '"tartines"' (WIA 804) or, more subtly, in what she perceives as being the secondary meaning or atmosphere cast by a choice of word. For example, she comments that in 'Ma Boheme':

> I don't think the foot should be "tucked tight against my heart"—he holds his foot *near* his heart and plucks its elastic as if it were a lyre—in the position of Apollo playing the lyre— (*WIA* 805)

Bishop is preoccupied with the shape and movement of the human activity referred to in the choice of word. Characteristically her objection uses sensation to underlie observation. Theoretically much of what Bishop writes here can be read as a privileging

of the position of the author, or in Schleiemacher's terms, moving the reader towards the author. The question that arises is what does translation teach us about the composition of Bishop's concept of change? In these instances, change is not just defined by literal accuracy, but is also a term encompassing authorial and textual intention. Change is a key word and concept for Bishop, charged with emotion. It forms the crux of her disagreement with Lowell over his treatment of Elizabeth Hardwick's letters in *The Dolphin* (*WIA* 707), and a lack of change strikes the final note in her elegy for Lowell, 'North Haven'. In translation, as suggested by the lines of 'Family Portrait', change needs to be approached with extreme caution; 'When matter becomes annoyed, / who knows the malice of things?' (*P* 249).

Bishop and Paz: watching the shadow

Paz and Bishop met in 1972 during the period Paz was at Harvard, delivering the Charles Eliot Norton lectures. A friendship soon formed between Paz, his wife Marie-José, and Bishop, who also developed a close working relationship with Octavio Paz. She translated several of his poems, five of which appear in both their collected works; in turn he also translated some of her poems, later published in his book *Versiones y Diversiones* (Machova 2017, 82). Like Bishop, Paz was part of the poetical pantheon, a poet who although fluent in English, wrote primarily in Spanish. His fluency in English is a key component in their translation work together. Their discussions on what to change and how is largely positive, in the sense that revision was a positive activity for them both. On 21st January 1979 (VC 17.5) Paz wrote to Bishop asking her permission to include her 'beautiful versions' of some of his poems in an anthology of his poetry

being compiled by Eliot Weinberger. He asks her opinion on some changes he has made to her first translation of 'The Grove', notes that he has made some 'typographical modifications' (which may be the line spacing seen below) and asks her advice on word choice in 'The Grove'. Peppered amongst this, Paz affirms his intention to translate Bishop's 'North Haven', and in a moving allusion to Bishop and Lowell's deep friendship, echoes their joint commitment to the art of revision as they write, saying:

> Yes, I, too, have the same malady and I am condemned to revise, revise, revise… I know it is useless but I cannot avoid it. It is a revenge against ourselves, against time. (VC 17.5)

Bishop's reply (dated 8 February 1979) focuses mainly on the translation of 'The Grove'. She begins by commending Paz's translation, saying 'your own English translation is perfectly good (perhaps it is parts of my earlier one? - I don't have the carbon here…)', and then suggest some specific changes. Most of the letter is dedicated to thinking about a few words of the poem ; 'dazzling', 'that basin!', 'the west', 'blind', 'cement', 'opaque'. Bishop's thoughts are structured around dictionary definition as well as the allusions cast by the words. This exchange of letters makes clear the multiple layers of authorial and translation intervention carried out on the text of 'The Grove'. The text itself become a sort of palimpsest. To give context to my reading, I quote below two versions of the last 10 lines of poem; one as it appears Bishop's translations (*P* 255–6) and presumably the version closest to that worked on in 1979, and then on the right, the version as published in the later *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz* (1987, paperback edition 1991, 351), edited by Weinberger.

Bishop	Paz
And now	And now the trash can,
on the opaque cement	the empty flower pot,
nothing but	on the blind cement
sackfuls of shadow	contain nothing but shadows.
the trash – can,	Space closes
the empty flower -pot.	over itself.
Space closes	Little by little the names petrify.
over itself:	
inhuman.	[E.B]
Little by little, the names petrify.	
Cambridge, England, 28 July 1970	
1972	
Translated by Elizabeth Bishop with the author.	

In the version included in Bishop's *Poems*, the placement of the words and the line length and breaks are striking; they emphasise a visual or sensual rhythm of the words on the page. It is unclear from the letters at Vassar how this typological impulse was

worked through by Bishop and Paz, although from his comment quoted above, we can surmise it was something he was comfortable with. The textual information at the end of the poem—place (Paz, not Bishop, was in England in July 1970), dates, person—signify layers of author/translator intervention. In the version edited by Weinberger, the lines keep their staggered appearance but there are significant word alterations or omissions. In her letter to Paz (8 February 1979, VC 17.5), Bishop's analysis of the lines emphasises the idea that nouns, nominally naming objects, are actually describing the containers of shadows, a thought perhaps triggered by the 'blue blue basin' of line 23. On the basin she writes:

> That basin! I've never been quite sure about it — it is a space in the sky, isn't it?.— with the clouds crumbing around it? IF I am right about this — it would make it much clearer if you could say "a tile-blue basin" or a 'blue tile basin" and omit the <u>of a basin</u> which makes it too solid. (But I may well be wrong!)

She then reaches the end of the poem and returns to the idea of porous solidity:

> at the very end it just occurred to me as I was copying it that perhaps the trash-can and flower pot are now nothing but <u>containers of shadow</u>s....

This was a comment that Paz absorbed in his later translated version of 'The Grove', where 'empty' has been substituted for Bishop's 'contain nothing but shadows'. Bishop then goes on interrogate the word 'blind', in the context of the 'blind cement' (Paz's original Spanish being "el opaco cemento" (1988, 350). Bishop writes

> "Blind" is not a very good try for "cement" — or not here — but I didn't like "opaque". Now I see the OED gives as the first meaning of "opaque" — "lying in shadow, darkened, obscure" — so probably the word has kept a better meaning in Spanish than in English. (Here it now only seems to mean that you can't see through it!) (VC 17.5).

In this case, Paz retained 'blind' in the version of 'The Grove' of his *The Collected Poems,* although Bishop stands by 'opaque' in the version of 'The Grove' published in *Poems*.

These letters allow us a glimpse of the collaborative nature of Paz and Bishop’s work on translation. The poets share a similar language sensibility, a crucial aspect in enabling them to respect each other's understanding of the meanings and attributes of words, that is the literal definition, allusion, sound quality, metrical and rhythmical qualities. This is a moment in which the poets 'watch the shadow' of each word as they deconstruct and reconstruct the poem. This small moment in the history of ‘The Grove’ contains another beguiling aside that, to me, sounds very much like the beginning of a possible Bishop poem, around the meanings dancing around the ideas of ‘opaque’ and 'blind'. In her letter, she goes on to mention that she has been reading ‘your Duchamp book and I am very much afraid a lot of it is over my head. (I can only think <u>concretely</u>—my head is <u>opaque concrete</u>)’ (VC 17.5). Cement has metamorphized into concrete, creating the wonderful conceit of ‘opaque concrete’, which suggests a similar inherent contradiction to a state of mind as to the containers that hold nothing but shadow; it hints at another poem analogous but not identical to ‘The Grove’.

Before moving on from this brief analysis of the differences between Paz and Bishop's translations, I want to note a choice Bishop made in her translation of 'Objects & Apparations'. In the fourth verse, Paz writes ‘Memoria teje y destejo los ecos’, which Bishop translates as ‘Memory weaves, unweaves the echoes’. More literally translated, the phrase would be ‘Memory weaves, and *I unweave* the echoes’ (Fontanella 1999, 274). Here Bishop deliberately choses to erase the personal pronoun, possibly as part of her desire to create the space that Paz so appreciated in her poems. There is a similar moment in Bishop's translation of Drummond de Andrade's 'Family Portrait' which occurs in the penultimate and last verse. Bishop translates '<u>The</u> living and the

dead relations' (my emphasis), carefully following Drummond de Andrade's original 'os parentes mortos e vivos' (Drummond de Andrade 2003, 79), which could equally apply to his parents or family, or to parents and family in general. However, another of Drummond de Andrade's translators, Richard Zenith, takes this same moment and writes 'My dead and living relatives' (Zenith, 2015, 64, my emphasis), an equally valid choice in the context of the poem. These are small instances where translation lays bare the choice between effacing or embracing the personal 'I'. They speak to Gillian White's evocation of the reader being in a 'lyric shame situation' (White 2014, 46). White explores readings of mid-century American poetry to expose 'shame attributed to, projected onto, and produced by reading that anthropomorphize poems as "lyric"' (White 2014, 4). White discusses Bishop's own poetry in her reading, working first from Bishop's encounter with and reaction to William Carlos Williams, and then through to her later work to demonstrate that Bishop experiments with 'rhetoric and discourse' (White 2014, 96) in order to 'reveal and disrupt habits of language to produce interpretive space and to foster critical self-awareness' (White 2014, 96). The few opportunities we have to read and compare different versions of Bishop's own translations and different translators' versions of poems she worked on help illuminate moments, when as readers of Bishop's poetry, we have the opportunity to understand 'how entangled with acts of projection and identification we become when interacting with art, and people, in moments of interpretation' (White 2014 46). Translation is one way of viewing Bishop's own entanglement with all these aspects with a penetrating lens, although Bishop's own reluctance or inability to formalise her thoughts on translation practice make this viewing an oblique one. Nonetheless, the choices made by Bishop as translator remind us, as Paz said of her, that 'poetry is not in what words

say but in what is said between them' (Paz 1977, 213). Translation is another door into the interpretative space that Bishop creates for her readers within the body of her poetry.

Bishop was a translator, not an interpreter; the two abilities require different cognitive acuity. Nor did Bishop speak Portuguese fluently, commenting to Ashley Brown in an interview that 'I'm like a dog; I understand everything that is said to me but I don't speak it very well' (1966, 19), a formulation that Bishop had earlier used in her poem 'The Riverman', where he, too, understands Laundinha's language but cannot yet speak it (*P* 104, lines 51–2). This reticence of speech does not imperil her ability to hear. Bishop demonstrates an awareness for the ‘political wit and love-affair wit’ (*OA* 291) that shines through in some of the best popular Brazilian sambas, and in her talk on Brazilian popular music (1977) she included some of these translated samba lyrics. At this talk, she and Ricardo Sternberg, who played the guitar, planned to 'read and sing Brazilian poetry, in the original and in English translation' (Schiller, 1977, 79). Her appreciation of samba was closely tied to what she perceived to be the authentic voice behind the words, which hints at her appreciation of physical movement of the body in her intention to perform her translations of samba lyrics, rather than just limit them to transcription on the page. Bishop criticises the film *Black Orpheus*, based on the play *Orfeu de Conceição* by Vinícius de Moreas, who also wrote the words for all but one of the songs in the film, as being

> pretty fakey, too—only one true samba—and the words, being written by a *real* poet, are bad. They lack that surprise, the mis-used words, the big words, etc.,

that sambas always have. […] I suspect they're some of [the] last folk poetry to be made in the world. (*WIA* 314)

Bishop objects to the lack of authenticity behind the words in *Black Orpheus*, written as they were by a 'real' poet; she is interested in how real sambas find both authenticity and resistance in words. In the same letter, Bishop mentions her interest in making a collection of translations of her favourite sambas, something that she never did, and only a few appear in her collected works. She also mentions the Brazilian 'ballad books' which she had sent Lowell. These were the 'literatura de cordel', literally ballads and songs published as pamphlets, accompanied by illustrations, and often sung to guitars (*WIA* 315). These, like the samba, speak to Bishop's interest in the authentic voice, and the resistance it applies to the conditions it is spoken in. In 1964, *The New Yorker* published Bishop's ballad, 'The Burglar of Babylon', which she referred to as 'last week's news in the form of poetry' (WIA 257), a poem inspired in part by the works of João Cabral de Melo Neto. Basford (2019 207–217) explores the architectural and typographical interconnectivity between 'The Burglar of Babylon' and Bishop's reading of Cabral de Neto's works, enriching our understanding of how the architecture of Rio was absorbed by both the format and subject of the poem. Bishop also included it in the 1965 edition of *Questions of Travel*, and then published it as a landscape orientated book accompanied by woodcuts by Ann Grifalconi in 1968 (Machova 2017, 77; *P* 340, 343 note 17).

Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987) was one of Brazil's foremost poets, who quickly adopted and then adapted the Brazilian modernist movement into his own modernist style. The interplay between Drummond de Andrade and Bishop's poetry

have been extensively researched in Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins in *Duas Artes: Carlos Drummond de Andrade e Elizabeth Bishop*. 'Family Portrait' belongs to the later group of Elizabeth Bishop's translations of Brazilian poetry. Published in *An Anthology of Twentieth Century Brazilian Poetry* in 1972, the poem forms part of Bishop's uncollected translations. As the title suggests, 'Family Portrait' is a poem structured around a family portrait, and therefore addresses issues of individual identity and inherited identity, formed in the changes wrought by time. The poem explicitly addresses the mutability of its characters as a result of examining the images of the people through the lens of time and memory. The changes are most poignantly described in the faces of the children, who have since changed:

> Peter's face is tranquil,
> that wore the best dreams.
> And John's no longer a liar.
>
> (*P* 248)

In her reading of 'Family Portrait', Milléo Martins suggests that the primary theme in the poem is that of 'the image in movement' (my translation), (2006, 70–72), drawing comparisons with Bishop's 'Poem'. Milléo Martins points out that in 'Family Portrait', the text explicitly emphasised the portrait's silent response 'The portrait does not reply' (*P* 249) in response to what she terms the poet's imagination working in the depiction of the changes wrought by time to the subjects of the portrait. Although in 'Family Portrait', the painting is silenced—a key difference to the multiplicity of voice and memory in 'Poem'—, silence does not mean that it is also stilled. A part of my reading of 'Family Portrait' embraces the disconcerting suggestion that at any time the

constituent parts of the family portrait—the people, the furniture—may fly out of the frame that holds them in. As the poem says:

> The frame of this family portrait
> holds its personages in vain.
> They're there voluntarily,
> they'd know how—if need be—to fly.
>
> (*P* 249)

In this case the frame is the frame of the family, from which each individual can escape, if they so wish. Note the similarity with Bishop's frames; Drummond de Andrade creates a frame which both holds and admits the possibility of escape. The frame is porous, like skin. The previous verse has reminded us that family traits come to the surface and appear despite attempts to hide or eradicate them. The real locus of attention is not on the frame, but on that which it tries to hold. Hence:

> But there’s enough to suggest
> that a body is full of surprises.
>
> (*P* 249)

It is the body—both of the individual and of the family group—around which this poem pivots. Given the context of Bishop's time and interest in Brazil, it is also possible to read this as a moment which speaks to Bishop's interest in the Brazilian landscape. As Lombardi suggests, the 'Brazilian landscape possessed for Bishop all the mystery, the energy and the frailty of a woman’s body’ (Lombardi, 1995 136).

I want to retain this awareness of the multiple facets of the body alongside the objects that form part of the characterisation of the figures captured in the portrait. The poem creates a double layer. First in the fourth verse we are told of the death of

the natural landscape 'the flowers are gray badges / And the sand, beneath dead feet, / is an ocean of fog' (*P* 248). The next verse captures the ghostly movement that occurs in the moment the observer simultaneously views the portrait and mentally recalls the people as they were. Objects begin to move: 'In the semicircle of armchairs / a certain movement is noticed'. This movement captures the sensations of memory, just as it is captured for Bishop in 'Primer Class' she feels 'a strange sensation or shudder, partly aesthetic, partly painful, goes through my diaphragm' (*Pr* 79). How easily the objects can embody a person is suggested by the tenth verse:

> They could refine themselves
> in the room's chiaroscuro,
> live inside the furniture,
> or the pockets of old waistcoats.
>
> The house has many drawers,
> papers, long staircases.
> When matter becomes annoyed,
> who knows the malice of things?
>
> (*P* 249)

It is the people who could move to live inside the furniture, who could chose to transpose their spirit into objects, much as Crusoe sees himself in his knife. Bishop had recourse to translation as part of her practice of effecting a double transfiguration between languages, between dismantling and recreating the text of a poem, and in her observation of accuracy to enable the presence of a non-English language poem to reach into the hearts and minds of English-speaking readers. The background to her work with Octavio Paz gives us the ability to see the strength of her ability as a

collaborative translator; her (mis)appropriation of Brazil culture and language should not obliterate the success of her work in this field.

Chapter VI: This is the House that Elizabeth Built: Houses, Homes and Objects

[…] It is like introspection

to stare inside, or retrospection,

a star inside a rectangle, a recollection:

this hollow square could easily have been there.

'Paris, 7 A.M.' (*P* 28)

The local museum's asked me to

leave everything to them:

[…]

How can anyone want such things?

'Crusoe in England' (*P* 186)

It is antithetical to frame a chapter about the concept of house and home with quotations taken from two poems that address the experience of travel, and yet the life and writings of Elizabeth Bishop make it impossible to discuss one without the other. That Bishop had both a natural propensity for, and a compulsion to, travel, is widely known and evidenced by the title of her third book of poems, *Questions of Travel*, in which she explicitly negotiates questions of what it is to be a tourist, or traveller. In this chapter, I examine how the tripartite relationship between house, home, and travel functions beginning with a series of questions, triggered by 'Questions of Travel'. Is it a necessary condition for a traveller to have a home from which to depart or to arrive at? Is the purpose of travel to experience Freud's '*unheimlich* [of which the nearest semantic equivalents in English are 'uncanny' and 'eerie', but which etymologically corresponds to 'unhomely']' (Freud, 2003 124), in being away from

home? As Goldensohn reminds us, Bishop was 'deeply sensitive to what Freud called "The Uncanny"' (2021 245). How do geographical borders impact on the notion of a home? What difference, if any, does it make to the idea of home if the traveller is also a tourist? Do humans infuse objects, like Crusoe's knife, with a sense of home, so that they too become houses for the spirit?

In 'Song for the Rainy Season', 'Sestina' and 'One Art', Bishop uses the word house, rather than home. The distinction is important – Bishop chose her words carefully – but elusive. In 'Song for the Rainy Season', it is the house that is 'hidden / in the high fog' and open 'to the white dew / and the milk-white sunrise' (*P* 99), whilst in 'Sestina' (*P* 121), 'house' – not home – is the first of the line end words that form the sestina structure. 'House' has a very specific definition in the OED as being a building for human habitation, whilst 'home' can refer both to a building and, if used without the article or the possessive, be 'conceived of as a state as well as a place' (OED). Note that this state can be one of belonging or exclusion. Whilst qualities of home are undoubtedly part of the subscript to Bishop's poems about houses, it would be erroneous to overwrite house with home. *A Concordance to Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry* lists 62 instances of 'house' and variations, 'housed' and 'houses' (Greenhalgh 1985, 359–360), while 'home' and variations 'homelier' and 'homely' appears only 26 times (Greenhalgh 1985, 355–6). House and home are intertwined but nonetheless distinct. Tellingly 'home' appears in 'Crusoe in England' with an ambivalent, sometimes derogatory sub-text. Crusoe is describing how he 'often gave way to self-pity', asking

> What's wrong about self-pity, anyway?
> With my legs dangling down familiarly

over a crater's edge, I told myself

"Pity should begin at home." So the more

pity I felt, the more I felt at home.

(*P* 183)

Crusoe's home does not recall feelings of comfort or belonging, but rather validates his sense of pity, increasing his sense of abandonment. There is a profound ambivalence attached to the value of home and being 'home-made' in 'Crusoe in England' which I explore in more depth later in this chapter, thinking now about the use of 'house' in Bishop's poetry. Perhaps as a result of her itinerant lifestyle or as a natural corollary to her artistic eye, Bishop demonstrated a great interest in the structure of houses, but she never considered herself expert in the field of architecture, as she later admitted whilst translating Henrique Mindlin's *Modern Architecture in Brazil* (*OA* 311). In an early story published in 1937, 'The Sea and Its Shore', she describes a 'very interesting' house, made of 'wood, with a pitched roof, about 4 by 4 by 6 feet, set on pegs stuck in the sand. There was no window, no door set in the door-frame, and nothing at all inside' (*Pr* 11). The attention to the structure of the building is sketchy but architectural, just as it is in 'The Monument'. Architecture informs the depiction of structure, but it does not impose a definition on the function of the house. The lack of a door invites the exterior world into the house; it provides a somewhat unreliable protection against the weather, as evidenced by Boomer's familiarity with paper in 'all stages of soddenness' (*Pr* 12). 'Song for the Rainy Season', a later poem published in 1960, which refers to the house shared by Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares at Samambaia, joyfully extends this sense of interior openness to the exterior, welcoming in all comers. In this poem, the house is a shelter, a home, for humans and others,

including the weather and the magnificent natural world that frames it. This does not mean that the house is weak; rather it is strengthened by its capacity to offer shelter to the elements. In 'The End of March' it is not openness but inaccessibility that defines Bishop's 'proto-dream-house, / my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box' itself protected from the tides 'by a palisade', and ultimately unreachable; the house is 'boarded up' (*P* 199–200). Although architecture informs Bishop's description of houses, it does not impose a single definition of function. The structure can be abandoned—as it is in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance'—or inhabited; it can be open or closed; the human figure within, as is the speaker in 'Paris, 7.A.M', or outside, as in 'The End of March'. In both 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' (*P* 57) and 'Paris, 7 A.M.' (*P* 28), the traveller witnesses the emptied space, marked by human absence; memory and time are both attached and detached from place.

Houses are structures—or containers—that function either filled or empty. For the topographer, houses are objects constrained by the national boundaries of a country, grouped together into villages, towns, cities, etc., or, in Bishop's configuration, '*Continent, city, country, society*' (*P* 92). In Bishop's writings, boundaries of all sorts are porous and geographical ones are no exception; witness the moments in 'The Map' when 'The names of seashore towns run out to sea, / the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains' (*P* 5). Writing to Lowell in 1961 she expressed her appreciation of Paul Klee's painting as having 'modesty, care, *space*, a sort of helplessness but determination at the same time' (*WIA* 250). The space of the house in 'The Sea and Its

Shore' is marked not by an absent human, but by an absence of objects. We are told that

> it could have been a child's perfect play-house, or an adult's ideal house—since everything that makes most houses nuisances had been done away with. (*Pr* 11)

Owning belongings and furnishing a house is fraught with tension. The house in 'The End of March' is boarded up and bare, but it represents a place where Bishop can 'look through binoculars, read boring books, / old, long, long books, and write down useless notes' (*P* 199–200). The emotional opposition created between the house that provides sanctuary conflicts with the need to also contain objects that are invested with personal meaning, making this vision of 'proto-dream-house' an unattainable ideal. In my view, the pivot is the suggestion that objects themselves are houses, much as the rock becomes the house for the giant snail, who will ensconce itself in the crack and become like 'a sleeping ear' ('Giant Snail', *P* 165). If an object can be a house, then Crusoe's difficulty in donating his objects to the museum (*P* 186) stems in part because of the individual biography invested in each object: they are his emotional and psychological home.

Even when Bishop is writing from within domestic borders, her poetry often addresses the experience of not being quite at home, of somehow being out of place. One example is the Man Moth, who returns to 'the pale subways of cement he calls his home' and yet is constantly displaced as he 'always seats himself facing the wrong way' on the trains he does manage to flit aboard (*P* 16). In her study of abandoned houses, Marit MacArthur (2008) explores the conjunction between Bishop's early childhood displacement and her reaction to the upheaval in Europe in the years between the

wars. MacArthur develops a nuanced reading of 'Sleeping Standing Up' that conjoins thoughts about war with displacement from home, noting Bishop's reference to Hansel and Gretel in the crumbs that the poet and reader follow:

> on the green forest floor,
> like those the clever children placed by day
> and followed to their door
> one night, at least; and in the ugly tanks
>
> we tracked them all the night. […]
>
> (*P* 31)

The trick of following the crumbs works only once and only for the children; the crumbs dissolve and disappear under the feet of the poet and followers, and they never find the cottage. MacArthur discusses the poem in the context of the 'Heideggerian problem of dwelling', exploring how it 'resonates deeply on several levels at once: the aesthetic …, the personal …, and the historical,….' (2008, 105). While MacArthur focuses on attaching dwelling to Bishop's houses, both real and imagined, I want to explore this idea further and use Heidegger's thoughts on dwelling as a lens through which to view Bishop's use of objects and their relationship to the creation of a home. I am interested in Heidegger's thoughts on Dasein, or 'being-of-man-in-the-world' (OED), in particular in reference to the interaction between Dasien and 'things', or the interaction between people and objects in the pursuit of purposeful activity. Recall 'The End of March' and Bishop's reading of 'boring books' and writing of 'useless notes', which, knowing of her self-proclaimed 'second thought habit' (*NYr* xlvii) will not be useless at all. In a letter to Anne Stevenson in 1964, Bishop described her admiration for Darwin and empathising with the necessary condition for creativity, what she called

'a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration. (In this sense it is always "escape", don't you think?)' (*PPL* 861). This provokes a series of questions; escape from what, or from which building, or home? Bishop's formulation of being 'self-forgetful' in her process of creativity seems to me to be an example Heidegger's suggestion that that tools have a being of their own that he calls a 'readiness to hand'. As explained by the website of the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*:

> Readiness-to-hand has a distinctive phenomenological signature. … Tools-in-use become phenomenologically transparent….The carpenter becomes absorbed in his activity in such a way that he has no awareness of himself as a subject over and against of world of objects. … Phenomenologically speaking, then, there are no subjects and no objects; there is only the experience of the ongoing task (e.g., hammering). (Wheeler, 2020, 2.2.2 'Modes of Encounter' website).

Bishop's letters attest to her preoccupation with the material tools of her trade. Her notebooks are actively filled with cut-outs and newspaper articles, the typewriters that need replacing, or skip, or stick, or the ribbon that is not quite the black that she wants it to be (*NYr* 420). The moments of absorption Bishop found in writing are evident in the texture and volume of her correspondence. In her poetry they are more opaque, although Frank Bidart recalls her description of the act of writing at the end of 'At the Fishhouses'; 'she said that when she was writing it she hardly knew what she was writing, she knew the words were right' (Fountain & Brazeau, 340). In Bishop's poetry, her tools are often purposefully rendered and observed although the experience of using them may have been transparent. Objects, including those that momentarily 'disappear', are paradoxical in Bishop: they disappear only to be noticed and re-imagined, just as happens to the accoutrements of her trade in '12 O'Clock News', where the right-hand verse columns describes the unnamed object and the left hand column lists the names of each one, from 'gooseneck lamp' to 'ashtray' (*P* 194–5).

Bishop travelled frequently and spent periods of time in hotels or rented apartments. These are similar to the house in 'The Sea and Its Shore' in that a hotel is a home – albeit a temporary one – shorn of all the objects or attachments that make a house a nuisance or a pleasure. One of the themes of *Questions of Travel* is the difference—if one exists—between travel and tourism. Mass tourism as we know it now did not start until after the Second World War. When Bishop was travelling to Brazil, it was still in its infancy in the US. Nonetheless, the difference between a traveller and a tourist is woven into *Questions of Travel*, more specifically in 'Arrival at Santos' and 'Questions of Travel'. One of the aspects that marks a difference is a question of having a home from which to depart. In 'Arrival at Santos', her fellow traveller, Miss Breen, 'when she is at home, is in Glens Fall /s, New York' (*P* 87–8). The figure of Miss Breen acts as foil to the other traveller in the poem, Bishop herself. The question Bishop poses is this:

> […] 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 at last, and immediately,
> after eighteen days of suspension?
>
> (*P* 87)

Superficially at least, the tourist in the poem is Miss Breen, who has a home to return to. Implicit in the light irony lacing the expectation of an answer to this existential question is the suggestion that tourists are ephemeral, fated to return home. To my knowledge, Bishop never defined the difference between a tourist or a traveller, but

when ‘Questions of Travel’ is read in conjunction with ‘Arrival at Santos’ there is, I think, a question as to whether travellers travel with the intention of finding or making a home. In 'Questions of Travel' Bishop questions the nature and viability of the choices that travellers are presented with, asking

> *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?”'*
>
> (*P* 92)

The words are deliberately italicised marking a tonal difference with the rest of the poem; this is the traveller writing in their notebook, considering the moral reverberations of having made the decision to view and experience the many different things that it 'surely would have been a pity' (*P* 91) to have never seen. The opportunity comes in a moment of absence; the poem states that the noise of the rain has just stopped and in the 'golden' (*P* 92) silence, the traveller has an opportunity to write. Notice here how silence plays a part in enabling the poet to cease one action, that of listening, to begin another, that of writing. By implication, this is also Bishop questioning her own motivation in travel, pitting the attraction of domestic life embodied in the warmth of the 'folded sunset' against the joy of staring at 'some inexplicable old stonework, /[…]/ instantly seen and always, always delightful?' (*P* 91). The crux of the poem lies with the question of choice, which despite – or because of – the experience of travel juxtaposed by the idea of home, is revealed to the traveller as being ‘never wide and never free’. Home is a problematically fluid concept, unmoored from geographical, emotional or even architectural certainty.

Bishop's translation of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poem, 'Travelling in the Family' is, in amongst other readings, a moment of displacement, where the work of a foreign author enables Bishop to confront a reality she never fully expressed in her own writings. The poem is similar to a dream landscape, where the poet walks 'In the desert of Itabira / the shadow of my father / took me by the hand' (*P* 140). This is a quest poem, one where the poet searches within memories of the past, seeking to know the family he came from and noticing difference between then and now. The father remains silent throughout, but

> The narrow space of life
> crowds me up against you,
> and in this ghostly embrace
> it's as if I were being burned
> completely, with poignant love.
> Only now do we know each other!
>
> (*P* 142)

Travelling back home in this poem has a whole different meaning; the travel is not geographical but rather emotional, one of memory. As Linda Anderson noted, how to use memory in her work is one of the most important discoveries Bishop made (2015, 7), compounded by her growing understanding that memory needed a temporal or geographical gap to function (2015, 7). In Drummond de Andrade's poem, home is not so much the house, but rather the family, particularly the relationship of the poet with his father. This is a translation of a poem that resonates with Bishop's poems of memories of Nova Scotia and her childhood that are collected within *Geography III*. Linking all these poems is a question of identification with, and about, the concept of home. In the period of historical turbulence during and following the Second World

War, this was a common theme. Recall T. S. Eliot's contention in 'East Coker' that 'Home is where one starts from' (1944 19). Bishop does not share Eliot's certainty about a single home or a single point of departure. For her, the question is further fragmented by the multiplicity of starting points that her different homes represent and the possibility that there is more than one home, defined by arrival rather than departure. With this multiplicity of departure and arrival points in mind, it is useful to reconsider the concept of 'dwelling'. The verb 'to dwell' is not only defined (OED) as living in a place, but also has layers of meanings associated with delay or the action of lingering, such as sustaining a note in music. One of the questions Bishop explores is the tension between the action of delay and that of movement. Delay may perversely enable t a dwelling, but this in turn requires a change to the action of movement that characterises her poems and personal life. Ideas of arrival and departure become layered by notions of return.

Bishop sought homes for her poetry in the pages of various magazines, particularly *The New Yorker*, and had a first reading contract with them. As Joelle Biele notes, when Bishop sent 'Exchanging Hats' to John Ciardi for *New World Writing*, she offered it up as a '"a small escaped poem"' (*NYr* xxxi), because it had been refused by *The New Yorker*. However, Bishop also held back her poems on the page until she was ready to seek publication, or until they were published in her own collections. The structure of the page recalls the artistic shadow box in the display of words contained within its frame and viewed through a transparent face in order to enable visibility for what is written. In his essay, 'Out of the Box', Thom Gunn gives a perceptive and helpful reading of Bishop's poems alongside Joseph Cornell's boxes, referred to Chapter II. My

reading of Bishop's borrowing from Cornell suggests that she, like Cornell, uses juxtaposition as tool for suggestive interpretation. Where Cornell uses the wooden frames—internal as well as external—of this art works to direct the viewers' gaze, Bishop works within the tight constraints of her chosen poetic form to guide the reading experience. Gunn's reading suggests that the poems become the carrier of 'unboxable experience' (1993 78), which he links with Marianne Moore's desire to see Bishop 'risk some unprotected profundity of experience' (1998 391). As Gunn notes in his reading of 'The Moose', Bishop's tight use of poetic structure effectively works like a series of interconnecting boxes, providing protection to the unleashed experience. Prompted by Gunn's reading and Moore's incisive criticism of Bishop, I now want to explore how Bishop conjoins experience alongside metaphors of house and home, of the act of looking out juxtaposed with the desire for a place of shelter. Poems such as 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' make clear how houses stand empty, 'the human figure / far gone in history or theology' (*P* 57). Even when speakers are within, as for example, in 'Paris, 7 A.M.', Bishop frequently looks into an empty space in her houses, the speaker looking down in to a 'hollow square' (*P* 28) that is the courtyard below. Extending Gunn's line of thought, I suggest that Bishop's poetical boxes are simultaneously a container of experience while empty of the human form. In part, this removal, or distancing, of the human form from the observed space allows Bishop to manipulate memory and return to moments of the past, hence the 'childish snow-forts' (*P* 28) of 'Paris, 7 A.M'. It also enables Bishop to practice the formulation of a voice in subjects she was not yet confident in, such as the intimations of war in the 'ammunition, the piled-up balls / with the star-splintered hearts of ice' that the speaker searchers for on the balcony on the winter's night in 'Paris, 7 A.M.' (*P* 28).

A poem, like other art objects, has its first genesis as being ‘home made’, or 'hand crafted', finding a first home in a notebook or scrap of paper and then moving to publication. Both the ideas of being home-made and handcrafted resonate strongly with 'Crusoe in England', but first I want to point to how poems, like people and their objects, can travel between homes and exist in a time beyond the lifespan of their creator. The movement of Bishop's poems between publications has been addressed in the chapter on dedications. Here, I want to explore the historical and anthropological idea that objects require text to be interpreted and equally that text requires an object to facilitate the human desire of recording a human history. Neil MacGregor’s introduction to *A History of the World in 100 Objects* uses the subtitle, *The Necessary Poetry of Things* (2010, xvi), to demonstrate how objects need poets to continuously reinterpret them, citing in one example how the burial of Sutton Hoo is recovered and evoked by both Beowulf and Seamus Heaney (2010, 304). MacGregor also makes clear that even in literate societies, text needs the accompaniment of objects to adequately record societal 'concerns and aspirations' (2010, xvi), in part because of the tendency of the victor (or author) to overwrite or appropriate the voice of the conquered (or observed). Thus, a reading of Bishop's poems through an anthropological lens illuminates, at least in part, the connections between objects and text embedded in Bishop’s poetry.

I have already discussed the inscription of text to further explain objects in instances such as the marks made by the burin in 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance' (*P* 57), or the writing on the column *'gallus canit; / flet Petrus'* in 'Roosters' (*P* 39). The use of objects to hint at a history that is not, or cannot be, fully

captured in text is harder to identify as clearly in Bishop's poetry, not least because her medium is text itself. One example is the 'small, exquisite, clean matte white, / and hard as stucco' wasps' nest (*P* 208) that Bishop collects at the end of her poem 'Santarém'. This is simultaneously admired by her, but dismissed by her fellow traveller, who asks '"What's that ugly thing?"' (*P* 209), the closing line of the poem, thus also leaving the reader to ponder the significance of the nest. The wasps' nest, empty, delicate, both beautiful yet ugly, stands for the wondrous beauty of the Brazilian Amazon and the way of life of the indigenous people of the Amazon, both immensely fragile, and in great danger of destruction by the tourism that purports to record and protect it. Bishop does not overwrite the wasps' nest; each reader has to navigate the myriad of possible interpretations suggested by the poem. Another instance of text requiring an object to enable a holistic interpretation of events described occurs in 'Brazil, January 1, 1502', a poem pinned down by an inserted quotation from Kenneth Clark '… embroidered nature … tapestried landscape' (*P* 89). Here Bishop weaves a depiction of a conquering force overriding and brutalising the natural landscape of Brazil. The words of the first verse create the image of the 'embroidered nature', opening with the multiple 'Januaries, Nature greets our eyes' (*P* 89), immediately making the reader aware of the movement of time—past, present and future—that both ravages and preserves the natural environment. The second verse develops a number of themes, including the imposition of Christianity on the indigenous population, but I note the line—in English—where Bishop describes the vines leaves as being '"one leaf yes and one leaf no" (in Portuguese)' (*P* 89). This is a moment when language performs the equivalent of the acrobat's turn; the poet comments on the necessity of translation to make meaning clear to herself and to her readers whilst the

language of colonialism—English—meets that of another coloniser—Portugal—and re-interprets the words and life of the indigenous people of Brazil, which are only truly spoken by the patters of the vine leaves.

I thought it interesting to invert MacGregor's assertion that a history of objects is impossible without poets and consider how a history of Bishop's poetry is impossible without objects. Objects, like people, carry a history through their lifetime; this is often expressed as the 'biography' of objects. Bishop's clavichord is one such object. Described by Brett Millier as 'one of those possessions that is its own reason for being and that organizes and focuses the energy of the human beings around it' (1993, 81), Bishop bought the clavichord in 1935, describing it as having 'beautiful tone, and small so that you can take them with you wherever you go' (*OA* 32). The portable, domestic characteristics of the clavichord are important to register. It has to travel with Bishop. Like her cat, Minnow, the clavichord came to represent an idea of home to Bishop and it followed her around the world until she eventually sold it in 1975. As one of Bishop's belongings, the clavichord has its own biography that records not only travel but also instances where it prompted Bishop to express thoughts on music, or poetry (*OA* 31). Critics are increasing familiar with how a biography of an object can link seemingly disparate poems such as Bishop's 'Jerónimo's House' and Marianne Moore's 'The Paper Nautilus'. These have a specific attachment to each other generated by Louise Crane's gift of a nautilus to Marianne Moore, made explicit in the letters sent by Moore (1998, 381, 388, 400). The influence of the gift is explicit in Moore's title for her poem, whereas in Bishop's 'Jerónimo's House' the reader needs to have read Bishop's letter to Moore of May 21, 1940 (*OA* 89, 90) to know of the link Bishop made between the

two. It helps also to know that at the time, Crane and Bishop were living together in Key West.

The anthropological concept of a biography of objects can be traced to Igor Kopytoff's essay 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditisation as Process', in which he makes the point that objects have a biography due to their interaction with humans, but they cannot be defined by just one of their life cycles, nor by a singular point in the processes of exchange and consumption (1986, 66–68). Writing in an edition of *World Archaeology* dedicated to the cultural biography of objects, archaeologists Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall pick up Kopytoff's ideas and formulate the discussion on these terms:

> People have realized that objects do not just provide a stage setting to human action; they are integral to it. …human and object histories inform each other. One metaphor for understanding this process is…biography. The central idea is that, as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other. (1999, 169)

This interaction between person and object, altering through the processes of time and change, are frequently commented on by biographical readers of Bishop. One example is the interruption to Bishop's bus journey from Nova Scotia related in a letter: the 'driver had to stop suddenly for a big cow moose who was wandering down the road. She walked away slowly into the woods, looking at us over her shoulder' (*OA* 141). Bishop spent years incubating a poem about the same incident, interwoven with ideas of memory and place, unfinished until she decided to read the finished poem as her *Phi Beta Kappa* address at Harvard in 1972. The dedication Bishop gave the poem, 'for Grace Bulmer Bowers', frames the poem as one of memory. This is Bishop's Aunt Grace who was so instrumental in looking after her as a child. The poem opens with a gentle,

meandering description of the Nova Scotian landscape, through which 'a bus journeys west' (*P* 189), a metaphor for the transformation taking place between the passengers on the bus. The poem moves on to rework the memory of what is being left behind against a background of conversation between the passengers carrying the cadences of leaving home, the memories of past voices:

> A dreamy divagation
> begins in the night,
> a gentle, auditory,
> slow hallucination....
>
> (*P* 191)

This hallucination is the experience of hearing 'Grandparents' voices' (*P* 191) anew, talking without interruption. As the poem moves towards its climax, the moose appears, causing the bus to stop and disrupting the journey. The moose 'looms' (*P*192):

> Taking her time,
> she looks the bus over,
> grand, otherworldly.
>
> (*P* 193)

The flow of conversation pauses and alters, moving the reader into an awareness of the present as the poem alters viewpoint (*P* 193):

> by craning backward,
> the moose can be seen
> on the moonlit macadam;
> then there's a dim
> smell of moose, an acrid
> smell of gasoline.

Both the bus and the moose are objects that are carriers for the memory of time, place and of the movement of a journey, which forms a part of their own biography. They are intimately intertwined with the poet's voice as they are also mingled with the voices of the passengers on the bus. Bishop's biography informs the production and structure of her created art object, the poem 'The Moose', both in the length of time between experience and finalisation of poem, and in the detail contained in the poem. The poem also carries out its own process of textual transformation of people and narrative held within the confines of the bus. As Gosden and Marshall indicate, the transformation of people and object are intimately tied up, one with the other. Linda Anderson makes a related observation in the context of Bishop's development of the use of memory in her poetry, noting that Bishop's 'principle of belatedness' (2019, 31), or the ability to allow time to pass to wait for a future where she could make sense of past events, was of increasing importance to her as she developed as a poet. Many of the poems in *Geography III* are in explicit dialogue with Bishop's early work. Bishop found a way to achieve a new creative impulse through gathering movement and change in the pauses of time.

'Crusoe in England' is one of Bishop's later poems (published in 1970), redolent with the fluidity of memory and painfully alive to the ability of time to change the soul of things, and in some way, render them useless, inefficacious. The poem moves towards closure with Crusoe's lament about alteration; where once his knife:

> reeked of meaning, like a crucifix.
> It lived. How many years did I
> beg it, implore it, not to break?
> I knew each nick and scratch by heart,

the bluish blade, the broken tip,

the lines of wood-grain on the handle...

Now it won't look at me at all.

The living soul has dribbled away.

My eyes rest on it and pass on.

(*P* 186)

As Costello notes, 'the knife can easily be translated to a writing implement' (2003, 362), and is therefore open to being read as a comment by Bishop on her own writing process or block. Before moving on to my own reading of this moment, it is important to acknowledge that Costello does not follow this path, alternatively suggesting a reading where the object is not useless, but is instead the subject of a 'cultural transfer'. It is in the terms of the success of this cultural transfer that my interpretation diverges from Costello's suggestion. Costello views this transfer not only as a comment on the figure of Crusoe, but also more widely within poetic tradition in which Bishop is writing. Within this tradition Costello suggests that Crusoe is able to give voice to what she terms 'contradictory, historical impulses which his particularity does not resolve' (2003, 363). This is a compelling suggestion. This transference of a lack of resolution is another facet of Bishop's ability to construct a form around ambiguity. However, I want here to use the tools of anthropology to suggest some alternatives to a consideration of the transfer of value that Crusoe's objects undergo. The crucifix is both a symbol of death as it also is of resurrection, but Crusoe's knife, ostensibly always dead, as befits an inanimate object, has inverted the pattern and moved from resurrection to death. Crusoe's lament for his knife is one infused with questions of value: the historical, emotional, functional and contextual value of the object. He states that 'The local museum's asked me to / leave everything to them', but questions 'How can anyone

want such things?' (*P* 186). Read through an anthropological lens, his lament is rooted in the evolving and co-dependent biography between humans and their things. Crusoe understands that his personal biography is inseparable from the biography of these collected or made objects, and vice versa. Furthermore, where once he housed his objects in the dwelling he built on the island, they are now going to be housed in a museum, calling into question the attribution of value to the object when disposed or dispossessed from the human whose reality invested it with value. Equally, although he makes no direct comment on his own current home, it is clear that he, like his things, is out of place, 'unhomed' away from the island.

As Godsen and Marshall understand it, both people and objects 'gather time' and in so doing effect a process of mutual, interactive, transformation. They then incorporate the work of Marilyn Strathern, whose analysis of gift giving suggests that these 'produce social relations and are active in a mutually creative relationship between people and things' (1999, 173). Crusoe has been asked to leave these objects to a museum, thus halting their free interaction with himself and with wider society, and consequently ending the 'mutually creative relationship' that these objects symbolised. Godsen and Marshall further incorporate ideas from Strathern, whose observation of Melanesian society leads to a realisation that:

> while Westerners understand objects to exist in and of themselves, Melanesians see objects as the detached parts of people circulating through the social body in complex ways. People are not just multiple; they are also distributed. A person is ultimately composed of all the objects they have made and transacted and these objects represent the sum total of their agency. (1999, 173)

Thus Bishop's biographical history or her agency, is not just Bishop the poet, but also Bishop the gift giver and the artist, who gives poems—in the shape of dedications—

pictures, and gifts to her friends and lovers. Notice that Crusoe develops a number of ‘island industries’ from which come things and objects that are, by necessity, ‘Home-made, home-made!’ *(P* 184). Crusoe is composed of all the objects he is being asked to donate to the local museum, which signals a petrification of his 'living soul' as it does of his knife.

Crusoe, alone on the island, forgets the key word ‘solitude’ in his struggle to recall Wordsworth's poem, an omission that stands for the human need for community and integration into a society. Crusoe’s island solitude deprives him of the social network within which he could safely distribute his objects; paradoxically, a part of his objection to the thought of donating his objects is the enforced unity imposed by the curating of a collection. As all of Crusoe’s objects were ‘Home-made, home-made’, he became a part of the ecological community of the island by virtue of having used the natural provisions. Crusoe may have been alone on the island, but he formed part of a community in which he and his objects could freely circulate. Solitude is refracted away from the habitual meaning of being alone, but Crusoe is nonetheless part of a community: that of the natural ecology of the island. This version of communal living is not enough. As Crusoe says: ‘Just when I thought I couldn’t stand it / another minute longer, Friday came’ (*P* 185). Friday breaks the bond with the home-made community of the island, and reprieves Crusoe from solitude. He signals the end of this time on the island, and the imposition of others. By the end of the poem, Crusoe is alone in his room in England, ‘another island, / that doesn’t seem like one, but who decides?’ (*P* 186).

As Helen Vendler noted (2006, 37), one reading of 'Crusoe in England' is to see it as an elegy for Lota de Macedo Soares. Crusoe's lament for the 'living soul' that has dribbled away from his beloved knife, and his own petrification at the loss of his objects implied by the false picture of his life to be created at the museum, resonates with 'Inventory', Bishop's unfinished and unpublished lament over the loss of her home at Samambaia. Written in 1967 when Bishop's relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares was unravelling, and Bishop had been asked to leave their home for the sake of Macedo Soares' mental health (Millier 1993, 385–386, *EAP* 338), 'Inventory' is a poem beginning out of an unfinished list of the objects that Bishop loved and which helped structure her sense of personal history.

> Bed, birdcage, and a chest of drawers,
> the biggest shell, the flat and foot-shaped
> piece of granite I found myself,
> the paddle, and the portable ink-well;
> the baby-book, […]
> the living cat
> where - where can I take them next? (*EAP*, 143, my ellipsis)

This question of where to take the objects next, where to create the new home, is pivotal to the anthropological reading which understands that a person's sense of self is, in every way—physical, mental and emotional—distributed amongst their things. Implicit in the distress vocalised in this draft poem is the understanding that the objects that once circulated freely in the community around and between Macedo Soares and Bishop can no longer do so: they are ostracised. Bishop is personally invested in these objects, and not just those that came from her past—such as the baby book, but also

found objects such as the shell, or the made object, invested with the ability to carry out her trade, the ink-well. These are the things that Bishop values, the objects that mark her presence in the house and in turn, the objects that make her feel at home, but they are also the objects that created her home with Macedo Soares. It is the objects that Crusoe relinquishes that hold the elegy for Macedo Soares.

On a biographical note, after Macedo Soares' death in September 1967, Bishop returned to Samambaia to find the house stripped of the possessions they shared. This was not entirely unexpected. Bishop knew that Macedo Soares had left her house and possessions to Mary Stearns Morse. Bishop wrote to Maria Osser, a mutual friend of theirs, describing her shock and alienation at the scene, writing: 'Mary left me the linen on my bed, 2 towels, 2 plates, forks, knives, etc. This was my HOME, Maya. Do people think I have no feelings?' (*OA* 490). Earlier in the same letter, Bishop claimed that 'I don't give a damn about THINGS' (*OA* 489); what she wanted was an object that was of value because of the memory of the shared life it held, not because of a putative monetary value. The first draft of 'One Art', Bishop's villanelle of loss, has two suggested titles either 'HOW TO LOSE THINGS' or 'THE GIFT OF LOSING THINGS' (*EAP* 225). Like 'Inventory', the poem begins with a collection of objects, 'keys, reading-glasses, fountain pens', whose loss become symbolic of the pain of dissociation from the objects that define a self, as well as of loss itself. 'One Art' evolves over sixteen drafts into the poem we have now, where Bishop juxtaposes the loss of objects dear to her, 'my mother's watch', with the loss of 'three loved houses', to culminate in the horror of 'losing you (the joking voice, a gesture /I love)' (*P* 198). The poem is laden with the pain of lost love, but the 'you' Bishop fears losing is not Macedo Soares, but

Alice Methfessel. The poem is a peon to loss: the loss of loved people, loved objects, loved houses, tightly contained within the villanelle form. Each loss is seemingly containable, measurable; yet also threateningly amplified. The detail of her mother's watch is scaled next to one of her much loved houses, so that the watch is an object that represents a home for memory and absence, but it is itself now homeless. A similar movement between containment and abandonment happens in the treatment of the houses;

> 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.
>
> (*P* 198)

It is an extraordinary poem, imploding from within, the pain of a life of loss contained by the tight form, even the unimaginable possibility of 'losing you' contained by the bracketed '(*Write* it!) like disaster.' Bishop lived in and loved many houses, but it is generally accepted that the three loved houses are those in Key West, Samambaia, and Casa Mariana, although the question of location is in one way reductive; the poem refers to all or none of them depending on the reader. Nor does the reader need to name the cities to get the sense of amplified loss. For the poem to succeed the sense of place must remain deliberately elusive, moving in scale from the specific to the vastly general.

In the connectivity between objects, homes and loss, the resonance struck between 'One Art' and 'Inventory' reverberates out to 'Crusoe in England', specifically touching on Crusoe's exclamatory question 'Home-made, home-made! But aren't we all?' (*P* 184). Crusoe's affirmation is ambivalent, followed as it is by a question. If the reading focuses on the emphatic repetition of 'home-made', the rhythm of the line propels the urge to reply 'yes'. If, however, the reader puts the emphasis on the question, the 'but' signals the reverse impetus: are we all home-made? Hanging in the balance is the certainty that we all stem from our parents and from the home(s) of childhood, against the opposing notion that we are also what we make ourselves to be. Thus, which home are we made from? And can we be made from more than one home? For Crusoe, the answer would seem to be no; his home was that of the island, now left to the past. The elements of biographical knowledge that provide the subtext to some of this anthropological reading is problematic; I am not equipped to, nor do I wish to answer these questions on Bishop's behalf. There are intense questions around how we treat biographical detail in conjunction with Bishop's work.

In his essay, 'Autobiography as De-facement', Paul de Man wrote a warning, suggesting that:

> We assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life…(1970, 920).

De Man sounds a warning familiar to cultural anthropologists; and that is an awareness of the intrinsic subjectivity in the creation and appreciation of an autobiography and therefore impact on an ostensibly objective process. His words point to the power of looking back over the past during certain times in life, an action which can have the

effect of directing the future towards a previously unimagined end, much as Bishop achieved in her time in Brazil. With these suggestions of subjectivity—both of the reader and of the writer of an autobiographical project—in mind, I consider again the impact of the 'Foster letters' recently added to the Bishop archives at Vassar. These letters invite an intimacy that perhaps Bishop never meant to be part of the fabric of her public persona. In amongst other points, Bishop details in the letters the sexual and emotional abuse perpetrated by her uncle, George Stephenson. The letters also describe parts of her childhood, her troubles with alcohol, developing and changing friendships, her understanding of her sexuality, and the difficulty she had in relating to men. They give a brief insight into Bishop's own understanding of how her mother's illness and death impacted on her own psychology, particularly her sexuality. The letters impact strongly on the question of whether home is somewhere we start from in childhood, or alternatively a place(s) created as life is lived, partly because so much of what is recounted relates to Bishop's early years, but also because the abuse took place within the walls of the loving home that Aunt Maude provided for Bishop.

The work of the child psychologist, D.W.Winnicott helps to explain one possible level of the resonance of these events. In an essay 'The Child in the Family Group', he writes that:

> it is the child's family pattern more than anything else that supplies the child with these relics of the past, so that when the child discovers the world there is always the return journey that makes sense. (1986, 135)

Winnicott's point about the 'return' is key. The child develops an interest in exploring the world away from family, but when threatened or overwhelmed returns to the family in order to feel both protected, loved, and to be able to make sense of the new

experience. The threat inherent in the return to a home where Uncle George is present can only be imagined; Bishop found a way of writing her own autobiography throughout her life that did not depend on this return journey. Despite her strong attachment to Nova Scotia, the letters make clear that Bishop's childhood home will never be the only place that she wishes to be identified with, neither as starting from, nor as returning to. The return journey was never a clear path for Bishop. The words of her poem 'Dear, my compass / still points north' (*P* 313) remained in a draft form, whilst the difficulty of choice and the uncertainties of travel are expressed clearly in 'Questions of Travel': '"*Should we have stayed at home, /wherever that may be?*"' (*P* 92). Having considered the ethical questions raised by the Foster letters, Linda Anderson suggests that the most helpful way of reading the Foster letters and their impact on Bishop's work is to appreciate the insight they offer into 'how Bishop was developing trust in herself to write freely, without censorship' (2019, 21). Writing itself was the one constant home for Bishop, affording her the protection and sustenance needed venture in and out of the world.

On leaving Vassar, Bishop found another home of sorts in her friendship with Marianne Moore and her mother. Bishop quickly learnt to negotiate the oddities of the Moore household as evidenced in her description of the ritual of accepting a nickel at the end of the visit for the subway:

> I always simply helped myself to a nickel as I left, and eventually I was rewarded for this by Marianne's saying to a friend who was protesting, "Elizabeth is an *aristocrat*; she *takes* the money." (*Pr* 121)

The action of taking the nickel reinforces Bishop's acceptance of Moore's hospitality. The rupture over 'Roosters' in 1940, which occurred when Moore and her mother

heavily edited and altered Bishop's most ambitious poem to date, led to another episode of a rejection of censorship. Bishop replied to Moore rejecting her advice and defending her own choices, beginning her letter with a firm 'What I'm about to say, I'm afraid, will sound like ELIZABETH KNOWS BEST' (*OA* 96). From this stage on, Bishop would never consult Moore again with the same deference, but over the years the poetic 'discipleship had evolved into a mutually supportive friendship' (Leavell 2013, 282). In 1939, whilst living in Key West with Louise Crane, Bishop met Dr John Dewey, who became one of her sponsors for the Houghton Mifflin Poetry award. Bishop developed a life-long friendship with the Dewey family, and would often stay with Jane Dewey, Dr Dewey's daughter. In 1948, Bishop wrote to Lowell saying that 'it seems to be my lucky-in-real-estate year' (*OA* 153), as she had been offered the use of the Dewey apartment in Key West for a period of time. A couple of years later, in 1950, whilst at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., Bishop would often visit Jane Dewey at Shadowstone farm, in Havre de Grace, Maryland, 'the most beautiful place' (*OA* 204) that Bishop quickly came to love. It was here where she retreated after Lota's suicide in 1967. The farm in Maryland was not the only place of refuge that Bishop formed a strong attachment to. In the 1970s, Bishop began to stay at John Malcolm Brinnin's house in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Duxbury became an important place of retreat for Bishop, a place where she went to:

> find the peace and solitude of the ocean, and the company of congenial souls to whom she did not need to explain the nature of her relationship with Alice, her struggle with alcohol, or her deliberate pace of composition (Millier 1993, 491).

Bishop wrote one of her rare dedications on 'The End of March', 'for John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read: Duxbury', a discrete yet affirmative highlight of the importance

Duxbury had for her. The poem is an extraordinary celebration of an unremarkable moment, a cold and windy walk along the beach, a sighting of a ramshackle house, imagined as being Bishop's 'proto-dream-house' (*P* 199), and then a momentary glimpse of sunshine on the return. The house described takes up a whole verse. The poem is in one sense about the sense of coming home, being at home, doing the things one does at home, which for Bishop are reading, writing and an ignition of warmth, the physical warmth of the kitchen and the spark of creativity heralded by the electric wires and electricity coursing through the lines: 'A light to read by—perfect! But—impossible' (*P* 200). It is impossible because the house is both imaginary and also reveals itself to be boarded up, unattainable and uninhabitable, and yet this is not a moment for despair. On the contrary, the comforting sense of the 'return' as described by Winnicott allows the sun to come out for 'just a minute' (*P* 200) and light up all around. This moment of finding a home in a walk on the beach, a place of transience, is a moment where there is space created to be able to be, despite being neither here nor there. As Joanna Walsh puts it in her book on the experience of finding homes in hotels: 'At home, there are too many things to think about. In order to think properly, it is necessary to be neither here nor there' (2015, 72). Nor can Walsh think properly in a hotel. She inserts Heidegger's voice who states that 'To give thought to homelessness is to take up residence within it' (2015, 72). One of the myriad qualities to be enjoyed in 'The End of March' is the Heideggerian concept of taking up residence in homelessness, a concept that Bishop eventually finds a way of negotiating to be at ease with. Despite the inaccessibility of the house, the poem celebrates a being at home in life on that walk on the beach, a home found in the hospitality of friends.

Another notable place of refuge for Bishop was the Sabine House farm on North Haven Island, Maine, where Bishop spent several summers in the 1970ss together with Alice Methfessel and a number of their friends. In a letter to Howard Moss in July 1974, Bishop wrote that 'the SABINE FARM is absolutely beautiful' (*NYr* 360) Bishop's North Haven journals are full of the wonders of the natural world, particularly details of the flowers and birds that she observed all around her. The entry for July 2nd, has an intriguing bracketed caption, an unattributed quotation '("a late spring"?)' (*The North Haven Journal*, 13) at the head of the page, which echoes back in time to 'A Cold Spring', where Jane Dewey is memorialised, together with the quotation from Hopkins; 'Nothing is so beautiful as spring' (*P* 55). In the journal, the weather is a constant presence, inhabiting the farmhouse together with Bishop, Methfessal, and their friends. The entry for 10th July details how a 'magnificent' thunderstorm woke Bishop in the morning:

> The thunder approached from all sides—as if it didn't give a damn—had no special aim, etc. (How anthropomorphic one gets off with Nature like this—) […] When I open the kitchen door I can hear the fir trees whoosh-whoosh-ing — and all the bird-calls, rather subdued today. With the house shut up I hear only loud drips— (*The North Haven Journal*, 13, 14, my ellipsis)

This fluidity between the internal and the external is reminiscent of the 'open house' (*P* 99) of Samambaia in 'Song for the Rainy Season'; these are structures that are protective and yet simultaneously open to the weather outside, whilst also containing their own weather and temperaments internally.

The question of finding a home in homelessness points towards an intriguing echo between 'Manuelzinho' and 'One Art', which lies in the thought of 'owning' a place. In 'One Art', there is a hint of colonial imposition in the impossibility of owning

‘some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent’ (*P* 198) against the balance that Manuelzinho treads, being ‘Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)— / a sort of inheritance; white’ (*P* 94). It is an echo that plays within the same bandwidth as the knowledge that Bishop enjoyed some independent wealth, generated by the small stipend left to her by her father. As Steven Axelrod writes, 'One Art' 'conflates Bishop's personal experience of "losing" with a global history of mastery and disaster and with the fear of defeat that haunts ever colonial and military project' (2014, 40). Axelrod goes on to make the point that written into 'One Art' is also the 'discourse of mastery and loss that come to the fore in relation to the Vietnam War', and opens the possibility of reading 'One Art' as a 'sardonic commentary' on 'American "victory culture"' (2014, 40). The relationship a poem posits between a personal and public home is always important to hold in mind. A reading of 'One Art' invites these other political and social readings, just as a reading of 'Manuelizinho' from a Brazilian perspective illuminates uncomfortable suggestions of a colonial imposition by Bishop on her adopted country (discussed in the previous chapter) in opposition to the shadow lands of Bishop's perceived homelessness and—or—her loss of home is the freedom that comes from having no home for which to be responsible and the means to travel. It is reasonable to suggest that there were times in her life where a transient life suited Bishop. Key West was a place Bishop loved, and yet it was a place she also sought to leave, writing to Frani Bough Muser that ‘Key West is as beautiful as ever. I’m beginning to think it has a “sinister” hold on me …’ (*OA* 87). The real difficulty Bishop faced was not finding the physical structure of a place to call home, although that too was important, but the challenge of a finding a place that helped her form a coherent sense of self.

Designed by Sergio Bernandes and built by Lota de Macedo Soares in 1952, the house at Samambaia is another of the loved and lost houses of 'One Art'. The house was architecturally acclaimed and won a prize in a competition in which Walter Gropius, one of the pioneers of modernist architecture, was a judge. Bishop's appreciation of the lived environment comes from observation, and she observes the interaction of all aspects of living creatures with their home. Part of her appreciation of architecture is the integration with the natural world that surrounds it, an appreciation that is as true of her enjoyment of the colonial architecture in Ouro Preto as it is of the modernist house at Samambaia. In both Samambaia and in Casa Mariana, the house Bishop bought and restored in Ouro Preto in 1965, Bishop found a place to work. The studio at Samambaia was built especially for her. It was:

> one large room with a fireplace. […] Then there is a small bathroom and kitchenette with a pump and a Primus stove for tea, etc. It is way up in the air behind the house, overlooking the waterfall. I have all my books together for the first time in ten years; all my papers, etc. (*OA* 252)

Like the rest of the house at Samambaia, the studio is embedded in nature, home to the natural world as well as to humans. Books fill the studio, together with papers and letters, a physical manifestation both of Bishop's work as well as a reminder of her place in the web of friendship and literature that she carried and developed throughout her life. Bishop had photos of Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore and Dr Anny Bauman up above her study in Ouro Preto (*OA* 527), all three talismanic figures of what it meant to be home. After Macedo Soares' death in 1967, Bishop returned to Brazil, to live at Ouro Preto, where she tried to make a home for herself, although her letters are full of the frustration at not being able to work or find peace there (*OA* 515). This is a period when Bishop is again 'homeless' or 'unheimlich'. Although she has a home of her own, she

cannot profitably dwell there. When Bishop decided to sell Casa Mariana in the early 1970s, one of her main worries was how to transport her library of over 3,000 books, which was itself already a diminished library with some of the books having dispersed after Macedo Soares's death. In the event, as Lorrie Goldensohn recounts (1992, xi), Bishop left many of her papers with Linda Nemer in Brazil, which were eventually added to the archives at Vassar.

The transience of the human figure in the built environment is now something that follows the ghost of Elizabeth Bishop herself. Determined Bishop readers can track her movement through New York where there are 'thirteen addresses in Manhattan where devout readers can stalk Elizabeth Bishop's ghost: seven hotels and six apartments' (Mallonee, 2013). There has since been a cultural shift away from hotels as a place to live in. In the words of Joanne Walsh, in the past it was mainly

> women without men: … There were hotels for single women, in single rooms, for maids, and old maids… Hotels were the only place these women were served, had anyone to serve them. They were the only place they existed in public. (Walsh 2015, 144)

For many contemporary readers, the transient experience of staying in a hotel is now more closely associated with the societal premium placed on leisure. Bishop's experience of hotels was a lonely privilege, indicative of her status as a woman who was without family and partly funded by the small inheritance left to her by her father and grandfather. Bishop's early story, 'In Prison' (1938), draws some similarities between hotels and prisons; it is a story driven by the desire to become fixed, no longer transient. The narrator begins in a state of suspended desire, saying 'I can scarcely wait for the day of my imprisonment' (*Pr* 18), literally longing to give up freedom to live within the structure and order of a prison. That the story is experimental, slightly

tongue-in-cheek, does not detract from the complex issues that Bishop is exploring. The heart of the story lies with the pressure and obligation to write. The decision the narrator faces is one between 'Choice and Necessity' (*Pr* 18):

> The hotel-existence I now lead might be compared in many respects to prison-life, I believe: there are the corridors, the cellular rooms, the large, unrelated group of people with the different purposes in being there that animate every one of them; but it still displays great differences. (*Pr* 18)

The superficial differences between prisons and hotels lies in the furnishings and decorations of the rooms, the lamp-light in the hotel room falling on the wallpaper so as to create the illusion of a 'large silver bird-cage' (*Pr* 19) closing around the narrator. The essential point is that 'One must be in; that is the primary condition' (*Pr* 19). Paradoxically, the desire to be confined and forced to obey standard rules of behaviour and dress leads the narrator to suggest that

> in a place where all dress alike I have the gift of being able to develop a "style" of my own, something that is even admired and imitated by others. (*Pr* 24)

This ability to be most individual when most confined resonates with Bishop's statement on Stravinsky (*OA* 358), referred to in the first chapter. Restriction paradoxically encourages individuality not in a destructive sense; Bishop senses that her historical knowledge of poetic form and voice will enable her to develop her own voice that this both part of a poetic tradition and yet individual. For Bishop, being 'in' is a vital condition, indicating a complete absorption of being in a moment in time or place; the need to be 'in' runs through 'In the Village' and headlines the poem, 'In the Waiting Room'. Both of these describe moments in time where Bishop is challenged to achieve, by choice or necessity, a moment of self-realisation. Both 'In the Village' and 'In the Waiting Room' end with a departure that is no departure at all. 'In the Village'

is framed by the eternal sound of the scream, replayed by the 'Clang' (*Pr* 77) of the blacksmith shaping a horseshoe. The strange moment of elision in 'In the Waiting Room' when the poet slides out of the reality of the dentist's waiting room into the accentuated psychological understanding of the formation of a self in 'you are an *I*, / you are an *Elizabeth,* / you are one of *them*' (*P* 180) moves like the crest of a wave through the poem, until it breaks and the reverse happens: 'Then I was back in it. / The War was on' (*P* 181). The return journey is psychological, not physical, but in the interim, time and emotion have contracted and expanded, opening out into new vistas for both the poet and the reader. The early desire expressed by the narrator of 'In Prison' that 'one must be in' evolves into a more nuanced approach where Bishop manipulates time and scale as so that she, as poet, and we, as reader or viewer, are simultaneously both in and out. This simultaneous expression of presence and absence is also a feature of her paintings. As Lorrie Goldensohn has noted, many of Bishop's paintings capture the moment of departure from a house or room; they are 'the just-evacuated containers of human activity' (1999, 172).

The publication of 'In Prison' prompted Marianne Moore to write another of her perceptive letters to Bishop. Moore praised Bishop's 'prison meditations', highlighting the story's 'insidiously innocent and artless artifice of innuendo' (1998 390), but went on to wish that:

> you would sometime in some way, risk some unprotected profundity of experience; or since no one admits profundity of experience, some characteristic private defiance of the significantly detestable. (1998 391)

Aside from the question of what would count as a 'private defiance of the significantly detestable?', the letter focuses on the need to balance the mediative tone of the story

with specific and real detail, emotional and physical, acknowledging that neither the reader nor the author can be allowed to hide so thoroughly behind the screen of words. Notably, in the same letter, Moore classifies Bishop's early prose work as really being poems. Moore's formulation of the need to risk exposure in order to gain profound experience, her dismissal of 'mass salvation formulae' (1998 391), is a formidable challenge for anyone, not least a young and uncertain poet living through a moment of flux. Ironically, Bishop's stubborn refusal to accept Moore's editing of 'Roosters' was perhaps the first significant act of 'characteristic private defiance of the significantly detestable'. Certainly, it was an act that enabled Bishop to take risks with her writing and to come out from under Moore's protective wing. The difficulty Moore's challenge posed to Bishop is partly the acknowledgement that 'in' is no guarantee of knowing where one is at.

Bishop's own internal discussion on how to resolve this dichotomy between in and out, or departure and return, reverberates throughout her writing, particularly in *Questions of Travel*, headlined by the division of poems as being 'Brazil' or 'Elsewhere'. Another refraction of the same question is found in the poems that consider the dispossessed, or people who are never quite at home. One of the themes in 'Manuelzinho' is the relationship of the tenant, who is also a squatter, with the landowner, whilst 'Sestina' describes the house that is not home, empty of parents for the child at its heart. 'Visits to St. Elizabeths', modelled on the nursery rhyme, 'This is the house that Jack built', directly addresses what it is to be found insane and committed to the house of Bedlam and refers to Bishop's experiences of visiting Ezra Pound. Pound was held at St. Elizabeths for thirteen years as an alternative to be tried

for treason, until he was eventually released in 1958. To be dispossessed is not only to be without a house, or without possessions. The 'tragic man' (*P* 131) of 'Visits to St. Elizabeths' owns a wristwatch that counts out time in the 'house of Bedlam' (*P* 131), recalling and recounting moments of memory and action as the hours and days pass in a miasma of reality that questions all that it is to be deemed sane. Possessions can un-home a person just as a house can be a prison, rather than a shelter. Pound's watch symbolises both the eviction and containment of his spirit from St. Elizabeths. It is also possible to invest objects or actions with the qualities of home, building a metaphorical house for the self. In 'Jerónimo's House', the speaker's home is no more than 'perishable / clapboard with / three rooms in all' (*P* 35). The house is a home because of the objects that adorn the house, such as ferns planted in sponges, four pink tissue-roses, and an old French horn. These are the things that make a house a home. As Jernómio says:

When I move
I take these things,
not much more, from
my shelter from
the hurricane.

(*P* 35)

The house is merely shelter from the weather; what is important to Jernómio's sense of home is his ability to transport the objects that carry memory, meaning and a sense of self to the next shelter he must find or build. Emptied of these precious objects the house ceases to be a home and becomes just a shelter from the elements. The stepped structure of the poem on the page is a visual mimicry of the 'veranda / of wooden lace'

that endows the house; the paratext suggests that just as Jerónimo's house is effectively open to the elements, so too is the poem pushing against the containment of the page, accentuating the patterns in the white space against the written meaning of the text. There is a suggestion that the page is not a reliable container, or rather, that it too has leaky boundaries through which words and meaning can pass.

Poems on the page are containers within containers, much like the boxes of 'Objects & Apparitions'. Consider also the structure of the ashtray in '12 O'Clock News'. One aspect of this prose-poem is the typography that Bishop choose, which enhances a similar sense of connected boxes as in 'Objects & Apparitions'. The words in the margin of '12 O'Clock News' annotate the boxed verses, acting like the explanatory labels of encased museum objects. The poem describes Bishop's desk in the language of a visitor from another world, using the language of war and with a distortion of scale and perspective, so that the ashtray becomes a 'sort of dugout, possibly a shell crater, a "nest" / of soldiers' (*P* 195). The poem tells us that all the soldiers are dead; what we observe is a failure of protection, where the bodies of the soldiers make up the vulnerable and exposed nest unable to offer protect them.

In Bishop's writings, homes and houses are leaky containers, which both protect and expose that which is held within. Objects provide a home; they function as depository for memory and emotion; they are markers of time. The objects in Bishop's poetry resist the urge to become symbolic because they retain their ambivalence; they too can protect yet expose simultaneously. This ambivalence gives the reader space to enter into the homes provided by Bishop's poems, and to chart therein their own personal journeys to and from that which is observed. That objects facilitate memory

is well-made, both by Bishop and by critics alike. The line of thought between a sense of place, the creation of memory, and the unwrapping of personal objects is complex, but clear. However, these connections exist even before they come as carrier for memory; Bishop uses objects as a way of constructing a sense of place.

In a letter from 1940, Bishop writes to Marianne Moore about her house in Key West, saying:

> I have one Key West story that I must tell you. It is more *like* the place than anything I can think of. The other day I went to the china closet to get a little white bowl to put some flowers in and when I was rinsing it I noticed some little back specks. I said to Mrs. Almyda, "I think we must have mice"—but she took the bowl over to the light and studied and after a while she said, "No, them's lizard"… (*OA* 87)

There is memory in this story, albeit recent memory, but the white bowl is not merely a symbol of Key West; rather it acts a container for a multifaceted experience which includes Mrs Almyda, the lizard excrement, and the action of placing the flowers in the bowl. On another level, the china that appears in 'In the Village' packed and unpacked as Bishop's mother moves from home to hospital is partially broken and yet 'painfully desirable' (*Pr* 65), itself a leaky home for all the emotion encapsulated in the story.

Conclusion

"Look at that, would you."

('The Moose', *P* 193)

Endings are a complicated negotiation for Bishop. Writing in 1975, Bishop commented that young 'poets tend to try to tie everything up neatly in 2 or 3 beautiful last lines, and it is quite surprising how the poems are improved if the poet can bear to sacrifice those last, pat, beautiful lines' (*OA* 596). The sacrifice of those 'last, pat, beautiful lines' return us to Bishop's appreciation of the power of juxtaposition, a theme that preoccupied her from early in her career, demonstrated in her letters to Marianne Moore, *OA* 95), and one that she also explicitly discussed in her correspondence with May Swenson. Form dictates that the poem must end—and sometimes imposes the structure, if not the content of that ending— but Bishop's natural tendency was to allow her poems a glance backwards. This preference for a glance backwards—backwards meaning both a return in time as well as an encouragement to return to the interior of the poem—together with her employment of the forces of juxtaposition, creates endings which pivot on the possibility of ambiguity. In part, the encouragement to look backwards supports the sense of an ongoing empathetic participation with both the subject of the poem and with the reader, even after the poem has finished. For example, in the penultimate verse of 'The Moose', the bus driver speaks:

> "Curious creatures,"
> says our quiet driver,
> rolling his *r*'s.
> "Look at that, would you."

Then he shifts gears.

For a moment longer,

('The Moose', *P* 193)

The driver's instructive, '"Look at that"', is a verbal encapsulation of all that has been seen and experienced; it is a clear instruction on where and how to direct the gaze. Observation is not all; we are also reminded to (re)awaken the other senses. The poem, along with the bus, moves on to the last verse in which Bishop encourages a look backwards:

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

(*P* 193)

Notice how the verse split is deliberately placed so that the lingering moment happens in the penultimate verse, whist the active 'craning backward' opens the final verse. The moose departs but leaves the poem saturated with the 'dim / smell of moose, an acrid / smell of gasoline'. Observation is, as always, allied with the participation of a myriad of other senses; kinetic movement propels the bus and the poem onwards, smell is juxtaposed with vision—the moose's smell is 'dim'—, and then with taste—the gasoline is 'acrid' on the nose. The effect is to build up an image in the mind's eye, making 'words visible for a moment' ('Objects & Apparitions, *P* 202); but it is only for a moment. The image fades; the reader is encouraged to 'crane backwards' and delve again into the poem, and in so doing brings both the memory of the first reading and a host of new

sensations. In this action of return and renewal we begin to find the space which Bishop creates between her words to allow the reader 'in', where she finds the ability to allow silences to speak.

This concept of making 'words visible' is one of the defining themes of my thesis. The term is borrowed from the artworks of Cornell, voiced by Paz, and transcribed by Bishop. As Goldensohn remarks of 'Objects & Apparitions', if 'Bishop had invented the original poem herself it couldn't have fitted more neatly into *Geography III*' (1992, 265). In the context of the visibility of words, I focus on what Paz identified as a key tool in Bishop's writing; that of creating poems that are 'living objects: muscles, skin, eyes, ears, color, temperature' (1977, 213). Paz defines these aspects of sensation as components of Bishop's verse, going on to fete her for her ability to create poems that were objects, objects that speak, 'but above all, objects that know how to keep silent' (1975, 213). Sensation transcribed into the written word is one aspect of Bishop's 'making visible'. Another, less tangible and more elusive aspect is, as Colm Tóibín noted, the power in the late poems that 'comes from what is said and what lies beneath' (2015,73). Words are made visible but words also allow for the possibility of silence as well as speech. In paratextual terms this means that the blank white space surrounding and interspersed within the poem 'speaks' to the reader, just as the words also do. There is something more to silence than an absence of speech. It is there in the moment that Bishop appreciated in her writing on Gerald Manley Hopkins, in the moment the acrobat performs an 'extra turn and flourish' in his fall without 'spoiling the form of his flight' (*Pr* 470). Silence is not a negation of sensation or emotion; rather it is a moment when the poem can 'suggest more, and then leave the reader unsure,

unsettled' (Tóibin 2015, 73). Vidyan Ravinthiran provides a compelling reading of the drafts of 'One Art', in which he demonstrates how the poem (from the second draft onwards) moves from 'the poet's spontaneous overflow of feeling [...] into the shining artefact we recognize as the achieved poem'. (2015, 199). Bishop's self-injunction in the poem, '(*Write it!*)', is a moment when the words make visible the losses suffered whilst also leaving the devastating suggestion of the greater loss to come, that of impermanence, where words may indelibly fix a moment in time, but time will work against words to eventually erase that moment from memory.

Sensations, as Paz noted, are key components in the ability to use words to transcribe perception onto the page and in so doing, make visible that which is observed or experienced. Recall Peggy Samuel's analysis of the poems following on from 'Paris 7. A.M.' and 'Quai d'Orléans' in *North & South* and *A Cold Spring* in which 'we find her probing how the relations between inner and outer will be structured in poems' (2014,171). Samuels defines Bishop's craft broadly into three: the 'visual (what can be seen) and the linguistic (what the mind thinks and feels) and crafting a means of arranging their "touch" through the materiality of verse' (2014, 171). These three aspects together with Paz's—or Swenson's—description of Bishop's poems as objects prompt me to return to my central question: can it be said that Bishop turns her poems into objects? My response, (undoubtedly influenced by Bishop) is an ambiguous 'yes'. Certainly, there is much in the application of her craft that marks Bishop out as a 'maker' and I will return to the materiality of Bishop's work momentarily. However, as I said in my introduction, I cannot escape the thought that for Bishop, a poem is a poem and an object is an object; the two may share characteristics but they are distinctly

different. To force a theoretical reading onto the poetry without admitting ambivalence is, I think, wrong, and does both Bishop and the reader a disservice.

Where—or what—are the defining parts of that ambiguity or ambivalence? The poem remains a poem because it is built of words, and it is in the silence between the words that ambiguities flourish. To return to 'The Moose', note how the bus driver's voice is both clear and yet understated: he is 'our quiet driver' (*P* 193). A moment of lyric silence comes after he speaks but not in silence; it is masked by the noise of shifting gear change. It is as he 'shifts gears' (*P* 193) that the reader is propelled backwards into the interior of the poem or into the realm of memory, and given the instruction that the moose can still be seen if we crane backwards. Ambiguity is thus partly an outcome of memory; and memory belongs not just to the poet, but also to the reader, whose various experiences will layer the poem with their own palimpsest of emotions.

Another enabler of ambiguity is reticence, a key quality of Bishop's poetry. Reticence is an aspect applied by Bishop both to her own biography and to the poem itself; it also comes hand-in-hand with Bishop's ability to edit out, to cut back. Reticence is not just to hold back but also to edit out or remove what is saying too much; both these aspects are obvious in a comparison of the drafts of poems with their finished polished selves. The reader participates in this editing out as well, partly through Bishop's regular interruption, reversal and circling around notions of linear time and memory in her poems. Linear time is often disrupted so that 'our visions coincided—"visions" is / too serious a word,—our looks, two looks:' ('Poem', *P* 197). In this coincidence of two looks another alternative is created, the poem itself. However,

there is a sense in which Bishop's published poems evolve and are more expert as time progresses. As Costello says, her ability to hold back and yet portray a 'more intimate, immediate voice for lyric' (2003, 355) is due not so much to 'personal disclosure' but rather to a 'generic achievement'. In her early correspondence with Robert Lowell, Bishop thanks him for his review of her work (*WIA* 5, 6), especially because it was the 'first review I've had that attempted to find any general drift or consistency in the individual poems, and I was beginning to feel there probably wasn't any at all.' In his review—based on *North & South*—Lowell singles out her qualities of observation, her morality, her command of speech ('Thomas, Bishop and Williams', 1947, 186). However, as he says, 'Bishop is usually present in her poems; they happen to her, she speaks, and often centres them on herself' (1947, 188). One marker of Bishop's progress as a poet is this ability to create a distance from herself within the speaking voice of the poem. It is this ability that marks one of the differences between 'Quai d'Orléans' and 'Poem'. Both detail the rendered observation of an object and a moment in time; both demonstrate memory interrupting time and both branch out from a single voice to a multiplicity of voices. Bishop's translation work helps to reveal her shifting attitudes towards her own lyric voice. By the end of her career, in her translation work with Paz, we see Bishop holding back the personal 'I'. Samuels' analysis of 'The End of March' in *Deep Skin* gives an example of one such moment. She quotes the lines

> […] Then we came on
> lengths and lengths, endless, of wet white string,
> looping up to the tide-line, down to the water,
> over and over. […]
>
> (*P* 199)

Samuels notes that Bishop 'arranges three kinds of "moving" lines' (2010, 210), the tide-line, the waves, the string. In the movement inherent within and between these lines and those that follow, Samuels finds 'the human figure embedded in the material, emerging, falling back' (2010, 211), moving on to 'landscapes or "we's" from which lines, figures, or "I's" emerge and fall back.' Notice here that the 'I' emerges and falls back; in fact Samuels finds in these lines the 'suggestion of a dead body … resonant with Bishop's mourning over Lota' (2010, 210). My reading is slightly different; I agree that there is the materiality of the human body suggested in the movement of the various lines, but I do not read the figure of Lota into the rising and falling of every wave, (whilst respecting those who do). Bishop's reticence is to not to obviate the personal but rather to give room for differencing versions of the personal.

Translation offered Bishop an opportunity to voice aspects of a poetic self that were inaccessible or difficult for her; translation fulfilled the dual role of speaking with another voice and enabling her to continue to write in her own. This is not to say that all of Bishop's translations were a success—nor did she so judge them—many are the tools and the draft outcomes of a working poet. Like letter writing, translation was a form of authorship that ran continuously throughout her life, sometimes accentuated, sometime receding. Translation was a tool that helped Bishop to enable a different type of return, the return to an emotional hinterland that was difficult for her to negotiate. Her time in Brazil enabled the creation of many of the later poems that are centred around Bishop's childhood experiences in Nova Scotia.

Another form of return can be seen in Bishop's dedications. Many of Bishop's early dedications in *North & South* were retrospective, a moment when Bishop

returned to her own work, some of which she chose to ally or anoint with the names of the people who were important to her. Later dedications, such as that to Lota de Macedo Soares prefacing *Questions of Travel*, remain cloaked by ambiguity, in this case the ambiguity of Portuguese to hide the loving words that foreshadow the poems of *Questions of Travel*, themselves ushered in by the home that Bishop found in Brazil. The epigraph to *Geography III* follows on from the clear dedication to Alice Methfessel and then deliberately disorientates the reader through the removal of the anchoring geographic co-ordinates. Bishop's manipulation of dedications, end notes and paratextual information are a part of her negotiation of how to wear a private face in public (Treseler 2019a, 263) as they are also indicative of how Bishop worked to finish her published poems so that they appeared framed, polished, on the page.

'One Art', Bishop's poem of contained, immeasurable loss, memorably ends with the parenthetical injunction '(*Write* it!)' (*P* 198). Writing is the force that enables the poetry. I want to return to 'Objects & Apparitions', the poems whose last lines shadow this thesis:

> Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes
> my words became visible for a moment.
>
> (*P* 202)

Words are visible because they are written; the materiality and tactility of Bishop's poetry is important. Like the boxes that contain Cornell's juxtaposing collection of found objects, the frame of the white page around Bishop's poems both contain the words within as they also demarcate the space without. ‘Objects & Apparitions’ is not only a translation from the Spanish into the English, but also an ekphrastic play between the world of visual arts and poetry. Translation emerges as a multi-sensory exploration

of shadow boxing within ‘Objects & Apparitions’. The subtle influence of Mallarmé and the depth given to the written word by an understanding of phonetic quality and ambiguity can be read in the opening where Bishop renders ‘Hexaedros de madera y de vidrio’ (Paz 1991, 404) into ‘Hexahedrons of wood and glass’ (*P* 201). This is sound translation at its finest. As Lee Fontanella notes, ‘the double aspirant (H-H) in “hexahedrons” matches the Spanish “hexaedors,” where there is no aspirated H, but there is a repeated E sound; [and] the accentuation conforms’ (Fontanella, 1999, 274). The action of speaking aloud the complex word ‘hexahedrons’ is part of its mystery—recall the delight and mystery in the 'dactyl trisyllables' (*Pr* 54) of Gwendolyn Appletree—; Fontanella is right when she says ‘we want to know what is inside this glorious word that stands for the boxes in which Joseph Cornell has encased his memorabilia.’

Just as Cornell uses shadow boxes to delineate the limits around and between the various objects he displayed, so Bishop uses the form and structure of the poem to create a framework within which the reading takes place. In this context, the change in the title from ‘Objectos Y Apariciones’ to ‘Objects & Apparitions’ is subtly revealing. Her use of the visual ampersand rather than a written ‘and’ is positioned to awaken the reader’s awareness of the visual within the poem. It acts a flag to the ekphrastic nature of the poem; it is a symbol that must be translated by the reader’s eye into verbal meaning, setting the stage for the play between the visual nature of Cornell’s work and Bishop’s written poem. This sense of transferring terms of reference between the original and the translation is alluded to by Robert Lowell. In a letter to Bishop he comments that that ‘the whole business of translating is fascinating, like living in

some[one] else’s house and being carried by their framework’ (*WIA* 339). For Bishop, translation was not only a useful activity that kept the activity of writing accessible. It also presented a way in which she could experiment not only with different voices, but also with different genre and forms.

Holding in mind Lowell's encapsulation as being like being in someone else's house and being carried by their framework, I note that 'Objects & Apparitions' can be read both as an exegesis of his work as it can also be read as 'an *ars poetica*' of Bishop's (Costello, 2008, 105). As Costello details, 'many of the images were hers before she found them in Cornell' (2008, 105). The last verse splits the terms of reference of observation. In the following lines, ‘Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes / my words became visible for a moment’, the poem ceases to be an explanation of Cornell’s work. Instead Cornell’s work is an exegesis of Bishop and Paz’s poetic impulse. At a macro level, Bishop's sense of every poem needing several translations to capture the various registers of meaning inherent in the original replays itself in this understanding that angles of perception are multiple, and thus that the observation of an object—Cornell's artwork— alters with perspective, and can become other—Bishop's poem. At a more micro level, when Bishop writes out the personal pronoun in Paz's ‘Memoria teje y destejo los ecos’ (Fontanella, 1999, 274), rendering it 'Memory weaves, unweaves the echoes', she resists the figure of the poet creator, relying on a synaesthetic link between the objects of the previous verse, the 'marbles, buttons, thimbles, dice, / pins, stamps and glass beads' to suggest a figure of the artist collector/reader who participates in these works either in their making or in their appreciation. Throughout 'Objects & Apparitions' the observed subject resists definition:

Memory weaves, unweaves the echoes:
in the four corners of the box
shadowless ladies play at hide-and-seek.
(*P* 201)

The ladies are 'shadowless' because of the relentless angle of full-frontal observation which robs them of their shadows. The dual frame of the box and the verse contains and simultaneously thrusts forward the ladies into the eye of the observer.

Scale is another theme of 'Objects & Apparitions', a theme refracted throughout *Geography III*. Bishop's paratextual insertion of the words from Monteith's primer as an epigraph to the book, provides a definition of terms whose accuracy is challenged by their proportion. The spatial scale of the geographical terms contradicts the verbal simplicity of the answers; the text is simultaneously credible and incredible. Similarly, the hexahedrons of 'Objects & Apparitions' play with our perception of dimension and scale. Like the map in *Geography III* that elides from being 'A picture of the whole, or part, of the Earth's surface' into the voice of the uncertain chronicler of 'In what direction is the Volcano? The Cape? The Bay?[...]' (*P* 178) the hexahedrons are simultaneously scarcely bigger than a shoebox and yet have 'room in them for night and all its lights.' Bishop is masterly in her manipulation of scale, placing the miniature 'Marbles, buttons, thimbles, dice,' at the beginning of one end of the scale and then moving them so that these 'Minimal, incoherent fragments:/ the opposite of History, creator of ruins,' are fundamental in the movement from 'ruins' to 'creations.' This manipulation of scale is part of Bishop's technique in creating a space within poetry so that the meaning lies not just in the words, but also in the gaps and pauses between the words. We see this in her early work, for example in 'The Monument'. For the

manipulation or distortion of scale (spatial or temporal) to be comprehensible to the reader, it must be contained within a frame. Hence the effectiveness of using the Cornell shadow boxes as a metaphor for what Bishop was trying to achieve in her own poetry, frames which relate content to context (Maclean 1991, 273).

Considering the over-arching framework of Bishop's published poems, in particular the architecture of her books as represented in *Poems*, I return to Stephanie Burt's assertion that 'each poem has been a perfect, unique construction, not just a thing with a form, but a thing with its own, *unrepeatable*, potentially permanent achieved form' (2019, 334). I understand this to mean that repetition of theme and form occurs within Bishop's works, but each repetition is rendered so that it becomes a component of an individual, 'unique' construction. Burt identifies Bishop’s pursuit of and acknowledgement of the 'illusion of closure', as is made so clear by a reading of 'The Moose'. As readers, we learn to accept Bishop's negotiation of the ambiguity of endings, which provide far richer substance than the 'pat' words that may at first seemed preferable. Bishop's offering of the '—the little that we get for free, / the little of our earthly trust' ('Poem', *P* 197), is not little at all (this should not come as a surprise given her manipulation of scale). Her offering is a selection of finely crafted, polished poems, where the gaps and the spaces form a part of the work. These gaps and spaces enable the words on the page to suggest much more than what is made visible by the ink of her typewriter. Her poems invite memory, re-reading, and a sense of creative authorship shared with the reader; they are amulets that carry aspects of the world within.

Appendix I - Tracing Bishop's Dedications

Elizabeth Bishop's Dedications—taken from ***Poems***, 2011 (which follows ***The Complete Poems*** 1969)

North & South **(1946)**

Quai d'Orléans *for Margaret Miller*

First published *Partisan Review*, 1938 without dedication. Re-published with dedication in 1969 *The Complete Poems*

Little Exercise *for Thomas Edward Wanning*

First published February 2, 1946 in *The New Yorker* without dedication. Re-published with dedication in 1969 *The Complete Poems.*

Anaphora *in memory of Marjorie Carr Stevens*

First published *Partisan Review*, fall 1945, without dedication. Re-published with dedication in 1969 *The Complete Poems.*

A Cold Spring **(1955)** TO DR. ANNY BAUMANN

A Cold Spring *for Jane Dewey, Maryland /* Nothing is so beautiful as spring. —Hopkins.

First published May 31, 1952, in *The New Yorker*. Dedication reads 'For a Friend in Maryland. / Nothing is so beautiful as spring./- *Gerald Manley Hopkins*.'

The Bight *[On my birthday]*

First published February 19th 1949 in *The New Yorker*, with the note reading On My Birthday

Letter to N.Y. *for Louise Crane*

First published *Harper's Bazaar*, September 15, 1940. Republished with dedication in 1969 *The Complete Poems*

Questions of Travel **(1965)** FOR LOTA DE MACEDO SOARES

'... O dar-vos quanto tenho e quanto posso,

Que quanto mais vos pago, mais vos devo.'

-Camões

The Armadillo *for Robert Lowell*

First published June 22, 1957 in *The New Yorker,* without the dedication, but with added place name '—Brazil' in title.. Republished with dedication in *Questions of Travel* 1965, place name removed.

Manners *for a Child of 1918*

First published in *The New Yorker*, November 26 1955. Dedication reads '(Poem for a Child of 1918)'

Travelling in the Family *to Rodrigo M. F. de Andrade*

New and Uncollected Work (1969) (added to *The Complete Poems* 1969)

Trouvée *for Mr. Wheaton Galentine & Mr. Harold Leeds*

First published in *The New Yorker*, August 10, 1968, with no dedication.

Under the Window: Ouro Prêto *for Lilli Correia de Araújo*

First published in *The New Yorker*, December 24, 1966.

GEOGRAPHY III (1976) FOR ALICE METHFESSEL

The Moose *for Grace Bulmer Bowers*

First published in *The New Yorker*, July 15, 1972 issue. No dedication.

The End of March *for John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read: Duxbury*

First published in *The New Yorker*, March 24, 1975 issue. Includes the dedication and place name.

Objects & Apparitions *for Joseph Cornell*

First published in *The New Yorker*, June 24, 1974 issue, with dedication and translators note.

NEW AND UNCOLLECTED POEMS (1978-1979)

North Haven *in memoriam: Robert Lowell*

Published in *The New Yorker*, December 11, 1978, with the dedication.

Appendix II - Tracing Bishop's Translations

***Bold** indicates publication*

1933, 1934 at Vassar – Aristophanes, *The Birds.* 'Unfinished, unperformed, and unpublished' (Machova 2017, 17).

1934- attends a class reading and translating French poetry (Fountain and Brazeau 62)

1934 onwards – works on French poets, including Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Corbière, Reverdy, Apollinaire, Jacob.

1937 – writes a letter to Rolfe Humphries, asking for translation work in Spanish

1949 – works on Max Jacob whilst at Yaddo (Millier, 1993, 225)

May 1950 – *Poetry* publishes translations of **Max Jacob**; 'Rainbow', 'Patience of an Angel',' Banks',' Hell is Graduated'. Details of other Max Jacob poems unpublished; see Machova 2017, 23; VC 56.13 & VC 64.11

1952 – Begins work on *The Diary of Helena Morley*. Refused by *The New Yorker* Feb 17th 1956 after initial interest.

1957 – ***The Diary of Helena Morley*** published by Farrar, Straus and Cudahy.

1955, 1956 – Working on *Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil* (*Modern Architecture in Brazil*) by Henrique Mindlin.

1956 – ***Modern Architecture in Brazil*** published by Reinhold Publishing Corporation (Machova 2017, note 1 43, 44)

1957 – *Harper's Bazaar* publishes an excerpt of ***The Diary of Helena Morley*** (referenced in *Prose*)

1962–1963 writes to Robert Lowell about working on Clarice Lispector.

October 30 1962 write to Katherine Wright asking if *The New Yorker* publishes stories, (ref. Lispector) 'Spender wants some for Encounter' (NYr 250)

March 19, 1963 *The New Yorker* rejects the Lispector stories.

1963 – *Poetry* publishes translation **João Cabral de Melo Neto** 'From The Death and Life of a Severino'

1964 summer – *The Keynon Review* publishes the translations of the **Lispector** stories 'The Smallest Woman in the World', 'Marmosets', 'A Hen'.

Spring 1965_– *Shenandoah* publishes the translations of **Drummond de Andrade**, 'Seven Sided Poem', and 'Don't Kill Yourself'.

March 1965 –_**Four Sambas,** "Rio de Janeiro", "Kick him out of office!", "Marshál, Illustrious Marshál", "Come, my mulatta" published in *New York Times* as part of "On the Railroad Named Delight'.

June 1965 –_*Poetry* publishes translation of **Drummond de Andrade** 'Travelling in the Family'.

Jan 16, 1969_– *The New York Review of Books* publishes translation of **Drummond de Andrade's** 'The Table'.

1971_– *The New Yorker* publishes translation of **Joaquim Cardozo**, 'Cemetery of Childhood'.

1971 – *The New Yorker* publishes translation of **Vinicuis de Moraes**, 'Sonnet of Intimacy'.

1972 – *Harvard Advocate* (summer) publishes translations of **Octavio Paz's '**The Key of Water', 'Along Galeana Street,'' The Grove', 'January First'.

1974 – *The New Yorker* publishes translation of **Octavio Paz's** 'Objects & Apparitions'.

1975 – *Ploughshares* publishes her translation of **Octavio Paz's** 'January First'.

April 29, 1977 – Chico Buarque de Holland, 'A Banda'; in typescript of translations by Bishop for the presentation on Brazilian poetry and popular music made by her and Ricardo Sternberg at Bristol Community College, Mass.

Translations published in collections before Bishop's death

North & South **(Houghton Mifflin 1946)** No translations.

Poems: North & South – A Cold Spring (Houghton Mifflin 1955) No translations.

Poems (Chatto & Windus 1956) No translations.

Questions of Travel (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965). No translations.

Selected Poems (Chatto & Windus, 1967) No translations.

The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968). No translations.

The Complete Poems (Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1969, Chatto & Windus, 1970)

Divides ***Questions of Travel*** into 3; *I Brazil, II Elsewhere,* ***III Translations from the Portuguese:*** Carlos Drummond de Andrade, 'Seven-Sided Poem'; 'Don't Kill Yourself'; 'Travelling in the Family'; 'The Table'; Joao Cabral de Melo Neto: 'From The Death and Life of a Severino'.

An Anthology of Brazilian Poetry, edited, with Introduction by Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil **(Wesleyan University Press, 1972)**

Manuel Bandeira: 'My last poem', 'Brazilian Tragedy'; Joaquim Cardozo 'Cemetery of Childhood'; 'Elegy for Maria Alves'; Carlos Drummond de Andrade; 'Travelling in the Family'; 'Seven – Sided Poem', 'Don't Kill Yourself', 'The Table', 'Infancy', 'In the middle of the road', 'Family Portrait' ; Vinícius de Moraes, 'Sonnet of Intimacy'; João Cabral de Melo Neto; 'The Death and Life of a Severino'.

Geography III (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976; Chatto & Windus, 1977): Octavio Paz, Objects & Apparitions

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