How to write *that* poem:
Notes on Scansion and Timing in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry

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As opposed to 'prosody' as the art of metrical arrangement incorporated into a theory of verse, notating the scansion of a poem, line, or lines is often delegated more narrowly a student's task.[1] Scansions are assigned so as to complete a certain overall gesture of awareness at the receiving end of the transaction of poetry. The observance of all a poem's levels—cognitive and aesthetic, semantic and sensory, and the creative background of what Paul Fussell (after T. S. Eliot) calls 'conventions and the individual talent'[2]—is clearly a good in itself, and reinforces the further good of realizing how these 'levels' cannot be disimpacted one from the next.[3] (Nor does it signpost the commitment to a throwback 'New Critical'

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[1] *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) in its entry on scansion makes a series of increasingly broad comparisons about scanning as a 'notation' system: 'The act of discovery or interpretation of the meter of a poem as realized in one of its lines; also the graphic transcription thereof, usually by symbols, numbers, or letters either above the line or alone. Scansion is a notation system for meter in metrical poetry just as sheet music notates music or writing notates speech' (p. 1117).
[2] See Paul Fussell, Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 188-198.
[3] Citing Henri Meschonnic's work in *Critique du rythme* (1982), Isobel Armstrong in fact opposes using this language of 'levels' taken from 'structural analysis', in favour of the 'interplay' of meter, meaning, diction, and typography; see Armstrong, 'Meter and Meaning', in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 26-52: 27.

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formalism to maintain that embedded relationship.)[4] However, in the classroom scansion's deployment often obliquely signals more in the way of pedagogical investments, things which I haven't quite had it in me just flatly to say, with my back to the class and a piece of chalk in hand.

These investments might be enumerated roughly: that there *are* norms just insofar as there are marvels and deviations; hence that if by 'free verse' is meant a style of versification without meter, there is ultimately no 'free' verse; that the intellectual emphases and ranges of passion attainable in verse often require counterpointing systems the poet gains only through an impersonal grappling with technique in the 'metrical set'—in other words, not only rhythm as opposed to meter, but polyrhythmia;[5] and that these tensions go well beyond the expressive agencies of recognizable, biographically coherent persons with a single aesthetic purpose in mind;[6] that poetic history and nomenclature matter so much that almost none of the key terms (at least in English language poetics) are unproblematically used, or even unambiguously appropriate when called on to describe the first thing that happens upon reading the first line of a poem (what's a stress? an 'iamb'? what in the whole wide world of *res cogitans* and *res extensa* does meter actually measure?).[7] Finally and yet perhaps first of all, I want to say that

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[4] Thus, in an essay published in a prior issue of this journal, Simon Jarvis has explained his commitment to 'a project I have been developing for a little while now in which I understand the repertoires of prosodic gestures deployed by poets not through the idea of form but rather as a distinctive mode of knowing'; 'Why Rhyme Pleases'; *Thinking Verse* 1 (2011): pp. 17-43.

[5] This point is a rehearsal of the distinction Brennan O'Donnell draws between Wordsworth and Coleridge in *The Passion of Meter: A Study of Wordsworth's Metrical Art* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995).

[6] For more in current thought regarding intentionalism, see Nonsite.org, issue #6 (Summer 2012) http://nonsite.org/issue-6-intention-and-interpretation. Pitted against the view of Walter Benn Michaels that language as such *just is* intention—and is otherwise better thought of as an instance of 'drawing' or 'marks' (say, if we glorify the manuscript page of an Emily Dickinson 'poem' in situ at the Amherst archive)—Simon Jarvis's way of putting this is that a poet may care about more than (s)he intends. The range of cognitive interests is both wider and richer than the range of semantic input; whereas Benn Michaels would reduce poems to 'intention dumps'. Jarvis, 'What Does Art Know?', in *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter*, ed. Peter de Bolla and Stefan H. Uhlig (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009): pp. 57-70. Isobel Armstrong's likewise useful distinction contrasts reference with import, signification as opposed to significance; see 'Meter and Meaning', 46.

[7] 'I don't believe in iambs', polemically asserts Meredith Martin to begin her study of nineteenth-century English 'prosody wars'; *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860-*

descriptive poetics as a field is relevant. It is the only major alternative to interpretive 'hermeneutics' as a literary-analytical methodology.[8] Moreover, it might even bear stating for some audiences that a descriptive or 'philosophical' poetics *exists*, as an alternative to the fast track of symbolization toward meaning, and the Easter egg hunt for apposite 'themes' (a point in need of quite a lot of earnest demonstration for us all, and certainly for first-year university students).

This essay does not so much develop its own theory of scansion (as distinct from, say, the idea of scansion as the notation of the meter of a poetic line, over against both a notional meter holding across its lines, and the marking of an actual performance of intonational rhythm), as it reflects on the difference between ways of thinking vitally versus passively about scansion. If preconceptions are left intact, scanning can suggest little more than a routine that stubbornly lingers around the at-once musty and technical, and vaguely numinous, 'musical' aspect of poetry. From my own undergraduate time I remember two very different reading experiences that may speak to this divergence between scansion and what is typically meant (and felt?) by referring to poetry—or poetry at its best—as 'music'. On one part of the campus, I got far enough into the Classics Department curriculum to struggle reading through Homeric hexameters, where the repeated experience of reciting the Greek aloud before parsing out a translation was that of frustration. Wholly apart from my severe limits as a translator, just as a sonic matter, it never got to be like reading *Four Quartets* or *The Prelude*. My reading false started. My performance of this entirely metrical scansion violated the pre-inscribed lanes of Homer's dactylic hexameters. Rather than the sought-after rhythmic effect of tripping through lines with a casual athleticism, rapid or slow, as if stumbling just right, my tongue just tripped. Though Robert Frost's 'straight crookedness of a good walking stick' comes to mind, I may already be describing

1930 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 1. 'DO YOU BELIEVE IN IAMBS?', reads the bottom of the publicity poster advertising Martin's lecture on 'Historical Prosody' for the *Poetics | History | Theory* colloquium series at UC-Irvine. http://sites.uci.edu/poeticshistorytheory/2013/02/ (accessed 29 May 2013).

[8] Jonathan Culler distinguishes poetics and hermeneutics in this way in his useful volume, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 69-81. Also see his two recent *PMLA* roundtable essays, 'Why Lyric?'; *PMLA* 123.1 (Jan 2008): pp. 201-206, and "Introduction: Critical Paradigms"; *PMLA* 125.4 (Oct 2010): pp. 905-915.

Elizabeth Bishop with this idealisation of the casually disciplined rightness of good reading. Bishop observes of the unaccented 'outrider' syllables, 'dapple-dawn-', in the second line of the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem, 'Windhover': 'Here the timing and tuning of sense and syllable 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'.[9] Tellingly, the undergraduate essay that Bishop wrote about Hopkins—of central focus to my argument ahead—on two occasions strikes out the word 'deviation' and writes 'duration', as if pressing itself to adhere to a quantitative language of measure. Thus Bishop defines her essay's main idea: 'The most general meaning of *timing* as applied to any particular physical activity is co-ordination: the correct manipulation of the time, the little ~~deviation~~ duration each phase of the action must take in order that the whole may be perfect'; 'Just so in poetry: the syllables, the words, in their actual ~~character~~ duration and their ~~deviation~~ duration according to sense-value, set up, among themselves a rhythm, which continues to flow over them'.[10]

Though a classmate originally from Russia had a way of making *The Iliad* sound disorienting to me and plumb true all at once, I knew I was doing the dactylic hexameter 'wrong' by going for stress. But I had no conception really of how to recite the 'quantitative' meter any better.[11] Since my friends and I over in English deeply enjoyed reading poetry aloud in general, I must confess to feeling not totally at fault in my scanning. We heard something we liked, but it wasn't the ancient meter ostensibly being studied. Of course we were experiencing the difference between 'accentual' and 'quantitative' verse, a versification system based on (rising

[9] Elizabeth Bishop, *Poetry, Prose, and Letters*, ed. Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz (New York: Library of America, 2008), p. 663; this volume is henceforth cited as PPL.
[10] Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 71.10); compare PPL 660.
[11] Hegel surveys the topic of comparative prosody in his *Aesthetics*: 'On this matter I will only reiterate what I have said already about the difference between classical and modern languages. rhythmical versification rests on the *natural* length and shortness of syllables, and in this it has from the start a fixed measure which cannot be determined or altered or weakened by any *spiritual* emphasis. Modern languages, on the other hand, lack a natural measure like this because in them the verbal accent, given by the meaning, may itself make a syllable long in contrast to others which are without this significance'; *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, two vols., trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), vol. II, p.1032.

and falling, more or less marked) stresses, and one based on what is called 'length' (also, 'number') in discussions of classical poetics. Even after I learned how to invoke this technical difference as a stand-in for clarification, the experience triggered a larger question that still is active for me. Should 'reading' in this most immediate of its many senses be essentially like riding a bike, or ought it to be truly, technically *hard* to learn for the first months and years of effortful exposure—more like learning the grammar of a new musical instrument, or learning a new language altogether, along with the sheer time it takes to develop the muscle memory of physical aptitude?

The second encounter with poetry's 'music' that I remember has surely impacted many students of poetry in the late-twentieth century, especially in America. I mean Harold Bloom's talent for celebrating his strong poets by stressing their 'cognitive music'. By comparison to the experience of Greek verse that I recount above, this influence is likely to prove so immediately generative to the ephebe of literary history, so little alien in its gusto for certain rhythms of observation and judgment of what constitutes merit in poetry, that its memory is less rich in the long run than incomprehension can prove to be. The risk of responding too warmly to Bloom's language of praise is that we accelerate, hence make inauthentic, the (perhaps inevitable) process of an individual reader falling under the spell-like force of how poems think through their figurations. We then ask to become stupefied, as a way not to reach but to prevent anything like full immersion in the cognitive-aesthetic experience that might otherwise be happening. Bloom's method deliberately confuses what his longtime colleague John Hollander calls poetic 'scheme' (play with formal pattern) and 'trope' (rhetorical modes of re-signification: the moves out of which Bloom forges his 'revisionary ratios').[12] In going along with this charismatic confusion, we would be unself-critically completing with each new poem the long arc modern poetry itself has taken from debating metrical-musical praxis, to settling on (whether to practice

[12] Wallace Stevens is the master poet of this creative slide, or distillation, moving from formal poetic, syntactical, and even grammatical schemes into highly deliberate yet improvised acts of creative troping. See Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), and Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

or disavow it) an ideal level of aesthetic cognition that draws from the language of music but has left all specifics, all contestation, behind. The problem with the Bloomian *agon* is, in effect, that it dramatizes on the order of a homogeneous critical and creative investment just the kind of dissension that it loses in literary history.

Bloom is up front about his belief that the honorific term, 'cognitive music', ought to apply just to the thinking verse of poets he himself judges the most splendid. He also maintains, qua strong poets and poetry by their very nature, that this art is ideology-free. Conceivable as a reserve to live from, his approach is hard to take anywhere. Which is not to say that cognition and aesthetics *don't* bear on each other intensively. Surely they do, especially if we place the analysis on a footing, unlike Bloom's plane of all-translating insight, which preserves the resistant material dimension of an everyday phenomenology. Addressed under the aegis of a 'verse melodics' that works toward the larger performance of a corresponding 'philosophical prosody', Simon Jarvis's scholarship represents one leading current example of such a project. If Jarvis's key terms of analytical method and aesthetic investment are significantly like Bloom's 'cognitive music' in their overall attitude about why reading verse can matter, it is the intensiveness of Jarvis's demonstrations (which engage both philosophical dialectics and poetic detail) that produces a very different sense of the honour, use, and energy still attainable within the genre of scholarly poetic commentary. Unlike Bloom in another important respect, Jarvis (via Adorno) maintains that 'art thinks historically, and that what is knows, when it thinks well, is natural-historical experience'. Jarvis further maintains: 'If technique is the way art thinks, and if self-absorption is, curiously, the way art notices others, then might this "virtuoso incantation" be, not simply a screen or a cocoon or an anaesthetic, but a medium—a medium for thinking, and for thinking about historical experience, just when in the very act of apparently retreating from it?'[13]

Through the variously interconnected example of Elizabeth Bishop—a poet who grew up in the verse cultures of the late nineteenth century, but then trained

[13] Jarvis, 'Why Rhyme Pleases', pp. 24, 25.

her own efforts on a theory and practice of philosophical poetics—the current essay seeks to investigate how this enterprise of working toward a 'philosophical prosody' might pair as an approach with 'historical poetics'. The latter is an influential recent strain of lyric theory developed largely by American critics, including Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, who write from a sense of the conflictive yet joined legacies of historicism and form (as well as reflecting feminist and gender/ culture studies approaches). This special issue of *Thinking Verse* takes up the topic of scansion at a scholarly moment of some demonstrable turning in collective thought on this subject. Recent theory of the lyric, especially a cluster of essays by Prins grouped under the title of 'voice inverse', has taught us at once how to deconstruct the broad claims to a 'musical' register of poetic voice, as well as how to take that common metaphor and idealisation of music much more seriously as a spectrum of historical practices.[14] For Prins, to the extent that it makes a concrete claim about technique at all, the 'music' of versification is an idea developed most richly in non-metaphorical terms by Victorian poetry and poetics, of whose repertoire we have yet to take the full inventory. In the work of Prins's student Meredith Martin, that most regulative of all metrical identities—the iamb of English verse—is reopened to an archive of empirical scrutiny, as a construction of what Victorian prosody had come to mean by the time Modernists like Ezra Pound used its diminished remains as fuel for the 'Make it New' relaunch. Treated elegiacally when it is not polemically dismissed out of hand, the 'musical' aspect of traditional, pre-Modernist poetry has been constructed already from a twentieth-century vantage that assumes all metrical practices had conformed to the metronome, when in point of fact, according to an actually experienced poetics to be judged by intonation and performance, *none* may ultimately have done so.

Even as it would relegate metered verse to the past, 'free verse' naturalises and sublimates just a few of the contingent historical 'winners' from a very long and multifarious trial of the metrical arts. The triumph of iambic pentameter as

[14] An excellent place to begin examination of the 'voice inverse' project is Yopie Prins, 'Victorian Meters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 89-113.

something close to a monoculture of verse form, such that it could be plausibly taken for a cipher of meter, helped ground this polemic. In her 2012 book *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, Martin has shown how George Saintsbury's nationalist accentual-syllabic vision, geared around the belief that there is a unique relationship between 'the English ear' and blank verse, attempts to sideline, or even erase, a mini-universe of competing nineteenth-century prosodic theories not as entirely dependent on the concept of 'feet'. These alternate accounts vary from Coventry Patmore's musical concept of meter based on the 'isochronous bar',[15] which is temporal rather than accentual in its basis of measurement; to scholars who, alternately, sought to re-ground the basic repertoire of English verse in Anglo-Saxon accentual practice; and finally the devotion of a scholar-poet like Robert Bridges to educate students on the difference between English and classical metrical arrangement—having seen for a generation or two the comically disastrous national consequences of young poets' failures.[16] One reason why Bishop makes for a compelling case study regarding the vying conceptual histories of scansion and meter, I discovered, is that at Vassar she was taught the subject of Literary Critical Theory, from the very start, through a comparison of Saintsbury with Sidney Lanier, the metrist whom Prins singles out as offering a fundamental challenge to the idea of prosody as a 'phenomenology of voice'.[17]

Placed in a middle distance, not in a terminal location, by this broader view, the Modernist polemic of the paratactic 'image' obscures rather than disrupts a more

[15] Jason David Hall, 'Introduction: A Great Multiplication of Meters', in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 1-25: 7.

[16] Cf. Robert Bridges, *Milton's Prosody, with a chapter on Accentual Verse & Notes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921). Bridges in his note to the preface of that volume gives a sense of the surprisingly public stakes of nineteenth-century prosodic debate: 'This success [of his school text edition of *Paradise Lost*] induced the Delegates of the Press, to issue my notes as a separate treatise, which converted some young poets, who 'nimbly began dancing'; and they introduced Miltonic inversions so freely into their blank verse that champions of the prevailing orthodoxy raised an indignant protest in the newspapers, wherein the discussion grew so incredibly hot that a London evening journal advertised 'prosody' as an attractive item in its daily posters. From that day the book has been on a false footing, and to me a perennial discomfort'[.] See *Milton's Prosody*, p. 113.

[17] Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 69B.11). See Yopie Prins, 'Historical Poetics, Dysprosody, and *The Science of English Verse*'; PMLA 123.1 (January 2008): pp. 229-234: 233.

variable, continuous metrical line one might want to hold in a kind of long focus. 'Looking back at this topography from a distance in time', writes Jason David Hall, we should not be surprised to find that fluctuations in landscape once recognizable to so many may appear to us smoothed nearly into invisibility'.[18] I reserve space for the discussion of Modernism in the background of this opening section of the present essay because, as its foreground, my argument skips over the high Modernist moment on either side. The section to follow—the heart of the essay—examines Elizabeth Bishop as she develops her own repertoire of verse techniques through an apprentice essay about scansion in Gerard Manley Hopkins, the most famous of late nineteenth-century virtuosic poets and exponents of prosodic theory. Bishop, I argue, was schooled not only as a young poet, but as a young person altogether, in the climate of nineteenth-century verse cultures that scholars of historical poetics have sought lately to promote as an important archive. However, because I am not finally content or in full agreement with the perspective that historical poetics may offer to the analysis of lyric poems, despite the rich yield that this approach offers to Bishop's own education, life, and work, my approach throughout is to work toward something like an imagined future condition of exchange between philosophical prosody and historical poetics: what would historical prosody have to be, and what might the study of verse melodics need to attend to, for a meaningful dialogue between them to become possible? A third section then presents Bishop's remarkable and aligned insights about the interplay of multiple aspects of time in the modern novel (the scansion of a prose 'polyrhythmia', if you like). While in its final movement the essay jumps forward—from the very beginning to almost the end of Bishop's writing life—to consider the possible meaning of her reference to Hopkins in a very different context involving the ethics of poetry, a meditation elicited with dismay when Bishop saw the manuscript of Robert Lowell's autobiographical volume of poems, *The Dolphin*, in 1972.

[18] Hall, 'Introduction: A Great Multiplication of Meters', p. 19.

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Elizabeth Bishop's career is widely linked to the expansion of conversational forms and tones in Twentieth Century American Poetry, and to an idiom of casual-seeming perfection. These trends don't accord with metrical scansion in the popular mind insofar as meter is seen as a feature of 'formal' poetry. Yet as a developing poet, Bishop was interested closely in the artistic and perceptual impacts of scansion on technique. The topic proved something of a hornbook. A short review she published in her high school literary journal, *The Blue Pencil*, defends Edna St. Vincent Millay's collection *The Buck in the Snow* (1928) as an unapologetic example of 'the ancient, honourable rules of the art' (PPL 640).[19] In an essay she published in her college literary magazine, *The Vassar Review*, in 1934, the then twenty-two year old Bishop set herself to addressing what is the most gloriously intractable of all topics in scansion: the 'sprung rhythm' of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

I should add right away though that, in the resulting essay, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins: Notes on Timing in His Poetry', Bishop is characteristically reticent and cagy about indentifying her main topic as sprung rhythm. Her subtitle deflects this ambition, and only begins to show through less prestigious language ('Notes on Timing') where the piece's true aspirations lead. She merely allows sprung rhythm as a predictable topic of fixation: 'I suppose that the most characteristic feature of Hopkins' poetry is that a great part of it is in "sprung rhythm." Such a departure from the verse traditions of three hundred years must be indicative or a desire or necessity of expressing different sorts of rhythm, involving different sorts of timing from those we find in other poetry' (PPL 661). The remark seems to

[19] Bishop calls out the following two lines from Millay for attention: 'Lovers and thinkers into the earth with you. | Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust'. Though Bishop's response is a bit teenage wasteland ('[these lines] have the power of making us stop, with our fingers between the pages, and stare at a blank wall until it turns to nothing' [PPL 641]), it's nonetheless worth noting the expressive idiosyncrasy on which she zooms in, even in this popular poet who follows the 'ancient, honorable rules'. the first line quoted begins with a highly emphatic spondee, and contains either a pyrrhic foot or an unusual colloquial stress, in the line's third foot ('think**ers into** the earth with you'). Nabokov, in the terms of his *Notes on Prosody* (Princeton: Bollingen, 1964), 9ff, would call this a 'scudded' foot (not a pyrrhic, but a foot with unaccented metrical stress). the rhythm of the second line quoted depends for its effect on two anapestic triple feet, leveraged by a strong medial pause: 'Be one **with the dull**, **the indis**criminate dust'.

connect a practice of 'timing' to Hopkins' 'departure from the verse traditions' and hence back to 'deviation', the cancelled word choice in Bishop's typescript, as a means to address Hopkins's principled poetics of a creative disruption of tradition. Oddly, this sentence ostensibly addressing her thesis topic is among the very few flat and unconvincing moments in the whole piece. One senses that Bishop is already wary of the discussion of sprung rhythm, while she is not the less impressed with the way this, and other less famous Hopkins techniques, such as 'inscape', indicate the presence of a radically new kind of artistic temperament seeking means of formal expression.[20] The enthusiasm she shares is for witnessing the emergence of *any* truly new rhythm, far from a narrow fixation on Hopkins and phrasemaking —and implicitly if quite slowly the quality of her observation thinks its way toward the young poet's own distinctive approach. This perceptual poetics will be based on the linkage of Hopkins's idiosyncratic style with observations about everyday coordinated movements familiar from any summer camp schedule of activities: hitting a tennis ball, rowing, throwing at moving targets.

In fitting with the precise, conversational poetic style that Bishop was to develop, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins' combines ordinary experiential observations with uncommon analytical perspectives. Whence her essay proceeds through a number of compelling treatments of 'poetics' headings, each handled in an invitingly undoctrinaire way. The issue of 'timing' from her title is understood in terms of 'co-ordination' of rhythms (PPL 661). This heading allows Bishop to relate her own foundation in conversational tones, with the extreme metrical developments of Hopkins. Contrasting 'God's Grandeur' to 'Windhover', Bishop notes the 'ordinary running rhythm' in the former poem, a 'more conventional sonnet', before remarking of the 'amazing "Windhover"' how, in that poem's famous last three lines, '[t]he action pulls more ways at once; new muscles are

[20] Here it is of interest to note that the Bridges edition of Hopkins's *Poems* was published in 1918, with a second edition in 1930. In her essay, 'Hopkins's Prosody', *Victorian Poetry* 49.2 (Summer 2011): pp. 1-30, Meredith Martin provides a partial bibliography of scholarship on Hopkins decade by decade. This list, unexceptionally, does not include Bishop's piece in *The Vassar Review*; what is striking is that Martin counts only five essays on the subject of Hopkins's prosody before Bishop's (p. 14).

touched and twinged, and the interrelations of stressed and slack syllables knit the poem more closely' (PPL 662). Referencing the last four lines of 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire', Bishop evokes the intriguing 'paradoxical[ ]' idea of a kind of 'accuracy with which poetry keeps up with itself' (PPL 663)—a notion of 'accuracy' framed outside the parameters of mimesis. She charts the characteristic 'movement' of Hopkins's verse on multiple levels of subject and object (PPL 665), comparing poetry to such manœuvres as the 'brain-life' of 'puzzling over a momentarily forgotten name or word',[21] or to a marksman on horseback shooting an arrow,[22] or finally—through a disturbing tour de force epic simile—to an airplane dropping bombshells down at a 'speeding battleship below, in an uncertain sea' (PPL 665). To sum it all up (drawing from a 1929 study, *The Baroque Style in Prose*, by M.W. Croll) Bishop articulates the broader purpose that (according to her) Hopkins shares with George Herbert and some other major 'Metaphysical' poets, to evince in his poetry 'not a thought, but a mind thinking' (PPL 666).

Here for Bishop the key insight is that '[t]he ardor of [poetry's] conception in the mind is a necessary part of its truth' (PPL 666). That contention links Bishop's approach to the signal point of emphasis advanced by early twentieth-century American 'New Critics' of lyric poetry, who refuse the false distinctions between cognitive matter and metaphorical figure, ideas and attitudes. However, by

[21] This is an experience Samuel Taylor Coleridge wonders at in *Biographia Literaria*. Bishop's evocation of her concept of poetic 'timing' also strongly suggests she had been reading Coleridge (which she is known to have done intensively while living in Brazil later in the 1950s and '60s). 'Gerard Manley Hopkins: Notes in Timing in His Poetry' begins: 'It is perhaps fanciful to apply the expression *timing* to poetry—race horses, runners, are timed; there is such a thing as the timing of a crew of oarsmen, or a single tennis-stroke—it may be a term only suited to physical motions. But as poetry considered in a very simple way is motion too: the releasing, checking, timing, and repeating of the movement of the mind according to ordered systems, it seems fair enough to admit that in some way its discipline involves a method of timing, even comparable to that used for literary actions' (PPL 660). For one of her writing courses at Harvard in the 1970s, Bishop prepared seven dense typed pages of notes (a handout?) from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*—or rather, Bishop's friend the poet May Swenson did on her behalf; Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 71.6).

[22] Compare J.L. Austin's criticism of the empiricist philosophy of 'sense-data': 'If we think of words as being shot like arrows at the world, the function of these adjuster-words is to free us from the disability of being able to shoot only straight ahead; by their use on occasion, such words as 'pig' can be, so to speak, brought into connexion with targets lying slightly off the simple, straightforward line on which they are ordinarily aimed. And in this way we gain, besides flexibility, precision'; *Sense and Sensibilia*, ed. G.J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), pp.74-75.

omitting prosody from their discussions of the intrinsic standing of poetic tone, imagery and structure (and the enclosures of 'spatial form'), the New Critics leave the work of something like a first philosophy of poetics still undone. Thinking beyond the alliance that Bishop shares with a slightly later New Critic such as Cleanth Brooks, the non-reductive coordination of literary practice with philosophical aesthetics found in her claim for the 'ardor' of 'truth' therefore recommends her poetry and thought to the comparatively more rigorous work of several recent commentators on the cognitive standing of verse melodics. I think particularly of Simon Jarvis's work as a whole, and his specific argument in the essay 'Prosody as Cognition' that 'prosody cannot be grounded on the model of the measurement of an object' as if that conception of 'measure' were independent of cognitive and artistic process.[23]

Bishop's exercise of judgment mixed with enthusiasm is striking—and needless to say, impressive for an undergraduate college student who is after all writing a term paper. 'Gerard Manley Hopkins' does not only succeed at the challenging undergraduate exercise of scanning a number of his poems (something Hopkins himself often did in blue chalk in his letters and poetic submissions). The essay develops through Hopkins an impressively nuanced yet direct language for making observations about what we might call the affective-cognitive embodiment of (all? good?) verse. While delivering a potentially new account of poetry to the reader (then and now), from the point of view of the aspiring young poet herself, these observations give embodiment and animation to a sense of representational exactness that would matter a great deal in Bishop's own poetry. Indeed this commitment to accuracy has emerged as something of an inviolable tenet in the interpretive community around Bishop. Of the trio of qualities that, on her own account, matter most to a Bishop poem—accuracy, spontaneity, and mystery (PPL 703)—it's only the first that can really be studied up and enforced. 'Spontaneity'

[23] Simon Jarvis, 'Prosody as Cognition', *Critical Quarterly* 40.4 (2003): pp. 3-15: 6. A counterpart to this essay is Jarvis, 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', *Paragraph* 28.2 (July 2005), pp. 57-71, which concludes: 'Only if we start from those musical and prosodic experiences which we actually have, rather than from their publicly respectable stuffed replicas, may we hope to find a less pejorative sense, not only for 'musical', but also for poetic, thinking' (p. 70).

and 'mystery' are immanently felt effects, experiences of the poem (equally as the subject and object). But the idea of 'accuracy' might be taken to suggest a more conventional relationship of representation, art's correspondence to a reality construed as temporally and logically prior, an 'original' experience simply to be dressed up in verse form and more or less successfully copied. The urgent demand to unseat this assumption about how art works—yet to preserve 'accuracy' as a criterion for art in response to its exposure to actuality, its contact with otherness—I take to be the crucial effort of Bishop's Hopkins essay. The celebration of accuracy is a meaningless fetish or worse if it leaves prior questions about the nature of the objects of poetic attention unexamined. At least as important as her fidelity to accurate detail (which practice may still *presume* how objects and experiences are already defined as if independent of our thinking about them) is Bishop's willingness to redefine what counts as experiential-aesthetic subject matter. Her writings display a perspicacious, open analytical mind toward questions about how the phenomena language describes may coherently present themselves for poetic attention in the first place.

The Hopkins essay in particular shows how the objects and experiences to which poems seek to remain faithful can only be apprehended—and quite possibly, how they can only be said to exist at all—in movement.[24] Bishop subtends an equally critical 'subjective' thesis not to be prised apart from the above 'objectively'-oriented claim. Language and the mind themselves move too insofar as they exist and live. Thus Isobel Armstrong maintains: 'like Coleridge's famous description of poetry, [meter] brings the whole soul of man into activity. It depends on the body's knowledge of the stress and sound system of the poem's language: this becomes reflexive knowledge as pattern is apprehended by the mind, a pattern returned to language and the body *when the poem is read in real time*'.[25] Far from a series of 'rules', poetic meter is an active event whose necessary conditions are intertwined and complex, involving the body, the mind, the line, and the poetic

[24] Bishop confirms that tenet later in her unpublished manuscript, '*Writing poetry is an unnatural act…*': 'spontaneity occurs in a good attack, a rapid line, tight rhythm—' (PPL 706).
[25] Isobel Armstrong, 'Meter and Meaning', p. 48.

and colloquial histories of the language all brought together in the unfolding of real time.

Partly due to her own personal reluctance as a performer of verse, however, Bishop's example presents a telling case for thinking through some basic differences between meter and scansion. The first recognizable poem in the 'Bishop' voice, after all, is 'The Map'. Attracted to the contemplative possibilities enabled by the fact that 'Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is, | lending the land their waves' own conformation', the 'Bishop' persona so suddenly, effectively realized in 'The Map' is also capable of a wonderful, steadily disturbed surrealism in her images of control and constraint: 'We can stroke these lovely bays, | under a glass as if they were expected to blossom, | or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish' (PPL 3). She attends not so much to the Stevensian 'rage to order' in a sublime, charismatically primary way, as to the nuanced artistic possibilities found in accepting a medium of knowing (this is often figured in the poem as a textural form of measurement, 'feeling for the smoothness of yard goods', and perhaps indicates a gendered knowing). 'The Map' shows Bishop to be thinking about the intrinsic 'sensuous element' even of a familiar and patently conventional representational system.[26] It is therefore quite subtly a poem about the rivalry and distribution of the 'sister' arts. To the poem's material dimension of language, we might oppose, say, the way a painting finds its 'natural' (not superadded) element in *colour*. Bishop seems to ponder such a material phenomenology of aesthetics with sustained, implicit focus throughout her poem and its meditation on the map's colours: 'Land lies in water; it is shadowed green || … Are they assigned, or do the countries pick their colors? | —What suits the character or the native waters best' || More delicate than the historian's are the map-maker's colors' (PPL 3). The quiet, decisive preference for a flattening plane of representation (flatter than narrative historical perspective, yet '[m]ore delicate') is part of what is so attractive and arresting here. The prosodic equivalent of

[26] At the start of his discussion of prosody in the *Aesthetics*, Hegel points out that 'things in nature, and the human form, are coloured naturally, and to portray them without colour is a forced abstraction; whereas an idea has only a very remote connection, or no inner connection at all, with the syllables used as purely arbitrary signs of communication; *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. II, p.1012.

Bishop's map is not the meter of a poet, I would suggest, but the scansion of a metrist. Even when the poem recounts effects of passionate excitement: 'The names of seashore towns run out to sea, | the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains | —the printer here experiencing the same excitement | as when emotion too far exceeds its cause' (PPL 3). The multisyllabic words here in the second to last line are indeed emphatic in the layout of print, but read glidingly with several 'outrider' syllables in recitation. Excessive emotion, 'far' beyond its cause, nevertheless holds closely to the meter; only with '*too* far' does the line become hypermetric (not by a full foot, but a syllable). 'The Map' works from a baseline of iambic pentameter; still, most of the lines of the poem's first stanza begin with counterpointed trochees or spondees ('Land lies in water'; 'Shadows, or are they shallows', etc). Just when Bishop provides a nearly regular iambic pentameter line ('The names of seashore towns run out to sea'), the theme is a counterpointed excess. It is not until the meaningfully generic and moving 'Poem', in her final collection, *Geography III*, that Bishop merges blank verse with the commonality of what she calls 'our abidance' (PPL 166).

Back in the Hopkins essay I have brought to hand, Bishop's most immediate interest lies in the implications of scansion to be gleaned from a few Hopkins poems under the idea of his highly developed apprehension of 'timing', rather than with his use of metrical norms per se. It is important, in other words, that Bishop's essay finds a way to feel and *think* through the idea of scansion, and does not simply embody the poetry in a performance, to share a trace with a scansion done after the fact. Bishop's account characterises a primarily visual notion of poetic timing—a perceptual marking system—one that does not necessarily require an empirical recitation in order to be realized. Her essay on Hopkins is compelling, but it does not rely overly on the sheer charismatic presentation of poetic rhythms as if that made poetic force self-evident. It is an experiment in how fruitful the thought of an analytical poetics can be, when linked by an unusually observant critic to rhythms of everyday testable phenomena: as much about the kinds of stimulating perceptual *models* that the decisive practice of a 'timing' scansion might furnish the young artist, as it is about outright performing of the scansion task. Bishop characteristically thinks about temporal 'timing' in verse alongside its

spatial depiction in efforts of descriptive analysis: a juxtaposition that is especially noticeable when we consider these topics along with the visual poetics of 'The Map'. Whereas the matter of timing, for a practicing musician and poet, invokes the immersive situation of bodily performance in media res, the conceit of visual 'mapping' avails her of visual perspective, delicacy of the ear, and intellectual detachment. Bishop began her undergraduate career with the idea of completing a music major (see PPL 852),[27] and her relationship to the musical aspect of Hopkins's poetry is at once ardent and impressively cool. Despite her affirmation much later in life that Hopkins (along with Herbert and Baudelaire) was one of her favourite poets—'favorite in the sense of one's "best friends" ' (PPL 703)—She is not a Hopkins acolyte in these early years, or even a poet showing an apprentice phase of pronounced imitation.[28] Scanning lines, to be sure, is just what readers must do to approach Hopkins's sprung rhythm as a tractable subject. Yet for

[27] Following the elaborate post-graduation arrangements that Bishop made regarding her Dolmetsch clavichord is one of the stray pleasures of reading her biography; see Brett Millier, *Life and the Memory of It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[28] Not included in any collections of her poetry to be published in her lifetime, Bishop's apprentice poem, 'Three Valentines', exhibits the Hopkins influence most directly, along with that of the Metaphysical Poets. These poems were published in a collection of select young writers, *Trial Balances*, in 1935. Their most important function in Bishop's career, however, was to engage the critical eye of Marianne Moore, who had agreed to sponsor and introduce Bishop's contribution to the volume. The line in 'The Map', 'along the fine tan sandy shelf' (PPL 3), suggests the influence of sprung rhythm in the accumulation of three successive clustered stresses. Yet the core of Hopkins's theory requires something different in kind than simply a dense cluster of stress: in sprung rhythm, the entire meter of the poem is re-aligned to move around the usually 'counterpointed' technique of lead stress. By contrast 'The Map', which was also published in *Trial Balances*, follows a more conventional prosodic pattern for metrical variation, 'allowing for' the triple stress to come in Bishop's description by preparing for it with a pyrrhic, or very 'weak' iambic, start to the line ('**along the**...'). From time to time in her remarks on poetry, Bishop connects Hopkins and Marianne Moore, as if to draw from a compound example of them as two courageous spirits who persevere with their poetic vision despite severe isolation. There is no prosodic agenda to bridge them, apart from a shared willingness to court the charge of idiosyncrasy and triumph by small glories. Bishop looks to both for fortitude of the spirit in a life of the poet-technician. Hopkins, too, lent a crucial aspect to Bishop's first meeting with Moore as recounted in the wonderful 'Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore' (see PPL 471-499). Bishop ventured to recommend to Moore the biography of Hopkins, written by the Jesuit priest G.F. Lahey, which she also consults in the 'Timing' essay (PPL 661). In a detail I don't believe has been noticed before, Bishop's motif of 'manners' and 'morals' (*MM*) in reference to Moore also comes from the language of Hopkins's 'gentleman' letter to Bridges (discussed below); *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 182.

Bishop, as I have shown, the practice suggests both that something more is going on analytically, and that something else is coming aesthetically into view for her. Scansion itself offers a visual rendering of poetic 'timing', and hence a means to absorb the example of Hopkins as an incomparably rich aural poet, without being singularly overwhelmed by it. Bishop generously absorbs Hopkins's practice and key ideas, all the while translating into the developing idiom of her own work just a very small and indirect distillation. Insofar as scansion itself already constitutes a visual system of 'notation', mapping, and marking, we might reasonably expect Bishop's 'Notes' on the topic to be highly derived and metacritical. So many a scholar's first publication is just this, a note on a note. But instead, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins' meaningfully reconstitutes for Bishop as a young poet the most earnest and useful of all bases of absolute poetic insight.

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If we envision scansion practice as the final operation performed on a literary object already constructed as a poem, it becomes a kind of technical exercise aimed to purify the ground of poetry 'for its own sake'. On this view, the effect of scansion is to reaffirm how verse is essentially different from other modes and genres of writing, and certainly different from other, non-linguistic, modes of experiencing and knowing. But 'Gerard Manley Hopkins' thinks about scansion as an initiatory part of perceptual creation and poetic knowing. Because Bishop treats scansion in the multifarious terms of 'timing', and links it to physical activities that involve hand-eye coordination (as well as to an involvement of the ear she need not argue for), and polyrhythmic sensation, the idea of scansion for her is much more like a theory of prosodic *translation*. This experiential, yet nonetheless speculative, theory commits her to two disparate kinds of attentiveness. The first and most apparent is her project to observe a translational poetics between literary modes. As a young student and as a mature artist alike, Bishop's is creatively analytical outlook that holds there can be a common poetics for the lyric poem and for prose (fiction or non-fiction, that distinction does not seem to be decisive for her). While at another, yet more fundamentally irreducible level, Bishop often pursues suggestions of possible forms of relation—if not a means of translating

outright—between and amongst non-verbal experiences. In other words, the idea of a translational poetics appears in Bishop's thought both about poetry and prose as genres—from her school days on, her sense of Hopkins as a 'Baroque' poet was developed from coursework on Seventeenth Century prose stylistics—as well as through her curiosity and aptitude to think comparatively at larger, more discontinuous, levels than literary difference. For example, after her graduation from Vassar, Bishop moved to New York City and, in addition to studying the Baroque with Erwin Panofsky, studied the 'mapping' of isobars and isotherms in a Geometry course at The New School.[29] Throughout her life she observed with interest the sounds of natural phenomena: earthquakes, tidal waves, tsunami, and the movements of animals.[30] In her 'Music as a Literature' class notes from Vassar, Bishop characteristically thinks about musical theory and material practice, together, as 'forms of motion'.[31] In touch with these larger habits of association is her notion of a poetic 'timing'. For Bishop 'timing' denotes the thought-practice under which we adjust one order of movement to the habitus of another. The coordinating act not only represents, but actually modifies the experience, much as scansion visually maps and so 'marks' the rendering of a poem's aural reception (and its oral performance). Bishop turns to Hopkins not for an avant-garde guide or authority to settle her artistic standards. Reading Hopkins offers a way to specify and affirm aesthetic technique as a form of continual transition. For this reason it is not so surprising that after this 1934 essay, Bishop most often refers to Hopkins's writing in the context of the descriptive and meditative prose of his journals (see, for one instance, PPL 680).

Bishop first attests to the idea that there can be a poetics of prose in some college notes (which I suspect are her extracurricular thoughts on poetry after having met Marianne Moore) housed in the Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 69A. 6). Bishop's interest and unusual degree of knowledge in the technical theory of music are also present throughout the archival manuscripts. She wrote a High School Theme in 1928 upon the topic of

[29] Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 70.1).
[30] Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 71.5).
[31] Vassar College Libraries, Archives and Special Collections (Folder 69B. 9).

Elizabethan music, which focuses especially on the domestic settings in which women learn to play 'on a piano-like instrument called a virginall' (Folder 69A.1). She took extensive notes (almost two hundred pages) for the course, 'Music as a Literature', at Vassar in 1932-33, and remarked upon the differences among the three main musical styles: the monodic, monophonic, and polyphonic (Folder 69B.9). Though these are course class notes, something like a thesis emerges from Bishop's engagement with musical history and theory, in the suggestive claim that music is a form of motion.

Taking a step back lets us see the variety of ways Bishop engages this transitional critical poetics in her essay. Most obviously, she substitutes the idea of 'timing' for the more familiar term rhythm, or for scansion as the notation of rhythms against the meter; but she also blurs or segues from a college student's academic lesson to articulating her own creative principles;[32] and if we look at the sequence of Bishop's college essays recently published in the Library of America volume, we see that she refers to Hopkins in an essay about prose and the idea of narrative time in addition to her consideration of his verse technique; finally, I think, she responds implicitly to Hopkins's Anglo-Irish identity (and his absorption in Welsh cultural and linguistic history) both to understand and to put some distance on the growing culture of Anglo-American New Critical formalist praxis (a school of poetic commentary referenced in her essay by the work of Croll, influence of Eliot, etc). As opposed to becoming yet another student to cite the objective correlative from 'Hamlet and His Problems', in other words, Bishop constructs her own poetics and a usable past by thinking through Hopkins. And her poetics, in its historical-conceptual moment, is reducible neither to an endorsement of formalism nor to a reaction formation against it. Bishop's lack of interest in declaring her allegiances also bears on her national identity. It is hard not to draw the inference that her own hybrid, ambiguous national status as a Canadian-American—and the connection between that status to the biography and her education—plays a role in the essay's background. To be clear, England only

[32] One instance of this transition between pedagogical exercise and creativity is Bishop's classical language training. Bishop translated Aristophanes' *The Birds* at Vassar, where she took four years of Greek, after having completed three years of high school Latin.

explicitly features in the essay as the occasion 'of the odd and often irritating rhyme' Hopkins is allegedly fond of: "'am and… diamond, England…. mingle and'": rhymes that 'usually "come right" on being read aloud, and contribute in spite of, or because of, their awkwardness, to the general effect of intense, unpremeditated unrevised emotion' (PPL 667). However, Bishop's response to Hopkins inevitably activates the notion of verse culture as an English national institution of aesthetic subject formation, especially when read alongside the poems in Bishop's first collection, *North & South*, which openly rework into lyrics more narrative poems by Tennyson and Felicia Hemans.

For readers at all familiar with Bishop's poetry, taking the Hopkins influence (in part) as a feature of a kind of national verse *Bildung* will call to mind the modernist thematisation of reciting Felicia Hemans's nationally ubiquitous quatrain poem, 'The boy stood on the burning deck' (1826), in Bishop's 'Casabianca' (PPL 5). Abrupt changes in scansion and rhythm are key to that poem's fresh effect:

> Love's the boy stood on the burning deck
> trying to recite 'The boy stood on
> the burning deck.' Love's the son
> stood stammering elocution
> while the poor ship in flames went down.
>
> Love's the obstinate boy, the ship,
> even the swimming sailors, who
> would like a schoolroom platform, too,
> or an excuse to stay
> on deck. And love's the burning boy. (PPL 5)

Bishop's version of 'Casabianca' achieves 'metaphysical' density of wit and feeling by repurposing a late-romantic sentimental narrative poem. Though only ten lines to Hemans's forty, the Bishop poem is full of examples of how a highly self-conscious conceit of classroom 'elocution' may be re-distilled into a dense, first-order allegorical reckoning with love; it is only the poem's most forensically

explicit instance of holdover nineteenth-century metrical cultures,[33] to begin each stanza with a metrical 'elision' of 'Love is' to 'Love's'—a contracted syllable that also clinches the poem's fierce and funny Cupid image—in order to preserve the line's proper syllable count.[34] But that Bishop does this *in her poem's first word* indicates just how far the norm has been wrenched into voluntary expression. Catherine Robson's study of the educational culture of the nineteenth-century recited poem, *Heart Beats*, contains a complete case study of Hemans's poem, and makes yet more clear and compelling a sense of how thoroughly Bishop was immersed in an experience of enculturation by verse (she was a school child in 1910s Nova Scotia, where old practices held out longer than elsewhere in the British Commonwealth).[35]

Bishop's poetic translations between styles (or between different historically prevailing subgenres) work out affectionate, witty, and at times subversively passionate conceits about the enculturation by verse. They are also ways of taking that education very seriously, so as to issue neither in thin denunciations of the ideological 'interpellation' of individuals, nor to be coyly reminiscent over a 'common' cultural past. Regarding her American side, Bishop seriously thought the

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[33] Apropos of Simon Jarvis's work on idolatry as a charge levelled in and against poetics, an example of this verse culture quite worth sharing occurs when Bridges cites two instances of *idolatry* in *Samson Agonistes* (the lines: 'Present in temples at idol*atr*ous rites', and 'Drunk with Idol*atr*y, drunk with Wine'). Bridges offers that elisions in these examples 'are best accounted for by supposing that the word *idolatry* had acquired a familiar contracted pronunciation in Puritan talk, and that it pleased Milton to adopt this'; *Milton's Prosody*, p. 47.

[34] A contraction that also happens in lines three and ten, as Bishop plays with yet another sometime verse convention, the matching of units of sense and syntax with line endings. Line ten is especially smart due to the strong caesura in an atypically place, after the first foot.

[35] See Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 91-122. Robson observes that only the recitation assignment gives Hemans's poem 'absolutely regular unvarying meter' (p. 116), the reversed second foot (if read for common prose 'sense') of 'The **boy stood** on the burning deck' becoming a creaking iambic 'The **boy** stood **on**…' through mechanical substitution. A similar substitution, Robson speculates, would likely conclude the poem in classroom performance: 'When he finally made it to the end, would not the reciting boy also be likely to murder the tender pathos of Hemans's final irregular, meditative stress on "that YOUNG FAITHful HEART" by chucking in for good measure his own unstressed "and" between "young" and "faith" to regularize, and thus speed up, the line?' (p.117). Bishop's serious, well-informed affection for poetry readers for the young is apparent in her review of Walter de la Mare's 1958 anthology, *Come Hither: A Collection of Rhymes and Poems for the Young of All Ages*, which Bishop deems 'the best anthology I know of'; see PPL 698-701.

national anthem ought to be 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' and not the 'Star Spangled Banner'. The latter, perhaps not coincidentally, is both militaristic and a complete melodic mess to the normal ranges of a human voice. An orphan, she writes in the memoir story, 'The Country Mouse': '*"Land where my father died | Land of the pilgrims' pride"*—for a long time I took the first line personally' (PPL 419). She also writes: 'There [in school in Worcester, Massachusetts] we pledged allegiance to the flag and sang war songs: "Joan of Arc, they are ca-alllll-ing you." I hated the songs, and most of all I hated saluting the flag. I would have refused if I had dared. In my Canadian schooling the year before, we had started every day with "God Save the King" and "The Maple Leaf Forever"' (PPL 421). 'Primer Class', another piece of Nova Scotia childhood memoir, recounts both the drilled and unconscious memorized learning of 'texts' across a heterogeneous range evocative of actual life, including 'The Gingerbread Boy', 'Henny Penny', the Lord's Prayer, and 'O Maple Leaf, our emblem dear' (PPL 407). In recounting her socialized verse education in the broadest sense in these pieces—her education as a poet who once was also a real child, and who returned in adulthood to matters of 'primary' aesthetic preference unabashedly—Bishop somehow manages to be neither satirically scathing and political, nor to seem twee.

For another poet, the Hemans poem would be a five-finger exercise; coming from Bishop, it is a masterpiece sui generis. However Bishop's thinking about 'timing' and scansion—again, because she realizes that timing in terms of an analytically visual, marked, 'mapping' intelligence—also moves between poetry and prose and extends to fields even further away, reaching a perspective that looks truly 'interdisciplinary' in the idiom of present-day higher education. Available now as a group in the Library of America volume, one of the most compelling aspects of Bishop's Vassar essays is their resonance between the realms of verse and prose—as indeed Bishop left college with the aim initially of becoming a novelist and short story writer in depression-era New York City. Her Hopkins essay closes with a reference, meant to be clinching, to the intellectual richness of seventeenth-century English 'Baroque' prose. Miss Rose Peebles—Bishop's favourite professor at Vassar, whose name would become an affectionate nickname for Marianne Moore in her enormously important friendship with Bishop (PPL 491)—was

Bishop's professor for seventeenth- century prose and modern prose narrative, not her teacher in poetry. 'Dimensions for a Novel', another Bishop undergraduate essay from 1934, begins with an epigraph from Wallace Stevens that clearly has prosody among its implications: 'The lines are straight and swift between the stars' (PPL 671; quoting 'The Stars at Tallapoosa'). But most astonishing is Bishop's long essay on the subject of time in the novel.

This essay, called 'Time's Andromedas' after a Hopkins sonnet, starts with the following, spellbinding account of how 'polyrhythmia' happens as a complex of cognitive and sensuous experience. From an initial sensation as much like the philosophical chimera of a 'sense-datum' as any experience can be (a pink glow cast over the shoulder onto the pages of a book), the long passage I will quote in full moves on to disclose analytical, arrestingly sublime and beautiful, layers of observation:

> One afternoon last fall I was studying very hard, bending over my book with my back to the light of the high double windows. Concentration was so difficult that I dug myself a sort of little black cave into the subject I was reading, and there I burrowed and scratched, like the Count of Monte Cristo, expecting Heaven knows what sudden revelation. My own thoughts, conflicting with those of the book, were making such a wordy racket that I heard and saw nothing—until the page before my eyes blushed pink. I was startled, then realized that there must be a sunset at my back, and waited a minute trying to guess the color of it from the color of the little reflection. As I waited I heard a multitude of small sounds, and knew simultaneously that I had been hearing them all along, —sounds high in the air, of a faintly rhythmic irregularity, yet resembling the retreat of innumerable small waves, lake-waves, rustling on sand.
>
> Of course it was the birds going South. They were very high up, a fairly large sort of bird, I couldn't tell what, but almost speck-like, paying no attention to even the highest trees or steeples. They spread across a wide swath of sky, each rather alone, and at first their wings seemed all to be beating perfectly together. But by watching one bird, then another, I saw that some flew a little slower than others, some were trying to get ahead and some flew at an individual rubato; each seemed a variation, and yet altogether my eyes were deceived into thinking them perfectly precise and regular. i watched closely the spaces between the birds. It was as if there were an invisible thread joining all the outside birds and within this fragile net-work they possessed the sky; it was down among them, of a paler color, moving with them. The interspaces moved in pulsation too,

> catching up and continuing the motion of the wings in wakes, carrying it on, as the rest in music does—not a blankness but a space as musical as all the sound.
>
> The birds came in groups, each taking four or five minutes to fly over; then a pause of two or three minutes and the next group appeared. I must have watched them for almost an hour before I realized that the same relationships of birds and spaces I had noticed in the small groups were true of the whole migration at once. The next morning when I got up and went to the window they were still going over, and all that day and part of the next whenever I remembered to listen or look up they were still there.
>
> It came to me that the flying birds were setting up, far over my head, a sort of time-pattern, or rather patterns, all closely related, all minutely varied, and yet all together forming the *migration*, which probably in the date of its flight and its actual flying time was as mathematically regular as the planets. There was the individual rate of each bird, its rate in relation to all the other birds, and speed of the various groups, and then that mysterious swath they made through the sky, leaving it somehow emptied and stilled, slowly assuming its usual coloring and far-away look. Yet all this motion with its effect of *precision*, of passing the time along, as the clock passes it along from minute to minute, was to result in the end in a thing so inevitable, so absolute, as to mean nothing connected with the passage of time at all—a static fact of the world, the birds here or there, always; a fact that may hurry the seasons along for us, but as far as bird migration goes, stands still and infinite.
>
> I had been thinking of writing a paper on the subject of time in novels,…. (PPL 641-43)

This is an essay about time in the modern 'experimental' novel (PPL 644). It references the Virginia Woolf of *The Waves*, Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Dorothy Richardson and Stein. But, leaving aside the passage's central visual exhibit of the migration—which by itself rates Bishop as a meditative observer in the company of Coleridge's *Notebooks*— notice how so many of the descriptors Bishop uses are appropriate to the discussion of poetry; and not only to poetry and its modes of awareness, but specifically to the lexicon of prosodic and metrical thinking: 'concentration'; 'wordy racket'; 'faintly rhythmic irregularity'; 'an individual rubato'; 'deceived into thinking them perfectly precise and regular'; 'interspaces'; musical 'rest'; 'not a blankness but a space as musical as all the sound'; 'time-pattern, or rather patterns'; 'precision'; 'passing the time along'; 'absolute'.

The smuggled-in underthought of poetry is so insistent, that one wonders if this is Bishop's private adjustment, so as to be able to think under cover about poetry in the lean 1930s, to navigate between what a vocation in contemporary 'verse' meant, and her aspiration to be avant-garde in the genre that at the moment held all the high-brow cachet—the modern 'experimental' novel.[36] Like the migration it ponders, the portion of the essay I have quoted composes a sort of meta-order unit in the form of a syntactical cycle or ellipsis, at first too large to see as meaningful, which does more than simply reassert the essay's subject matter at the close ('I had been thinking of writing a paper on the subject of time in novels'). 'The subject of time in novels' is to be sure the intellectual concern that the striking observations about bird migration are made to serve ('a sort of guess at what I felt about the *time* of certain novels and could not make clear to myself' [PPL 643]). And yet from this we learn—and I think in the long run more importantly—that novelistic time is also the subject that Bishop says at the start of the piece she 'was studying very hard' to construe, bent 'over my book with my back to the light of the high double windows'. Narrative temporality is the piece's *interrupted* subject. And the lacuna that punctures this failed conscious focus and lifts its grim hold is, rather than just the risk-free elevation of 'lyric time' let us say, the sensuously rich analytical perspective on prosodic timing. 'Time's Andromedas' constitutes the best possible kind of thought atmosphere one might have learned from the study of scansion.

The artist in her consciously laboured intention cannot yet adequately conceptualize what she feels she wants to know. Due in large part to the very concentration and confinement involved in this hard library task ('I had dug myself a sort of little black cave into the subject, and there I burrowed and scratched'), she is receptive to an experience not at all known or placed in the field of usable evidence in advance—physiologically, she is put into an obstructed, or perhaps suspended, anyway trance-like, state by the experience of a signifying 'subject matter' that has become only a muddled material sensorium ('My own thoughts, conflicting with those of the book, were making such a wordy racket that I heard

[36] A Vassar yearbook satire features Bishop and her friends—especially the painter Margaret Miller—as 'the higher types'; see Millier, *Life and the Memory of It*, pp. 41-60.

and saw nothing—until the pages before my eyes blushed pink'). 'Thoughts' shift in their usual philosophical alignment with the 'subjects' of contemplation; and, unannounced, the human 'subject' is discovered to have momentarily exchanged place with its conscious object; better than that, it has exchanged places with the supposedly blank, invisible and weightless paper sheet bearing on it thought's semantic coding. The page, and not the artist's face, 'blushes' pink. A recognition happens in the physical space located behind her back. ('In the creakings and noises, | an old conversation | —not concerning us, | but recognizable, somewhere, | back in the bus'; 'The Moose' [PPL 160]). If this passage from 'Time's Andromedas' were meant to be a description of what it's like in phenomenological terms for the willing mind to be overtaken by a melody half-recalled, it could not be truer. If this were a writer's workshop assignment to come up with an epic simile that still had some message to bear in the present—or, still less probable of success, a prompt to come up with a version of the cosmology of forms in the heavenly architecture of Dante's *Paradiso*—Bishop's migration could not be more faithfully rendered.

| |

> I, surely, cannot hope to prescribe. I try one word and another word and another word, reverse the sequence, altar the line-endings, a hundred two hundred writings, revisions—This is called prosody: how to write a poem. Or rather, how to write *that* poem.
>
> —George Oppen, 'Statement on Poetics' (1984 [1975])

> The poet whose metrical effects actually work upon a reader reveals that he has attained an understanding of what man in general is like. It is thus possible to suggest that a great metrical achievement is more than the mark of a good technician: it is something like the signature of a great man.
>
> —Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (1965)

> She [Marianne Moore] once remarked, after a visit to her brother and his family, that the state of being married and having children had one enormous advantage: 'One never has to worry about whether one is doing the right thing or not. There isn't time. One is always having to go to market or drive the children somewhere. There isn't time to wonder, "Is this *right* or isn't it?"'

> Of course she did wonder, and constantly. But, as in the notes to her poems, Marianne never gave away the whole show. The volubility, the wit, the self-deprecating laugh, never really clarified those quick decisions or hers—or decisive intuitions, rather—as to good and bad, right and wrong; and her meticulous system of ethics could be baffling. (PPL 498)

Paul Fussell's remark above shows the manner in which 'metrical achievement'—to be assessed, one must suppose, in a broadly Kantian way through the strong yet wholly indeterminate law governing judgments of scansion, an aesthetic judgment if there ever was one[37]—can find in 'technical' aptitude 'something like the signature of a great man'. What I have done in this essay, however, is to show through Elizabeth Bishop the validity of testing out a slightly different generalization: something like how crucial it might be to distinguish, as strongly as Fussell does, between modern poets who inherit and deploy unquestioningly an already metaphorical understanding of poetic 'music', and those who persistently subject this aspect of poetry to further, materially poetic, analysis and creative 'mapping'. When asked by an interviewer in 1975 to define the 'prosody' of his poems, the Objectivist poet George Oppen enlarged the question to include what most of his previous readers already understood to be 'a philosophy that [the poems] express'.[38] Oppen cites the many drafts with only minute differences of his poem 'Escape':

> Escape
> love like the shining of rails in the night
> the shining way the way away
> from home arrow in the air
> hat-brim fluttering in the wind as she runs
> forward and it seemed so beautiful so beautiful
> the sun-lit air it was no dream all's wild
> out there as we unlikely

[37] Typically, scansion is presented as one of literature's few topics of falsifiable 'scientific' knowledge. Here, I attempt to write in 'Kantian' critical opposition to that view, an attempt that seeks to promote rigor alongside the non-falsifiable, subjectively universal dimension of aesthetic judgment.

[38] George Oppen, 'Statement on Poetics', in *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers,* ed. Stephen Cope (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 47.

> image of love found the way
> away from home[39]

In the literal sense, 'Escape' is the '*that* poem' used in this section's epigraph and as my essay's title. Oppen defines his prosody ostensively, with a single-mindedness that might be mistaken for modesty. To the interviewer who might expect a grand manifesto from the Pulitzer Prize winning poet, at last, he does not offer that, and also he does not offer the softened 'subjective' answer, 'Well, I don't know about *prosody*, but this is how I write *my* poems.' Instead, Oppen paratactically inserts a voice of singularity as well as of command: 'how to write *that* poem'. Yet the deictic *that* should not be understood solely to hold down the register of an aesthetic of particulars—of the autobiographical, or of factive and therefore past experience, the 'solid' aesthetic object (as with the Williams glazed red wheelbarrow, put forth as the exemplary 'thing' like a substance with accidents). The *that* (just as Oppen had titled a poetry collection, *This in Which* [1965]) marks a difficult encounter with the present as a means to the absolute: the necessary and only means of 'disclosure'. Oppen describes prosody as a 'rigorous music', before trying to give some greater clarity to the principle that animates his poetry:

> Prosody is a language, but it is a language that tests itself. Or it tests itself in music—I think one may say that. It tests the relations of things: it carries the sequence of disclosure. And that is its vividness. More vivid than falsification, a test of conviction, the sequence of disclosure. I am not speaking of a philosophical naiveté, I am not speaking of kicking the rock and saying By God, sir, that's *here*, and certainly I'm not speaking of any remarkable philosophic sophistication. I am thinking of *actualness*, not some toughness of "realism": some manly toughness: I am talking of consciousness—which is to say, I am talking of experience, and THAT is to say, I am talking of emotion. Impossible to doubt the actualness of one's own consciousness: but therefore consciousness in itself, of itself, by itself carries the principle of ACTUALNESS for it, itself, is actual beyond doubt.

[39] Oppen, 'Statement on Poetics', p. 48. Editor Stephen Cope points out that 'Escape' was revised again, repositioned as the end of the poem 'To Make Much', and can now be found in Oppen's *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York: New Directions, 2002), pp. 271-272.

> And actualness is prosody, it is the purpose of prosody and its achievement, the instant of meaning, the achievement of meaning and of *presence*, the sequence of disclosure, which comes from everywhere; life-style, angers, rebellions—I am not apolitical, and it is possible to mock poetry, it is certainly possible to mock poetry just as there are times when one is sick of himself, but eventually, I think, there is no hope for us but in meaning. For Voltaire was wrong you know: anything can be said, there is a great deal too foolish to be sung.[40]

Like Bishop, Oppen published sparingly and revised as an obsession. Bishop allowed almost half her life for 'The Moose' to finish and find its meter. Oppen went almost three decades between publishing his first collection, *Discrete Series* (1934), and his next volume of poems, *The Materials* (1962).[41] (Hopkins of course preserved a seven-year silence from poetry upon taking orders.) It is his respect for the 'principle of actualness'—expressed through his Marxist political commitments on the one hand, and for his serious calling as a poet who could *not* write poems subservient to his politics—that gives some grounding to 'Hugh Kenner's famous remark that… it took him "25 years to write the next poem".'[42]

In no small part due to their commitment to write 'poems' so painstakingly, rather than to produce 'poetry' at a regular rate—and to what, in Heideggerian terms, figures as a commitment to the 'ontic' rather than to the 'ontological' standing of poetry—Oppen and Bishop may also be linked as the two twentieth-century American poets most likely to be praised for the 'ethics' of their self-understood calling as writers. This brings into view the last significant bend of my essay's argument about Bishop, scansion, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. What does sprung rhythm have to do with ethical conduct or even awareness? The near-consensus that reads Bishop's descriptive poetics as 'faithful' to reality—therefore ethically unimpeachable as an aesthetic position—has its costs and unsurprisingly

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[40] Oppen, 'Statement on Poetics', in *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers*, p. 49. Voltaire is ascribed the remark, 'Anything too stupid to be said is sung'.

[41] For an essay that develops the implications of the hiatus, See John Wilkinson, 'The Glass Enclosure: Transparency and Glitter in the Poetry of George Oppen', *Critical Inquiry* 36 (Winter 2010): pp. 218-238.

[42] Quoted by Stephen Cope in the introduction to *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers*, 10.

leads to many incongruities.[43] But the weight of this common assessment of her life and work nonetheless adds force to a question worth posing to all verse, because it carries an import we may feel and have not really addressed. At issue is not quite whether we rise to believe Fussell's (and Shelley's) conviction that true poets are ipso facto the best of men. The question is if a 'principle of actualness' in matters of philosophical prosody (in Oppen's words) may constitute some kind of initial impulse, or final bulwark, toward sustaining an integral relationship to a world 'out there'. The list of poets this essay has discussed—Hopkins, Moore, Oppen, and Bishop—warrants that consideration.

For Hopkins, the word and world both are imprinted by Christ and are marked by this 'instress' organically: 'All words mean either things or relations of things', and 'all things are upheld by instress and are meaningless without it'.[44] An upright force akin to a human individual with 'instress', in the sense of an integral and vital relation to pressure, marks Moore's perseverance as a poetic technician not despite, but because, no general explanation '[]ever really clarified those quick decisions or hers'. By comparison, Oppen struggles to evoke an almost theologically different way to attend to the world with his Objectivist 'actualness'; I locate Bishop indeterminately in between these examples of the moral standing of poetry. This suggests to me a parallel, if nothing more demonstrable than that, with the difference between Bishop's prosody and Moore's elaborate syllabic stanzas and Oppen's projective model of verse, the singular task to set one word after another.

The difference between a poetry that recognizes the fact of experience ('wild' and 'unlikely' in that it is both inassimilable to consciousness and includes us,

[43] The most recent example of this raking of Bishop over the coals for her ethical-political coherence—not just artistic 'perfection'— is Benjamin's Moser's discussion of Bishop's Time Life *Brazil* book in *The New Yorker* (5 December 2012). This piece raises the issue of Bishop's careless inaccuracies of Portuguese translation: just the sort of inaccuracies she (rightly) taxes Robert Lowell with in responding to *Imitations*, his volume of 'free' translations. See David Kalstone, *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), pp. 202-208.

[44] These remarks come from Hopkins's reflections on pre-Socratic Greek philosophy; *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House and completed by Graham Storey (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 125, 127.

pointing 'a way away from home') and one that metabolically ingests the world, shapes discussion in David Kalstone's pathbreaking account of Bishop's relationship with Robert Lowell.[45] Bishop had heralded Lowell's *Life Studies* upon its publication. '91 Revere Street', the prose section of Lowell's great volume, reflects the influence of Bishop's earlier autobiographical *New Yorker* story, 'In the Village' (collected later in *Questions of Travel*), and would influence Bishop in turn, helping to release her to the freer (still not 'confessional') use of personal life to be found ultimately in *Geography III*. However in responding to the manuscript of Lowell's volume *The Dolphin*, Bishop was disturbed. The poems not only shared intimate details of Lowell's tortuous relationship with his ex-wife Elizabeth Hardwick in the process of their separation, they *changed* Hardwick's letters, and opportunistically mixed fact and fiction in a manner that led Bishop to write to Lowell in a March, 1972 letter:

> But *art just isn't worth that much*. I keep remembering Hopkins' marvelous letter to Bridges about the idea of a 'gentleman' being the highest thing ever conceived—higher than a 'Christian,' even, certainly than a poet. It is not being 'gentle' to use personal, tragic, anguished letters that way—it's cruel. (Bishop to Lowell, letter of March 21, 1972)[46]

What are the implications of Bishop's summoning of Hopkins? And how—if it all—does his example now bear on the earlier interest Bishop took in sprung rhythm in the 1930s? As she does here, Bishop over the course of her career admiringly refers multiple times to a famous letter of Hopkins to Robert Bridges (3 February 1883), which prizes the character of the 'gentleman' over the 'artist' (see, inter alia, PPL 498-99). Recent scholarship on Hopkins, by Meredith Martin and others, offers an historically critical eye to his notion of a 'gentleman', placing this ideal in the intensively interwoven contexts of nationalism, prosody debates, war,

[45] Kalstone, *Becoming a Poet*, pp. 109-250; see esp. 207.

[46] *One Art,* p. 562. In a triangular discussion that involved Frank Bidart, Lowell confided, 'I feel like Bridges getting one of Hopkins's letters, as disturbed as grateful' (see David Kalstone, *Becoming a Poet*, p. 242). So even in communicating his response to Bishop's painful criticism of his 'confessional' tactics, Lowell immediately has recourse to the very same appropriative manœuvre she notices. Sharing with Bidart his amanuensis, Lowell reconstructs as a personal discovery the language that Bishop had given to him.

and education (as well as of class, needless to say). Hopkins had once written to Coventry Patmore that 'a great work by an Englishman is like a great battle won by England'.[47] Yet Bishop (who after all may be folded into these very same ideological contexts too, though it must be in a less readily diagnosed way) nevertheless turned to his language as a touchstone multiple times. For what? Lowell at the time was living with his new wife, Lady Caroline Blackwood, in London and at her Kent estate—which might give a notion of why Bishop again thought of her touchstone reference points in Hopkins (and Hardy); but that anecdotal fact hardly addresses the gravity of Bishop's allusive message to her friend.

This kind of difficult question is best answered by keeping things blunt; consequently, my conclusions on this issue will be abrupt. Bishop refers Lowell to Hopkins's letter in order to say there are higher values than art, a code higher especially than an art that assimilates difference to its own pre-existing, self-identical terms. There is first of all a measure of silence. There is another law, or a heteronomy of irreconcilable laws, pushing and pulling upon the 'voice' of the artist, behind and in tension with the expressive individual voice in poetry. *Isn't this moral insight a prosodic principle?* From the prerogative of the liberated vision that sees individual expression in all poetry's accents, the impersonal metrical set lingers to provide in every poem a what the passengers in the dark supply in 'The Moose': a 'conversation | —not concerning us, | but recognizable, somewhere, | back in the bus' as it moves down the line (PPL 160). From the perspective of the larger set of materials shared throughout this essay, the claim one ought to develop, therefore, is that there may be a poetic means in itself for this conviction to be honourably articulated. That position is perhaps best approximated by saying that the wonder and challenge is ever to write a single poem, rather than inevitably to write poetry. Bishop in her exchange of letters with Lowell positioned herself as a 'minor' poet, in very deliberate contrast to Lowell's grand (or grandiloquent) position—but there are other means intrinsic to prosody than simply this modesty about a *quantity* of poetic numbers.

[47] A communication cited in various forms by Meredith Martin in *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, pp. 11, 49, 74.

Despite Lowell's evolving mastery of metrical techniques, in his letters to Bishop he has a way of talking about the basics of verse and prose that reduces the genres to stereotyped positions: the experiment with prose in portions of *Life Studies* goes from 'naked' to 'fake velvet'; writing verse for long periods is to live with a language perched 'on high stilts of meter'.[48] Lowell was so productive—of major poetry if not always of singular poems. In a detail that must have astounded Bishop especially because she had just returned from the funeral of Marianne Moore, Lowell estimated in a letter about *The Dolphin*: 'I think Frank [Bidart] and I revised 405 poems in a month. That's no way to write, but it was made more sensible by Frank's amazing filing code and total memory for my lines, even for rejected versions'.[49] Sonnets of a scalar magnificence, Lowell writes the sonnet sequences of *History* and *The Dolphin* with a Fordist industrial rhythm of productivity. By contrast, G. F. Lahey, the scholar Bishop studied at Vassar and over whose work she bonded with Moore, observes about Hopkins: 'Out of forty-five complete poems written after the '[Wreck of the] Deutschland', thirty-four are sonnets.'[50]

Lowell's rewritings of Bishop's experience reflect this operating gear of a reductively semantic overdrive. A typical manœuvre is to reshape the content of Bishop's letters to him so as to make them read as the dramatic monologues of a character, or even as soliloquies. In several cases, Bishop's 'awful but cheerful' tone ('The Bight'; PPL 47) is turned with a strange insistence toward a much more univocal, and more plaintive, voice of desperation. Some of the poems entitled 'For Elizabeth Bishop' bear quoted passages that lineate and change material from her letters; and other poems not signalled as interpersonal by this mode of address draw from and change her language surreptitiously, from both published and unpublished sources. At one point, Bishop intervened to check a poem 'for' her

[48] *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, ed. Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), pp. 153, 158; quoted by Richard Flynn in his essay, 'Words in Air: Bishop, Lowell, and the Aesthetics of Autobiographical Poetry,' in *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century: Reading the New Editions*, ed. Angus Cleghorn, Bethany Hicok, and Thomas Travisano (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), pp. 204-220: 214.
[49] *Words in Air*, p. 704.
[50] G.F. Lahey, S.J., *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970 [1930]), 101.

that contained a fictionalized threat spoken by her mother (Bishop responded: 'her danger for me was just implied in the things I overheard the grown-ups say before and after her disappearance. Poor thing, I don't want to have it any worse than it was'.)[51] In his sequence of manically expressive versifications loosely based on her life, Lowell never did allow space for the resonance and reticence of Bishop's very real associations with danger; and this disposition toward the actuality of her emotional environment relates to Bishop's multisensory writing in connection with prosody. Lowell admits himself to the loss of 'timing' in the *Clang* of Nate the blacksmith making horseshoes and rings, in his versification of 'In the Village'.[52] He highlights the least prosodically resonant but most 'expressive' element of the story in his poem 'The Scream'.[53] He also versifies his shared experiences with Bishop in 'Water', and throughout a sequence of four poems entitled 'For Elizabeth Bishop'.[54] Whereas the grouping of poems as a whole wrenches Bishop's account of these experiences (even her own dreams) into a 'Lowell' voice, the last of these poems contains the wonderful and unusually apt ending that has rightly appeared in many discussions of Bishop's writing ever since: '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?'[55]

One poet cannot finish the 'gaps' in a single poem left, literally, in suspension on the wall, like a photographic negative developing in the darkest and slowest of temporal solutions. The other can't help but finish the same poem many times, with this scenario repeated over and over rapidly for so many poems. After his sudden death in 1977, Bishop would respond in kind to Lowell—in kind, that is, by recognizing their shared radical discontinuity—in her elegy 'North Haven': 'And now—you've left | for good. You can't derange, or re-arrange, | your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.) | The words won't change again. Sad

[51] Quoted by Kalstone in *Becoming a Poet*, p. 181.
[52] *Words in Air*, p. 390.
[53] Robert Lowell, 'The Scream', in *Collected Poems*, ed. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), pp. 326-327;
[54] Lowell, *Collected Poems*, pp. 321-322, 593-595.
[55] Lowell, *Collected Poems*, p. 595.

friend, you cannot change' (PPL 178). 'The islands haven't shifted since last summer', but Bishop as speaker in the poem 'like[s] to pretend they have | | and that they're free within the blue frontiers of bay' (PPL 177). If 'Nature repeats herself, or almost does' from year to year and from visit to visit, Lowell's self-revising behaviour represents an even surer standard meted out in six iambs: '*repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise*' (PPL 177). In 'North Haven', the description of migratory birds' return attests to the carefully observed difference, not acknowledged or seen at first, between ruptured actual lives and generic continuous life, and acknowledges whatever measure there can be of personal and impersonal continuity, in the alterity of recurrence.