

Article

Elizabeth Bishop's Grammar School for the Aspect-Blind and A-rhetorical

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Abstract: This paper uses Elizabeth Bishop's poem, "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" as an exemplar that displays the centrality of aspect perception in her work.

Keywords: grammar; rhetoric; Wittgenstein; aspect perception; seeing-as; poetry; religion; Elizabeth Bishop

"I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein (Rhees 1984, p. 94).

"It was a typical day at the shrine around what many believe is the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem's Old City. A Greek Orthodox choir sang inside a room facing the baroque structure. But the voices were drowned out when chanting Armenian priests and monks circling the shrine raised theirs. 'Sometimes they punch each other,' Farah Atallah, a church guard wearing a fez, observed with a shrug."

—"The New York Times," 7 April, 2016

1. Introduction

The present essay is wrested from a larger inquiry of mine concerning what a mode of grammatical and rhetorical criticism of literary works, one chiefly motivated "after Cavell after Wittgenstein," might look like and do.¹ The larger account proceeds on the understanding that those two predicates in the first place—"rhetorical," and the "grammatical" (conceptual, logical, philosophical) investigations of Ludwig Wittgenstein and others—can be seen as mutually constitutive, that is, more or less discriminated from or assimilated to each other according to the circumstances in which they are used. In this regard they function like many of the concepts involved in the particular mode of thinking and understanding that Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations* (1951), calls "aspect perception": "Different concepts touch here and coincide over a stretch;" "[M]any of our concepts cross here" (*PI*, II § 245). In *Culture and Value* (1994) Wittgenstein puts this pointedly: "Someone divides mankind into buyers and sellers and forgets that buyers are sellers too. If I remind him of this is his grammar changed (Wittgenstein 1980)?" Well, factually, who knows? Conceptually it will also depend, for some degree of variation among different circumstances is characteristic of this way of seeing things (see Mulhall (1994)).

Among a small group of literary critics in stated sympathy with Wittgenstein and Cavell, Angus Fletcher has nurtured similar coincidences of concepts in his own way of thinking about literature. For example he subscribes to how "John Hollander, having observed the central importance

¹ For example see (Dauber and Jost 2004), and (Jost 2004).

of Stanley Cavell to literary theory, described the way philosophy begins, and, by implication, the way philosophical arguments may need to be remarried to poetic imagination (Fletcher 2004).² If you accept the idea that, in marriage, even in re-marriage, two paradoxically become one, then the figure may also pertain to some poetry: in certain circumstances, for certain purposes, people do distinguish (say) grammar and rhetoric, and then in other circumstances, for other purposes, assimilate the two into an interconnected whole (not like links in a chain, say, but like a braid or cable), in which one can still recognize two-ness.³ Admittedly that fact “makes a tangled impression;” “Well, *that’s how it is*” (PI, II § 160). On the other hand, the Renaissance historian of ideas Rosalie M. Colie considers such temporary suspensions of conceptual boundaries not an unfortunate possibility but the premier virtue of paradox: “Paradox exists to reject such divisions as those between “thought” and “language,” between ‘thought’ and ‘feeling,’ between ‘logic’ and ‘rhetoric,’ between ‘logic,’ ‘rhetoric,’ and ‘poetics,’ and between all these and experience . . . Thinking in terms of paradox, or thinking about paradox, one cannot rely upon conventional categories (Colie 1966); cf. (Scholes 2006, p. 118)⁴.” Not that categories, conventional or otherwise, do not have limits, but rather that our activities and aims direct the flow of goods across their zones of influence.

In previous work I have imported resources from various intellectual traditions—philosophic hermeneutics, American pragmatism, so-called ordinary language philosophy, and the once long-dominant tradition of the *trivium* of liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic/dialectic—to help re-characterize study of literature (cf. (Garver and Lee 1994, p. 62))⁵. Drawing on that work here, I want to develop what Fletcher further calls “thinking the poem,” that is, thinking of thinking as an ingredient but discriminable dimension of a literary work (Fletcher 1991, pp. 11–12)⁶. For Fletcher this has meant trying to supplant epistemological orientations of traditional philosophy and criticism, whether rationalist or positivist (Descartes, Kant, early Wittgenstein) or empiricist (Locke, Hume, Reid, Moore), with attention to the whole speech situation of specific language games—including speakers, words, audiences, social practices, particular circumstances, and the point or purpose in speaking.⁷ On the present occasion my own proposal, a modest one, is that the American poet Elizabeth Bishop, refracted through multiple facets of a grammatical-rhetorical thinking the poem, appears as an astute investigator of these and similar matters in and out of poetry’s own poems—in certain ways like philosophical investigations, in certain ways unlike them—operate not as settled truths but as exemplary models of inquiry, argument, imagination, and judgment. Or, if that feels ham-fisted,

² Emphasis added. (cf. Hollander (1988)). For excellent recent theorizing on many issues relevant to such criticism, see (Altieri 2015), only after this paper was finished did I come across (Altieri 2013). See also (Warner 2016). Yet another such theorist-critic is David Bromwich; see for example, (Bromwich 1989, p. 268): emphasis added: “[T]he best aphorisms there are on interpretation itself *as a perspective* come from the [Philosophical] *Investigations* . . . Criticism resembles the making of a picture by seeing something as something else.”

³ This is a figure favored by John Henry Newman, later by the American philosopher C. S. Pierce, and by John Wisdom (a student of Wittgenstein) in *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Wisdom 1953, p. 157); cf. also (Wisdom 1965).

⁴ “The rhetoric/poetry opposition...is clearly a case of modernist paradox: a binary opposition that covers complexity with a façade of simple clarity.”

⁵ “The medieval trivium is a much sounder approach to the study of language and gives a much more adequate framework for the philosophy of language than its all-too-fashionable neglect might lead one to suppose.”

⁶ “Thinking the poem implies such things as taking the poem as an occasion for thought; thinking through the poem; being aware of one’s thoughts as one reads the poem; looking for some logic in the poem; allowing the poem to trigger certain lines of thought; looking in the poem for what Coleridge called its ‘implicit metaphysic;’ asking if what one is experiencing is Heidegger’s ‘what is called thinking;’ thinking about whether the poem is getting one to think” (Fletcher 1991, pp. 11–12). Hacker (1990) reminds us that “[t]he verb ‘to think’ is multi-faceted, being connected with opining (‘I think we ought to . . .’), believing (‘I think she is in the garden’), conceiving, imagining, fancying, and envisaging.” . . . reflecting, musing, meditating . . . as well as to deliberating, speculating, reasoning, and inferring.” For a good discussion of Wittgenstein on the concept of thinking, see (Hertzberg 2007). See also (Ellis 1981). cf. (RPP, II, 216): “If one also includes working thoughtfully, without any talking in our consideration, one sees that our concept ‘thinking’ is a widely ramified one.” cf. Hacker, *Meaning and Mind*, p. 154, on the “adverbial” aspect of thought.

⁷ cf. LC, 8: “What belongs to a language game is a whole culture.”

then of observations and insights appearing “beside” us readers (*para-doxa*), and of criteria and rules “above” or “ahead” of ourselves (*meta-doxa*), pointing different ways at once as we read.⁸

Considering Bishop’s poems as grammatical and rhetorical examples of issues involving such thinking and understanding has a couple of advantages. First, Bishop herself has noted that, though she herself was not interested in ideas *per se*, she has always been keenly concerned with (as she put it) “the mind thinking,” meaning not some mental accompaniment to words but rather the mind reflexively made manifest in its expressive activities.⁹ Yet this eccentric tilt of her work remains oblique to us, so we need to “[turn] our whole examination around” (*PI*, § 108) for a better view. Second, throughout her life Bishop was preoccupied with various existential concepts, even with foundational “myths” or “world-pictures,” that is, with fundamental models of understanding, with the grounds that such pictures make present, and with the way such foundations are manifested in language and poetry.¹⁰ Now, it happens that these matters stand in especial relief against Bishop’s skeptical but abiding interest in Christianity, so it is in this light, diffuse but pervasive here, that I explore them.

On beginning we could really use an abbreviated set of grammatical-rhetorical principles, for all of Bishop’s efforts across her career display such principles from different angles. Historically grammar and rhetoric have most often been theoretically circumscribed as distinct studies or arts, or alternatively as broad principled sciences, but practically they have also functioned as imperialistic meta-orientations, so to speak—architectonic ways of scaling intellectual disciplines to words and world.¹¹ Some versions of medieval grammar and Renaissance rhetoric, for instance, provided “language about how discourse functions under contingent situations, from the smallest units to the largest conceptual fields, from intention and the production of meaning to reception and understanding, from judgment to argument, from persuasion to action. (Copeland 2007); cf. (Struever 1970); see also (Copeland 1995; Kahn 1985; Carruthers 1998, p. 223)”¹². This is how I propose to think about rhetoric here, I mean as an overall orientation and attitude for looking (a “picture”) and as a way of thinking (a kind of “method”), both of which are broadly and deeply practical. For me these large concepts postulate an orientation toward life and thought as biological and normative processes and actions, within and by means of which the human animal probes the environment (from Lat. *probare*, “to prove”) to which it belongs. That is, we always find ourselves in, having already inherited, some specific time and place; here and there we fashion instruments by which we adapt to on-going change, transforming complex environments according to our individual and group interests, all the while being transformed by them for better or worse. In this way we make our actions, activities, products, not least our arts and sciences, function as open-ended ways of establishing and transforming ourselves amidst contingency and change: “Concepts are the expression of our interest and direct our interest” (*PI*, § 570).¹³

⁸ What I mean here is hinted at in (Roberts 2013, p. 56): “Riddles for the Anglo-Saxons were not any old word-game or puzzling question; they were rituals, poems, a canon of questions about the world and ways of seeing that world.” See also Altieri (2015, p. 131) who is interested in how the art work “points toward future uses rather than ideas of capturing some abiding core of wisdom.” The contemporary Italian photographer Ghirri (2016, p. 22) is downright Bishopian when he explains that “My aim is not to make PHOTOGRAPHS, but rather CHARTS and MAPS that might at the same time constitute photographs.”

⁹ Bishop to Stevenson, 5 December 1964, emphasis added.

¹⁰ 51: I mean “fundamental models” in the way Wittgenstein speaks of Freud in *LC*, 51: “What he [Freud] has done is to propound a new myth. The attractiveness of the suggestion, for instance, that all anxiety is a repetition of the anxiety of birth trauma, is just the attractiveness of a mythology. ‘It is all the outcome of something that happened long ago.’ Almost like referring to a totem.”

¹¹ E.g., Aristotle’s *On Interpretation, Poetics, Rhetoric*, or Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours Linguistique*. cf. (Sloane and Jost 2012).

¹² “To characterize such works as I have done is to insist that all medieval arts were conceived and perceived essentially as rhetoric, whether they took the form of poems or paintings or buildings or music.”

¹³ This comment characterizes an important aspect of what has been called Wittgenstein’s “linguistic Kantianism” or “transcendental linguism.” The rough idea here is that he looks to derive non-foundational conditions for the possibility of phenomena not in Kantian categories but as founded in a this-worldly pragmatics of language, experience, and action; cf. (Hacker 2013, p. 13): “The a priori nature of things is fixed by the sense-determining rules for the use of expressions signifying things. To suppose that things, their properties and relations, have an a priori nature in any other sense, is to fall victim to an illusion.” In my judgment Charles Altieri (*Reckoning with the Imagination*, 64 *passim*), otherwise so brilliant on

Provisionally, then, let grammar, understood as a rule-governed art for making intelligible discursive wholes, encompass (i) what we normally call grammar, the combinatory rules governing signs, syntax, sentences and so on, and the like in a semiotic system; (ii) the mostly implicit, unwritten promptings (rules, Wittgensteinian “criteria”) of our concepts, philosophical or not, when they are in linguistic use; and (iii) the clarification of our words in use as enabling, sometimes even as transcendental conditions for knowing and acting. Grammar in that last sense falls under what John Stuart Mill, John Henry Newman and others in the nineteenth century called getting a “view” of something, what Wittgenstein later calls an “overview” or “survey” of concepts in language, “through a process of ordering” (*PI*, § 92) specific uses of words: “The concept of a surveyable [or perspicuous] representation . . . characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matters.” “A surveyable/perspicuous representation produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’” (*PI*, § 122). Grammar seeks perspicuity as to how concepts relate to each other and to the world in ordinary language in use: “We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order for a particular purpose, one out of many possible orders, not *the* order” (*PI*, § 132). Its traditional instruments have always been diverse, but they include empirical-qua-logical statements, distinctions between and assimilations of fact and value, description of the conceptual possibilities of meaning, and the articulation of rules for intelligible wholes.

In turn now let rhetoric encompass the linguistic means to evoke the situated, sometimes passing, always value- and emotion-laden interests and circumstances that situate human rationality, imagination, and will in coordinated but unstable ways. As a technique of inquiry, interpretation, argument, and shared judgment, rhetoric can be employed as an impartial instrument for deciding on practical matters. Understood, however, as an overall “actional” orientation, a way (*one* way) of organizing thinking in all realms, it characterizes my own aim of trying to bring about what Aristotle calls “good judgment” in particular cases.¹⁴ Its traditional instruments can be broadly schematized: (i) so-called “topics” (*topoi, loci*), which function as standing “re-sources” we can avail ourselves of again and again to conceptualize an indeterminate situation, person, problem, text. Such re-sources often take the form of more or less open-ended terms or pairs of terms that delimit some indefinite range of possibilities, and that function either as place-holders for substantive issues or as the formal relations that shape substantive terms in thought and discourse (See for example the essays by (Olmsted and Smigelskis 2004)); (ii) “accepted opinions” of the *sensus communis* (*doxa* and *endoxa* and *metadoxa*, stated or implied) from which we give situations and problems meaning and significance; (iii) “arguments” (*logoi*) of many different kinds and structures available for either side of a case; and (iv) provisional “judgment” and/or “decision” (*krisis*) made by those involved in the issue. On this dual-aspect view, grammar and rhetoric involve each other, neither is viable without the other, and one is known partly through the other¹⁵. As Wittgenstein also postulates: “We refer by the phrase ‘understanding a word’

rhetorical exemplification, misleadingly overstates Wittgenstein’s commitment to binary “oppositions” like “knowledge” and “understanding.”

¹⁴ On rhetoric as a universal art, see especially (McKeon 1987; McKeon and Swenson 2005; McKeon 1994; McKeon 2016). For related work, see (Watson 1985).

¹⁵ Analytically distinguishable, grammar and rhetoric holistically interpenetrate in practice, and both emphasize the following: (i) the contingency of our world and the priority of the possibilities of words and texts over de-contextualized conceptual problems; (ii) the values, commitments and purposes of specific speakers and audience-readers as these show up not only in ordinary language used in standard (specialized or non-specialized) ways, but in ordinary, non-standard efforts (such as poetry, criticism, philosophy) beyond immediate information and other pressing needs; (iii) respect for the perspectivalism that belongs to words and texts in following established concepts and grammatical rules, but also in projecting them anew in novel ways; (iv) posing words and deeds as two sides of the same phenomenon; and (v) bringing language to use to find functional answers to new questions and problems. cf. (a) (Garver and Lee 1994, p. 62): “Wittgenstein . . . includes logic and rhetoric in what he calls ‘grammar’;” and 63 on rhetoric: “it is more useful to think of rhetoric as the general study of aptness and inaptness in the use of various sorts of expressions in various sorts of circumstances. Thus rhetoric is not a matter of pure form but has to do with the relation of language to the world (that is, to life) through the relation of linguistic expressions to the specific circumstances in which their use makes sense. A remark of (Wittgenstein 1980) in his *Last Writings* might serve as a motto for rhetoric in this broad sense: ‘Words have meaning only in the stream of life.’” (b) Nowadays it is still overlooked that such robust possibilities for discovery and

not necessarily to that which happens while we are saying or hearing it, but to the whole environment of the event of saying it" (BB, § 157).¹⁶ If "[g]rammar tells us what kind of object anything is" (PI, § 373), then rhetoric tells us for whom, when, how and where.

Specifically, then, I want to probe several related matters: first, how a handful of related terms coined by Wittgenstein in Part Two of *Philosophical Investigations* concerned with aspect perception and getting a view or picture of something may illuminate and be illuminated by poetry—in this case by several of Bishop's poems, and particularly by "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance."¹⁷ Second, I want to ask how a rhetorical grammar might bear on the meaningfulness of religious language, for this poem is perhaps Bishop's most overtly religious and even theological. Finally, I want to consider briefly, as Bishop implicitly does, what it means to say that some people see the world religiously and some do not, and how this relates to analogical language and thought.

2. "Thus Should Have Been Our Travels:/Serious, Engravable."

Thus begins—as retrospective conclusion—"Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," frustrated in hope and resigned in tone. Accordingly, we readers assume from the outset the speaker's non-figurative comparison of religious perception to sense perception—specifically, her pronounced dis-analogy between her present collocation of scenes lifted from a Bible near at hand, and remembered scenes from her own travels. This dis-analogy introduces an order of contrasts between what is possible and what is actual, contrasts displayed throughout the poem, most saliently in the first two of its three sections, between uniform holy sites ("sad and still;" (l. 5); "always the silence;" (l. 17)) in the first section (ll. 1–31), and diverse sounds, people, actions, and places of travel in the second (ll. 32–64). The former are plausibly said by her to be "serious" and "engrable," if for no other reason than that they are imaginatively on view in front of her engraved in sacred scripture (engraved even in illustrations—in lithographs, probably¹⁸—of actual graves; (l. 10); whereas "our travels" (l. 1), presented in a conflation of memories of various trips typical of the sophisticated tourist, are not.

All this is visibly on display, but something else, equally unconcealed yet harder to put one's finger on, something as it were elusive about the distinction between the "tired and a touch/familiar" (ll. 3–4) and the "foreign" (l. 6), operates unnoticed in Bishop's itinerary from beginning to end. What I mean to put on offer in staking this claim is not a new interpretation of the poem but a descriptive

reflection were commonly part of poetry and criticism from the ancients up through the eighteenth century, when even an empirically-minded philosopher like David Hume could write that "in many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and reflection." (On Hume's method as rhetorical, see Crane 1967). By Hume's time it had become awkward to speak this way, since his epistemic Enlightenment orientation to atomistic sensations and ideas, and the faculty psychology built with them, resisted blending or even analogizing discrete concepts like "image" and "idea," "fact" and "value," "poetry" and "rhetoric," "thinking" and "feeling" and "imagining." With the various linguistic and other turns over the last two centuries, however, it is once again a commonplace that thinkers across intellectual disciplines blur genres, ideas and methods at will, and that once self-contained bodies of knowledge increasingly locate their grounding "environmentally" in practical action in situated words and deeds. Depending on the circumstances, moreover, a contextual or operational approach elevates whatever virtues it finds it needs at the time: clarity and Wittgensteinian "perspicuity" certainly, but defined to fit the language game that is being played.

¹⁶ Many authors might be cited for support and clarification of terms like "existential," "pragmatic," "operational," "linguistic" and "contextualist;" for two interesting but neglected authors, see (Pepper 1942, pp. 232–33): "The [most basic] contextualistic categories are derived from what we may call the total given event," that is, an act within its contexts. Since contexts change, what a given act is said to be will change: "acts or events are all intrinsically complex, composed of interconnected activities with continuously changing patterns" (pp. 232–33). In many philosophic orientations or "pictures," "one can pretty clearly distinguish categories" (p. 234), but far less easily in a contextualism, where categories may be distinguished for some purposes and assimilated for others; and "Contextualist Criticism" in (Pepper 1945), see also (Garver and Lee 1994, pp. 152–53).

¹⁷ For this and other poems cited in this essay, see Elizabeth Bishop (2011). On getting a new picture of something, see (Lueken 1997).

¹⁸ See: (The Elizabeth Bishop Centenary 2010) "The directly identifiable primary source for this poem still exists: the Bulmer Family Bible, given to Bishop's maternal grandparents as a wedding present in 1871 by Mary Elizabeth Black Hutchinson Gourley, Elizabeth Hutchinson Bulmer's mother. Its publishing information includes: *New Devotional and Practical Pictorial Family Bible*, Chicago: The National Publishing Co., 1870."

account of something identifiably *there* in it (if it is there), something that readers and critics have likely felt if not yet clearly seen or articulated.¹⁹ One way to circumscribe what follows is to state that the speaker's appeals arise out of, and proceed over, unstable grounds of paradox and riddle. Just two examples: the poem *begins* by ending ("Thus"); and more subtly, the speaker's unengraved travels *have* been engraved, after all—*there*, on the page of poetry in front of us.²⁰

For now we can try to educe that paradoxical something by adding that Bishop's initial dis-analogy is not symmetrically transitive or reversible.²¹ To illustrate what I mean: Consider how, though Winston Churchill doesn't look like a baby, it doesn't follow that a baby can't look like Winston Churchill. On the contrary, it's an open secret that other people's babies are the spitting image of Winston Churchill. So here: though the travels of tourists rarely rise to the level of the engravable (much less to being publicly, permanently engraved, probably just because they are not "serious" like those Biblical scenes), it doesn't follow that images of sacred places may not look just like our own fugitive travels. Quite the opposite in fact, since the poem subsequently insists on this: when we turn again to the motley of situations registered in the first two sections, the persons and places in either section vary so little in outward character from those in the other that it's difficult to recall who or what goes where. Does the cobbled courtyard belong to serious section one or un-serious section two? Can we readily distinguish that courtyard from the geometric lines of crisscrossing Collegians in St. Peter's Square (ll. 36–37)? Speaking of collegians, who says that Khadour in section two, in his "smart burnoose" (l. 64), isn't but one more in a long line of those nefarious Arabs ("plotting, probably, / against our Christian Empire;" (ll. 6–7)) extended from section one? Do the "little pockmarked prostitutes" (l. 50) (section two) really belie the noble "human figure / far gone in history and theology" (ll. 14–15)—Mary Magdalen, say—in section one? As I understand it, the answer to these questions is: Hard to say, really. Anyway, those distinctions are not obvious.—Not obvious, no; perhaps one can't tell at all. But then the point? After all, the distinctions being requested have already been postulated by the dis-analogy up front!—Well, perhaps that is one point: from the start we too are taking as postulated, as a matter of course ("tired and a bit familiar"), the contrast between serious religious "vocation" (call it) and un-serious "avocation" ("our travels"). Maybe that assumption is blinding us to links not yet evident between the serious and the non-serious, between the believer's God-event of the Incarnation and the speaker's "What I Did on My Summer Vacation."

My present challenge to the speaker's structural dis-analogy between the sacred and secular, by way of eliciting similarities between these realms, holds up well, I believe, across all three sections of the poem, in fact so much so that we could easily lose sight of what the initial dis-analogy is based on—for it's not the case that the speaker merely *avows* that her travels differ. They *do* differ. But how? Costello (1991, p. 135) notes that "the opposition between the first two stanzas [section 1 and section 2] is not absolute." I'll return to this issue in detail in Part 4, but I need first to allow for two notable exceptions to my claim about similarities. The first exception occurs at the end of section one:

The eye drops, weighted, through the lines
the burrin made, the lines that move apart
like ripples above sand,
dispersing storms, God's spreading fingerprint,

¹⁹ See (Warnock 1976, pp. 46–48), where art is a bona fide intellectual instrument—a "showing-forth" and an exemplification.

²⁰ What Margaret McGowan has said of Montaigne in (McGowan 1974, p. 69), that he was himself a paradoxicalist and a great admirer of Cicero's *Paradoxa*, applies to Bishop: "[Paradox] involves the reader in the thinking process . . . it flattered intelligence, . . . stimulating further speculation. Essentially the paradox is open-ended: it teases the mind by running counter to normal assumptions and expectations; and it rarely seems (on the surface at any rate) to solve anything, but rather invites the reader into the thought, so that he might carry its implications further and make up his mind for himself." The speaker's list of her travels is itself a rhetorical paradox: an epideictic display (and so far forth a "praise") of that which is imputed, before and after, to be un-praiseworthy—what the tradition of paradox calls "rhopological" images of ordinary things.

²¹ On the non-reversibility and "salience" of comparisons, see (Fogelin 2011), who cites (Tversky 1997).

and painfully, finally, that ignite
in watery prismatic white-and-blue. (ll. 26–31)

Unlike the preceding Biblical scenes and unlike the subsequent scenes of travel, the imagery here is grammatically (syntactically and semantically) ambivalent and rhetorically indeterminate. The leading agents and actions, imagined by the speaker and not pictured in the book, are nonsense when abstracted from the point of their use, though not simply meaningless, since “God’s spreading fingerprint” establishes metaphorically something not only serious but sublime, albeit tenuous, and rapidly dispersed in an airy fracture of color. The second exception, pictured in the book (“Open the book;” l. 66) and not imagined by the speaker, also sublime but rather static in black and white (“unbreathing,” “colorless;” ll. 71–72), concludes the final section 3, where the divine presence appears metaphorically in a different though no less customary way, now represented as light and flame:

Why couldn’t we have seen
this old Nativity while we were at it?
—the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
and, lulled within, a family with pets,
—and looked and looked our infant sight away. (ll. 68–74)

This second grouping of lines has been profitably dwelled on by Langdon Hammer, a literary critic unusual in his recognizing in Bishop what he calls her “philosophical” preoccupations. In this regard Hammer seconds Bishop’s friend and mentor, the poet Marianne Moore, who said about her that “the *rational, considering* quality in [Bishop’s] work is its strength (Marianne Moore, quoted in [Goldensohn 1992](#)).” I think Moore is correct, and Hammer also, though “philosophical” may not be just the right word (there may not be just one right word). In the passage below what Hammer chooses to point out, and what he has to say about it, are in my view accurate and unobjectionable in themselves, and are doubly useful because they represent a general critical consensus on this poem. In fact, for these reasons what I take to be a quite different order of achievement on Bishop’s part, more comprehensive in feeling and intelligence, waits on us, so to speak, unseen and unattended—though it will take the remainder of this paper to show how and why. Hammer writes:

The Nativity is the scene of the Incarnation, that moment when the Word is made flesh; Christmas morning, that moment when the divine takes human form and so becomes present in the world. This is specifically here, as Bishop imagines it, a scene of revelation. That wonderful phrase, “the dark ajar”—as if the shadow were a door and you could enter it; “the rocks breaking with light”—that which is solid opening. What emerges is a flame, a sign of spirit. But notice how in this light, the sacred is secularized. What Bishop finds there is not the holy family but “a family with pets.” There is nostalgia here, in this poem, poignant and powerful; that is, a nostalgia not so much for the holy as for the family once constituted by their relation to the holy, the family with pets but also the family that gathered around the book to look at them—a family gathered through religious practice, who might then have “looked and looked our infant sight away.” In that, looking expresses a kind of primal longing for community and for human connection—a longing expressed through looking, importantly for Bishop, which is really what the poet is doing in “The Map,” I think, in the way that she invites us into her act of looking in that poem. Here Bishop’s

nostalgia is sad but also resigned. This Nativity is a scene that can be remembered and looked at from afar but not entered into, as the belief system that it comes out of and refers to can be looked at from afar but not entered into.²²

Once again, I appreciate what Hammer has to say here as adequate both to what he sees and very likely to what a majority of competent observers see. Nevertheless we might consider the possibility that “there is not *one genuine*, proper case of such description” (*PI*, II § 160). If that is so, then at least some of those same readers, understanding such a scene by placing it in contexts that make sense to them, may also possibly be proceeding apace in bad faith, unmindful of how it might be seen otherwise.—Well, “seen” maybe in some sense, but only by some.—Admittedly, only by some, probably. But recall that Hammer, in his own adverting to Bishop’s poem “The Map,” divines that the poet herself “invites us into her act of looking,” and that both of these poems (like many others of hers) actually stage complexities of “looking” and “seeing.” In other words Hammer himself may be intuiting that something further might in some sense be seen, as if peripherally registering a range of phenomena that Bishop in fact does feature throughout her work—and I mean not only her skills at detailed and apt description of particulars so rightly lauded by readers and critics, but her interest in “crossed” concepts, like “looking” and “seeing” and many others not yet accounted for meta-critically by anyone.²³

In Part 3 below we can draw on Wittgenstein to develop some of these issues, but here I can anticipate some of the complexity behind the culminating question of “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance” (hereafter “Over 2k”): “Why couldn’t we have seen/ this old Nativity while we were at it? . . . /—and looked and looked our infant sight away” (ll. 68–69, l. 73). Only briefly consider, as Hammer encourages us to do, Bishop’s opening lines from “The Map.” Her first words (of her first poem, in her very first book) enact what proves to be a characteristic mode of thoughtfulness pervasive in Bishop’s poems throughout her career:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
Showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
Where weeds hang from the simple blue to green.
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under. . . ? (ll. 1–5)

By “characteristic mode of thoughtfulness” I want to describe a habit in Bishop of picturing different *kinds* of data in *multiple* possible ways—in the present case to begin with, actual or represented land in actual or represented water, and either one “with” and/or “as” green shadows/shallows. This technique belongs to what Wittgenstein calls “seeing aspects” and “aspect-dawning” and “continuous aspect perception.”²⁴ Of course the mere fact that an author gets us to “see differently” is not headlines. All good poets at least, especially (though not only) in tropes like simile and metaphor, get us to see things anew. What may be noteworthy is that, while metaphors and similes arguably involve “seeing-as,” not all seeing-as is figurative much less metaphorical, so that it remains to be understood why Bishop is drawn to the more discursive and prosaic technique.²⁵ In the unassuming

²² (Hammer 2017). cf. CV, 64e.

²³ cf. (Ghirri 2016, p. 114) speaking of technological transformations in photography: “Today the inside and the outside are both crossed by ever faster and more frequent visual stimuli, and these new technologies have blown the circuits of representation.”

²⁴ Like the term language game, Wittgenstein’s many aspect-concepts are intended to elude straightforward definition. For now Stephen Mulhall’s observation may suffice: “When an aspect of a picture [or text] *dawns*, we recognize that a new kind of description of the perceived figure might be given, and we see it in those terms; when we *continuously* perceive that aspect, we take the status of the figure as the particular kind of thing . . . for granted . . . In this sense, aspects are on a different level to colour and shape [or, say, the sound of words] because the latter describe parts or properties of objects rather than objects considered as a whole;” (Mulhall 1990, pp. 28–29), emphasis added.

²⁵ The literature on metaphor is large and growing; see especially (White 1996; Stern 2000; Fogelin 2014; Donaghue 2014).

examples of seeing-as in this passage, for example, Bishop activates various conceptual possibilities; I can't exhaust them here, but the following may provoke further thinking:

- (i) In light of the title "The Map," imagine that you are looking at a map: "it" (let's say the area representing land) is shaded green. At land's end (perhaps differently shaded), *there*—are those shadows, or shallows? See them alternately as such.
- (ii) Now, given the ambiguity of the first line ("Land lies in water"), imagine that you are looking at *actual* land in water with those same characteristics and possibilities.
- (iii) Now *toggle back and forth in imagination* if you will (if you can) between seeing that topography with those characteristics now *as* real, now *as* mapped.
- (iv) Re-read the "it" that is "shadowed green," first as (real or represented) green *land* and then green *water*—and *then* as shading (cross-hatching, say) on a map.
- (v) Now toggle between seeing real or represented land-in-water and seeing the land as "lifting the sea from under."
- (vi) See the shading in line two *as* shadows cast (say) by a coastal cliff, then *as* dusky shallows of surf hugging the coast; now alternate those images first as mapped, then as real.

Except for the specifics in (vi), which may or may not share "internal relations" with what Bishop pictures,²⁶ the possibilities are palpably *there* in the text, and choices among them, reflex if not conscious, will get made. Meanwhile my point about concepts is further complicated by the fact that we readers are not, not perceptually anyway, "seeing" anything at all, I mean other than Bishop's words on the page as we read (and maybe not even those, since we might have them memorized). We are seeing, but now in the sense of "imagining," "picturing," something to ourselves. Better still: some of us, imagining that we are looking at either a map or a real coastline, *may* be picturing land, cliffs, surf—and some of us may not be. In any case the scene itself gets even busier, for in the lines that follow the shading-*cum*/qua-shadows/shallows is somehow also "showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges" (l. 3) . . . "But "showing" in what sense? Is *that* something we are also to see ourselves when we imagine looking at a map? And just what *do* we imagine or interpret when the poet further asks, "Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under?" (l. 5) And just what, finally, is Bishop asking of us in "Over 2k," I mean when the speaker asks, "Why couldn't we have seen/this old Nativity while we were at it?"

3. Aspect Perception: Continuous, Changing, Blindness to

No doubt we'll need to proceed patiently with all of this, for "[t]he concept of seeing makes a tangled impression" (PI, II § 160)—tangled, again, well beyond the several lines of thought I hope to secure here. To recapitulate: I am proposing that Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect perception in *Philosophical Investigations* can help us appreciate several of Bishop's grammatical-rhetorical interests in "the mind thinking" as this is so richly made a theme, and displayed, in her poetry.²⁷ To make that possible, I'll give a brief account of "seeing-as" in the context of a philosopher's methods and aims in the first sub-section below; in the second I'll offer a *prima facie* case for Bishop's own interest in aspect perception throughout her oeuvre, acknowledging comparisons and contrasts between her own poetic aims and Wittgenstein's related but different purposes. Only then, in Part 4, will we be able to see concretely how Bishop, in "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," toggles between continuous aspect perception and emergent aspect change in *various* ways. Since all of this

²⁶ The question here is *how much* (how many specifics) one is to imagine in seeing (say) a "likeness" between two faces, or in seeing a shaded space *as* (say) "shadows." I address this below.

²⁷ cf. Edward Minar (quoting Rush Rhees), "The Philosophical Significance of Meaning-Blindness," in William Day and (Krebs 2010): "'seeing something as something' [is] concerned with the principal theme of the *Investigations*, which is the relation between language and logic;" and Norton Batkin ("Aesthetic Analogies," in Day and Krebs, eds., p. 24): "questions of our capacity [for] 'noticing [seeing] an aspect'—and topics of experience and interpretation—are central concerns of aesthetics and criticism."

concerns poetry, moreover, we'll naturally need to consider her own seeing-as itself "as," indifferently, both style and substance.²⁸ This means that we'll need to place seeing-as in relation to at least some of her other grammatical, rhetorical, and poetic techniques (the latter including sound, tone, diction, imagery, syntax, and irony, but also analogy and metaphor). In the concluding Part 5 we'll briefly round out this "close-to" look at a single poem, by venturing a schematic "view" of analogical religious language, thought, and perception in poetry.

3.1. Seeing-as: Wittgenstein's "investigation of the [philosophical] 'foundations'" (PI, II § 372)

On the whole *Philosophical Investigations* looks to teach us about, and move us to, perhaps even have us feel some satisfaction in, a new picture of how we live with our concepts and our language games in the ways we do live, or might live. I mean that the author is engaged in modern versions of classical "*docere, movere, delectare*"—that is, good ol' rhetorical persuasion:

I very often draw your attention to certain differences, e.g., in these [university] classes I tried to show you Infinity is not so mysterious as it looks. What I'm doing is also persuasion. If someone says 'There is not a difference,' and I say 'There is a difference' I am persuading, I am saying 'I don't want you to look at it like that.'"²⁹

Such non-polemical persuasion is the very medium of Wittgenstein's intellectual "therapy," and is addressed specifically to those who are stuck in traditional conceptual confusions and linguistic fantasies, usually philosophers and other critical thinkers: "If you are led by psycho-analysis to say that really you thought so and so or that really your motive was so and so, this is not a matter of discovery, but of persuasion. In a different way [of thinking] you could have been persuaded of something different" (*LC*, p. 27). This is a therapy rhetorically undertaken chiefly by concrete examples rather than abstract argument, much as personal therapy proceeds, not by theoretical dicta and deductions, but by examining specific situations for their particular constellations of felt concepts.³⁰ In demonstrating in this manner, in exemplary cases and examples, such an author/therapist can show that: (1) concrete circumstances shape how we think of and use criteria of our concepts in other than univocal or equivocal ways; (2) factual description of particular uses of concepts persuade us rationally better than arguable interpretations mediated by general normative claims; and (3) examples provide shareable models with which to measure future projections and situations in an ongoing and open-ended way. Thus the therapist can (4) stymie any undue generalizing and rush to judgment.

A little more specifically, the first part of *Philosophical Investigations* deflates long-standing dogmatism about the "crystalline logic" putatively organizing philosophical argument and reveals what Wittgenstein calls "family resemblances" among certain concepts, indicating by this a relative porousness of conceptual bounds when these are functioning in language games in situated contexts. The second part of the book, on aspect perception, complements the first, but it also importantly develops and balances it. For "seeing-as" makes us aware not only of temptations to philosophical dogmatism, but of equally pernicious temptations to easy relativisms of concepts, by highlighting the fact that, when we see-as, we are seeing both selectively and collectively: that is, seeing and seeing-as

²⁸ By far the best recent account of how these two concepts cross is (Altieri 2009, pp. 420–41): Altieri identifies "how artists and writers emphasize sheer self-reflexive mastery of the medium as the vehicle for a whole variety of purposes" (p. 425).

²⁹ *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 27. I use the idea of "persuasion" purposely, as does Wittgenstein regarding changing another's mind about fundamental issues: cf. OC, pp. 611–612: "When two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic. I said I would 'combat' the other man—but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion." See also related essays by Demos (1932) and Rescher (2011).

³⁰ cf. (Kemp 2016, p. 21): "This picking out and exaggerating equates to traditional rhetoric, which involves the effective demonstration of the true or plausible." See also See also Charles Altieri, *Reckoning*, p. 134, on treating the example as having to take the place of the concept. And (Stafford 1999).

are restrained in part by public, inter-personal criteria in a shared form of life. Hence the second part is a fitting culmination of the whole, since it hedges against sweeping claims about the ongoing interpretability of words, without, however, dictating possibilities (much less actual choices) of our future linguistic conceptualizations.

As for aspect perception itself: recall, first, some of the basic ways that all of us use the concept of “seeing.” There is (a) our physically, perceptually, seeing the world, its people and places and so on. There is also (b) our seeing different kinds of pictures of the world, in diagrams, blueprints, maps, drawings, illustrations, photographs, art works, whether on a page or canvas or screen. Then there is (c) the related seeing of images, as when we see objects, situations, people or actions according to the words figuring them, for instance when we hear a story or read a poem. Additionally we (d) see images in imagination when we remember an event and see it again in the mind’s eye, or (with fewer constraints) imagine an event that perhaps no one has ever actually witnessed or perhaps ever could witness in the real world. In these latter examples we “see” according to established “projections,” as Stanley Cavell calls them, of our normal concept of perceptual “seeing”—both like and unlike it.³¹ Finally, in different contexts, “seeing” itself has, of course, different meanings: “seeing” to indicate understanding (“I see what you mean”), being aware (“I do see your acts of kindness”), accepting a situation (“I see exactly what’s happened here”), knowing how to continue a series (“Oh, I see how it works”), having the answer to a problem (“I think I see how to fix it”), grasping or following the implications of something (“Can you see where I’m going with this?”), and so on—for such a concept is also always susceptible to *further* projections, as Wittgenstein has stated: “Here there is an enormous number of interrelated phenomena and *possible* concepts (PI, II § 155, emphasis added).

On second thought in fact, re-focusing Bishop for a moment in this light, it’s little wonder that her central question, “Why couldn’t we have seen?” (l. 68), now sounds not merely ambiguous but paradoxical and even riddling: “couldn’t have seen” in which of its senses and meanings? What is being asked, and why? Is it a causal explanation the speaker demands here (What, was the shrine closed? Had you run out of time?); does she want some normative reason, good or bad (the visiting Armenians were way too loud)? Is it, perhaps more theoretically, an analysis—philosophical, theological, religious—of relevant concepts that name “ultimate” conditions for “seeing?”—Or is it rather that the speaker is whining here, just venting? or lodging a complaint of some kind? And “Why couldn’t we have seen?”—“we” who? And “have seen/ . . . while we were at it?”—“while” when? At *what*?

Not all riddles have answers certainly, in any case answers that are not themselves riddles. I personally find it easy to pretend that Bishop is all but playing a change on another riddle a few lines later, about the dark, I mean the old one about a door: “When is the dark not the dark? When it’s ‘ajar’ (l. 70).” In his own investigations Wittgenstein riddles us right down a philosophical rabbit hole—“When is a rabbit not a rabbit?”—“When [Now!] it’s a duck”—though not before slipping into our pockets a few weighty distinctions:

Two uses of the word “see” [sehen]. The one: “What do you see there?”—I see this (and then a description, a drawing, a copy). The other: “I see a likeness [Ahnlichkeit] in these two faces”—let the man to whom I tell this be seeing the faces as clearly as I do myself. What is important is the categorical difference between the two “objects” of sight. (PI, II § 111)

In this thought experiment Wittgenstein distinguishes, not definitively but as an aid to reflection, the concepts of *visually* seeing something, and *seeing* something *as* something (his subsequent examples will stress the pervasiveness of aspect perception beyond the visual or imagistic). Here we get the difference between *perceptually* seeing a face (e.g., “colour and shape PI, II § 136), and then, in a modified

³¹ cf. PI, II §254: “The concept of an aspect is related to the concept of imagination. In other words, the concept ‘Now I see it as . . . ’ is related to ‘Now I am imagining *that*.’”

sense, what we also call “seeing”—here, seeing a likeness between this face and another. The idea is that likeness is not present to a viewer in the way a face is present; likeness is rather a seeing the face “as” something: “Seeing as . . . ’ is not part of perception. And therefore it is like seeing, and again not like seeing” (PI, II § 137). Moreover, “since it [seeing-as] is the description of a perception,”

it can also be called the expression of thought.—If you are looking at the object, you need not think of it; but if you are having the visual experience expressed by [an] exclamation [registering one’s seeing-as], you are also thinking of what you see. // Hence the flashing of an aspect on us seems half visual experience, half thought”. (PI, II § 197e, first emphasis added).³²

To apply these distinctions ourselves we’ll need a few further terms. If at first a person happens not to see a likeness but comes to do so, Wittgenstein calls this “noticing an aspect” (l. 113), “the dawning of” an aspect, “being struck by” an aspect, or an aspect’s “lighting up.” When that happens, “aspect change” has occurred: a resemblance dawns, one goes from seeing just that particular face to seeing the face as “internally related” to another face: “[W]hat I perceive in the lighting up of an aspect is not a [physical] property of the object, but an *internal relation* between it and other objects” (PI, II § 247, emphasis added).³³ Before the change the aspects may have been “hidden not by obstacles in the scene itself, but by barriers in us, by our failure to ‘see connexions’.”³⁴ When we do see, what feels striking about the change is that it seems paradoxical: although nothing about the face physically changes as one looks at it, the face *does* suddenly change in the sense that it now appears different to anyone looking.³⁵

Well, but “anyone” can’t be right, for it happens that some people may never come to see the resemblance; such persons Wittgenstein calls “aspect blind” (PI, II § 257). For the aspect-blind person what others call aspect change is two discrete happenings, and they see or feel no paradox. Take a different kind of seeing-as: Wittgenstein’s minimalist drawing of Jastrow’s duck/rabbit in *Philosophical Investigations*. Some people simply do not see at first, perhaps ever see, *two* profiles—the rabbit facing right, the duck facing left—hence will not experience a “change of aspects.” (Think of a child-spectator at a play who can see her mother on stage but not her mother “as” the character she portrays.) Such a person is apt to treat others’ claims to see two profiles to be merely a willful choice about how to visualize the picture, and declarations of “paradox” a product of subjectivity. Wittgenstein does allow that the aspect blind may be able, in their own way, to “follow the idea” that the picture can also be treated as that of either a duck or a rabbit, but they don’t do so naturally, that is, without question or hesitation, and with confidence. They can be told, and thus be said to come to “know” such things about the picture, and they can proceed to “interpret” the picture accordingly, but

³² PI, II §216: “Only someone conversant with the shapes of the two animals can ‘see the duck-rabbit aspect.’” Thus Wittgenstein’s solution to the paradox is not an inner event but rather the outward criteria we use—a larger framework of practices and our mastery of techniques we tap whenever we undertake pictures or words. Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 46, puts this in Kantian terms: “in so far as an object is seen to have a specifiable purpose outside itself, as a tool has a specific purpose or function. . . . the judgment of that object cannot be a purely aesthetic judgment. . . Its [aesthetic] purpose must, if it is considered as an aesthetic object, be internal to itself.”

³³ In the present case the internal relation may be one of similarity of expression or any number of things—analogy of how parts are related to other parts, analogy of functions, of ratios of more and less, of scale, of strength, and so on. Such relations are (what Aristotle and others in the rhetorical tradition meant by, and what are now often called) “formal topics” useful for *heuresis* and *ingenium* (discovery/invention). They are also similar to what Heidegger in the philosophical tradition calls “formal indications;” see (Mulhall 2015).

³⁴ Minar, p. 185. These barriers can be those of character and will: see part 5 below.

³⁵ Wittgenstein eschews any physiological or psychological explanations, for example, that one’s eyes are moving in certain patterns, or that some “inner organization” of the visual impression changes mentally, noting that “[o]ur problem is not a causal but a conceptual one” (PI, II § 214e; and PI, II § 183; 338; 365, 366, 371). Stephen Mulhall treats this matter in (Mulhall 1990; 2001).

they don't, for whatever causes or reasons, simply "see" the two animal faces themselves.³⁶ In contrast, those who *do* experience the dual aspects of this picture see and talk of them without feeling any worry about relativism or any need to appeal to hypothesis or arbitration (cf. *PI*, II §§ 168, 216, 222). They can toggle between the two aspects at will, they feel the riddle or paradox in the aspect change, and they reject out of hand any talk of subjective "interpretation."³⁷ Indeed they feel that the specific concept of *seeing* aspects not idly chosen but rather as "forced upon" them (*PI*, II § 265), so that, when they experience aspect change, it is registered in exclamations like "Now I see the rabbit!" and "Now I see a duck."³⁸

Lest we get ahead of ourselves it may be helpful to restate here the larger issue mentioned before, the fact that, although Wittgenstein begins with visual and pictorial examples, those actually serve to introduce a series of far more expansive concerns about language and concepts: "Wittgenstein moves from the apparent paradoxicality of aspect-shifting to the 'raggedness' of the concept of seeing, to our relation to pictures, to experiencing the meanings of words ... to the role of agreement in various language-games, to our capacity to read others and to let ourselves be read by them." (Warnock 1976, p. 193). Thus it is not aspect change *per se*, first of all, that Wittgenstein finds intrinsically interesting. Rather he uses that phenomenon to tease out something much more common and therefore easier to miss, our "continuous seeing something as something," how we tacitly "regard objects as" this or that routinely and without necessarily being aware of doing so (hence our surprise when an aspect changes). Again, continuous seeing-as is not interpreting, though it may be difficult on occasion to distinguish them.

Second, it is not exclusively our seeing images, pictures, drawings "as" one thing or another that ultimately interests Wittgenstein, but rather the way humans comport themselves toward pictures, more especially toward language, and potentially toward anything in the world seen (in various senses and meanings of "see," visual or otherwise) under one or another of its possible aspects. Though "comport" is not Wittgenstein's word, it fits: in addition to talking about seeing or continuously regarding something as, we imply in such talk how we think of, value, feel about, act toward, care for, and appraise what we see-as: "'To me it is an animal pierced by an arrow'. That is what I treat it as; this is my attitude to the figure. This is one meaning in calling it a case of 'seeing' " (*PI*, II § 193).³⁹ Comportment concerns our overall stance toward and valuing of something, and is necessarily contextual and relational, since it is taking something as, or as part of, a whole.⁴⁰

Third and most important, visual aspect perception and blindness have analogues in linguistic experience, in how we understand words in use: "The importance of this concept lies in the connection

³⁶ Wittgenstein applies the concept of "interpretation" less capaciously than others do; for him the more that our understanding a problem or situation involves hesitation, dispute, choice among alternative solutions, sticking-points, confusion or uncertainty, the need to persuade self and others regarding what is at issue, the more it involves "interpretation." In the absence of these, we just "see" or "take" the situation for what it is; see (*PI*, II § 216, 261, 267, 334); and (Mulhall 1990, pp. 28–29): "When an aspect dawns, we recognize that a new kind of description [is being] given, and we see it in those terms; when we continuously perceive that aspect, we take the status of the figure as the particular kind of thing ... for granted."

³⁷ cf. *RPP*, 1, 504; *OC*, p. 94.

³⁸ (Mulhall 2001, p. 159) points out three characteristics of the aspect-sighted: first, in seeing a representative picture they do not see it "in terms of an arrangement of marks" in need of decoding or interpretation, but rather already just *get* what it depicts or is of. Second, they *grasp* what the picture depicts, and refer to it much as they do to other representations of rabbits or ducks. And third, they *respond* to the picture-objects in much the way that one might respond to the real objects themselves. For example, we might characterize the picture-rabbit as cute, or as alertly questioning, or by tickling its tiny little picture-nose.

³⁹ cf. (Pippin 2011, p. 25): "[W]hile Hegel certainly accepts that the physiological components of perception are *distinguishable* from the norm-following or interpretive elements, he also insists that the physiological and normative aspects are *inseparable* in perception itself. (As in Heidegger's phenomenology, there are not two stages to perception, as if a perception of a white rectangular solid is then 'interpreted as' a refrigerator. What we *see* is a refrigerator.)"

⁴⁰ See (Mulhall 2001, pp. 157–58): "Wittgenstein's detailed, ramifying discussion of the various phenomena ... embodies a set of reminders about our relation to pictures, photographs, and drawings which together form the necessary background against which the seemingly paradoxical experience of aspect-dawning can be seen as entirely unsurprising."

between the concepts of seeing an aspect and of experiencing the meaning of a word (*PI*, II § 261).⁴¹ In a way Wittgenstein's various visual examples—the duck-rabbit picture, the picture-cube as outward- or inward-looking, the black-white cross, the picture-triangle seen as “standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an overturned object” (*PI*, II § 162)—are *preparatory* to his main interest, which has to do with how concepts function in different language games. But then in another way, the visual examples were themselves always linguistically dependent already, since visual seeing, seeing-as, and continuous seeing-as presuppose both the ability conceptually to distinguish e.g., ears, mouth, bill, eyes, duck, rabbit, and to comport ourselves toward such concepts/pictures much as we comport ourselves toward the real things. That is, we can function in these ways only because we have already mastered the public criteria of many concepts, the techniques for playing language games, and innumerable other small- and large-scale linguistic and extra-linguistic techniques of living socially with others.

This begins to account for how and why Wittgenstein can so easily transition from visual aspects to analogous phenomena in our uses of language, calling our attention to our “experiencing the meaning of a word” and to “meaning blindness”—asking us, for example, to say and mean the noun “bank” in one or another of its aspects: as a financial institution, as a river bank. (These dual aspects of bank are an obvious analogue to the duck/rabbit aspects of the Jastrow picture, and to the shadows/shallows in Bishop's poem. And of course one might take “bank” as a verb with multiple aspects.) Here too a felt tension or paradox inflects our experiencing change of meaning without any change of word.⁴² But Wittgenstein works then to dissolve the paradox, by recalling our normal life with words and the perfectly familiar fact that our attitude toward them is as though words have always already *absorbed* in themselves their innumerable meanings-in-contexts, as though each word displayed its own expressive “physiognomy” (*PI*, II § 238). That words are able to have done this is rather to say that *we* act with and towards words as if they habitually present familiar faces and expressions to us, even new faces and expressions—because the phenomenon of “experiencing the meanings of words,” of being struck by one aspect then another, is subordinate to the more important fact that there is a “continuous aspect perception” involved in all of our words, though mostly unnoticed due to their familiarity: “The familiar face of a word, the feeling that it has assimilated its meaning into itself . . . —And how are these feelings manifested among us?—By the way we choose and value words” (*PI*, II § 294).⁴³ Again, continuous seeing-as is not the same as interpreting either a text or a situation. I may need to interpret German, but normally not my native English. Conversely, understanding is also not an inner mental “act” or “state,” but rather a *use* of language: “only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning” (*TLP*, 3.3); “If a sign is useless, it is meaningless.” (*TLP*, 3.328).⁴⁴

⁴¹ The secondary literature on concepts of seeing-as and how they relate to experiencing the meaning is large and ever growing larger. I have benefitted especially from Stephen Mulhall, *On Being-in-the-World*, and *Inheritance and Originality*; also Mary Warnock, *Imagination*, and (Verdi 2010). (a) Mary Warnock and others have rightly argued that Wittgenstein's concern with aspects involves (in a restricted sense) “interpretive” dimension to our words—specifically, the notion that words frame situations one way or another, continuously but often tacitly. But it is crucial to add that Wittgenstein guards his own analysis against any infinite regress of “interpretations.” (cf. *PI*, II, §§ 161, 163, 167, 261, 267, 334.) “Experiencing the meaning” of words correlates with our “seeing an aspect” of how we *habitually* understand them, and does *not* refer to any and all modes of interpreting ambiguous or polyvalent language. This applies *a fortiori* to literary criticism, many of whose “Wittgensteinian” expounders interested in the matter are often flat wrong: for an example see (Yu 2013). On the other hand it should be equally clear that I disagree with Walter Glannon's conclusion in “What Literary Theory Misses in Wittgenstein,” *Philosophy and Literature*: “Like a graft rejected by an incompatible host, Wittgenstein has little in common with literary theory.” For an unusually shrewd and balanced review of some of the tendencies of literary and philosophic critics to reductivisms of various kinds, see John Holbo, Rev. of (Gibson and Huemer): “Aesthetic (literary, poetic, artistic) receptions and appreciations of Wittgenstein . . . have tended to be aesthetically marred by philosophical weakness.”

⁴² Moreover, this is itself two-fold, for there is the additional paradox of our calling this change “a change of *meaning*”—even though no context of use exists in this thought experiment for us to mean the word *in*.

⁴³ In the rhetorical tradition comportment aligns with classical notions of *decorum* and Renaissance treatments of *sprezzatura*—concepts about what is a fitting and appropriate selection and arrangement of almost anything: grammar, substance, style, arrangement, genre, text, decoration.

⁴⁴ We don't normally call “seeing a fork” “seeing a fork-as-a-fork” because, in normal circumstances, we do not experience change of aspect, hence feel no need for such a remark. But that's not the same as saying that normal circumstances

3.2. Seeing-as: “The fat old guide made eyes” (l. 44)

There is more to say about all of this, but the immediate upshot is to see whether we can acknowledge that Bishop too, from her first poems to her last, traffics in aspect perception, not only by occasionally adverting to some instance of it herself, but by enacting in the poems how different things might be seen-as. Arguably poetic tropes, like metaphor, often involve seeing-as; but not all seeing-as is metaphorical or even figurative, and it is Bishop’s non-figurative seeing-as that I want to emphasize as more fundamental.⁴⁵ More exactly, Bishop is interested in aspects of attributes or essences related “internally” to other things: for instance, “shadows” or “shallows” internally related, by virtue of the shading characterizing either one, to such things similarly situated in our past experience.⁴⁶ To make good this hypothesis, we require enough selections from Bishop’s poems to entertain the idea that “doubling” (that is, the recognition of possibilities beyond what has been actualized) is one central principle of imaginative thinking in her poems.

In “Over 2k,” for instance, the speaker notices how, at Volubilis, “the fat old guide made eyes” (ll. 44–45). In this detail no actual toggling between dual aspects on our part is involved. But I cite it here to underline (i) how the speaker tacitly relies on our knowing how the difference between seeing a person’s eyes and seeing them *as* being somehow flirtatious gets shown (some people, again, are blind to such things); and to emphasize (ii) how the implied author (if not the speaker) will increasingly bring us to attend to our *own* lack of self-consciousness about this sort of doubling as something of real importance. Another example from this poem: the speaker earlier sees a “squatting Arab/ or group of Arabs,” but then immediately shifts the object of sight to our seeing them *as* “plotting, probably,/ against our Christian empire” (ll. 6–8). So in another poem Bishop has us first imagine “someone sleeping in the bottom of a boat” (“Little Exercise,” (l. 19), then asks us to “think of him as uninjured, barely disturbed” (l. 21). Here we have to adjust imaginatively from one aspect to another. In doing so, perhaps we’ll come after a time to enjoy (what “The Gentleman of Shalott” is said to love) just that shifting and toggling itself—“that sense of constant re-adjustment” (l. 42).

In the meantime art remains long and life short, so we might proceed more categorically by sampling Bishop’s non-figurative aspect-perception according to a few of their aims or effects. Sometimes such possibilities in her poems are (1) held in more or less balanced suspension (for instance, we aren’t ourselves asked to *choose* between “shadows” and “shallows”). Sometimes the speaker and/or implied author (2) records a realization that may (or may not) have been a conscious choice, decision, or judgment (e.g., “plotting, probably”), or (3) dwells thoughtfully on grammatical possibilities in context, or (4) encounters contradiction or confusion that may logically be nonsense, but is grammatically and rhetorically salient.

- (1) Suspension (See/consider/think/imagine N first as X, now as Y): *Large Bad Picture*: “it’s hard to say what brought them [ships] there, commerce or contemplation” (l. 32); *The Armadillo*: “it’s hard/ to tell them [fire balloons] from the stars—/planets, that is—the tinted ones” (ll. 12–14); *Paris, 7 a.m.*: “It is like introspection/ to stare inside [the courtyard], or retrospection” (ll. 13–14); *The Monument*: “It may be solid, may be hollow” (l. 70), and “It is the beginning of a painting,/ a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument” (ll. 76–77); *From the Country to the City*: “shining wires seem to be flying sidewise./ Are they birds?” (l. 22); *The Gentleman of Shalott*: “But he’s in

might not have been or might become other than they are, nor that we can’t now provide *new* circumstances for it—as in, say, a middle-school diorama of nineteenth century German farm life: we see a fork placed therein *as* a pitchfork—until, that is, we lift it out of its setting and say, “Look at this pitchfork—I mean, look at this fork *as* a fork; it belonged to my great-grandmother’s silver service. See N. K. Verbin, “Religious Beliefs and Aspect Seeing,” *Religious Studies* 36: 14: Like seeing, aspect seeing, both the continuous seeing of an aspect and the dawning of an aspect, forces itself on us. There is no inferring, no weighing of evidence, no concluding involved, but a spontaneous relation to the aspect.”

⁴⁵ Aristotle talks of metaphorical seeing-as as a riddle: *Rhet.*, 3.2 140b, 3.10 140ab, 3.11, 1412a.

⁴⁶ This is the reason that “shadows *cast by a coastal cliff*,” or “shallows *of surf hugging the coast*” are not what is being seen-as: these added details may or may not be acceptably *imagined* in context, but they are *external*, not internal, to what we are saying is seen-as.

- doubt/as to which side's in or out" (ll. 24–25); *Arrival at Santos*: "and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains" (l. 3).
- (2) Recorded Realization (See how what was seen/heard as X is Y): *In the Waiting Room*: "Suddenly, from inside,/came an *oh!* of pain/—Aunt Consuelo's voice— . . . /What took me/completely by surprise/ was that it was *me:*/ my voice, in my mouth;" *Crusoe in England*: "The folds of lava, running out to sea/ would hiss. I'd turn. And then they'd prove/ to be more turtles;" *The Bight*: "how sheer the water is/ . . . Absorbing, rather than being absorbed;" *Songs for a Colored Singer*: "and what curious flower or fruit/ will grow from that conspiring root?//Fruit or flower? It is a face./Yes, a face."
 - (3) Meditation or Wonder: (See/contemplate a divided X as unified, a unified Y as divided): *In the Waiting Room*: "What similarities—/boots, hands, the family voice . . . /held us all together/or made us all just one?" *Poem*: "His barn backed on that meadow. There it is,/titanium white, one dab."
 - (4) Contrariness, Contradiction (seeming or real), or Confusion: (See X as *alter-X*): "ticking loud on one stalled second;" *The Bight*: "The birds are outside;" *Twelfth Morning; or What You Will*: "He's [the horse is] bigger than the house. The force of/ personality, or is perspective dozing?" *Crusoe in England*: "I'd think that if they [volcanoes] were the size/I thought volcanoes should be, then I had/become a giant;" "I'd dream of things/like slitting a baby's throat, mistaking it/for a baby goat;" *A Summer's Dream*: "The giant with the stammer/was the landlady's son;" *At the Fishhouses*: "up the long ramp/descending into the water;" *The Bight*: "awful but cheerful;" *Arrival at Santos*: "a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag./So that's the flag" (ll. 14–15).

By this point I trust I've made at least a *prima facie* case that aspect change may be pervasive in Bishop, signaling a marked experience of dual or multiple "takes" on something, part perception and part thought, constrained by whatever aspect is in view and whatever the viewer compares it to: "Now it's a rabbit;" "I hear it as humorous rather than serious;" "Shadows, or are they shallows?" Of course when lines like those above are placed in such high relief we can't identify many of their particular uses and meanings; to that end, thinking now specifically of "Over 2000 Illustrations," we'll have to closely read several passages in part 4.⁴⁷ Here, however, we ought to distinguish two points.

First, I've argued that both Wittgenstein and Bishop draw our attention to the fact that aspect perception as such may be ingredient in all of our experience, from our practical actions, to our physical reactions, to experiencing the meanings of words, to theoretical speculation (cf. (Warnock 1976, p. 193). In the experience of aspect change more narrowly, and in aspect perception more broadly, seeing-as demonstrates how we experience the world "as" a greater or lesser fusion of external and internal, perception and thoughtful appraisal, observer and observed; of thought with emotion and attitude, and both with imagination; and of these with publicly sanctioned grammatical and rhetorical features of language (style *as* substance, substance *as* style).

Second, in a philosophic context Wittgenstein seeks to move his readers away from certain fantasies and dead ends of formal logic to the informal reasoning of grammar in use. In the context of poetry, Bishop does something similar from a different direction: she fuses perception, emotion, and imagination in order to stage new thinking. And "thinking" broadly conceived is as central to

⁴⁷ cf. OC, p. 105: "All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life." (Schalkwyk 2004, p. 135): "It is one of the fundamental tasks of the rule, or the concept, to reduce difference to sameness or identity . . . in our conceptual world we keep seeing the same, because concepts are *not* for use on one occasion. But such perception is crucially situated or aspect-related: we see the same only because we are at home in a particular conceptual world."

Bishop as Wittgenstein made it for his readers: “I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own” (*PI*, “Preface,” 4e). In different shapes and guises Bishop’s fascination with “the mind thinking” is also effectively saying to us, “Here’s what thinking about certain religious matters from different aspects can look like and do when pursued from within a pragmatic, grammatical-rhetorical ‘picture’ of thinking. Take your time. Think about it.”

4. “Why Couldn’t We Have Seen?”

If Bishop reserves for us readers the task of thinking thoughts of our own by inviting us, as Hammer suggested, into her acts of looking and seeing, then we need to ask what these acts are and how she involves us. After all, as any teacher knows, creating occasions for another to see-as, attempting to bring someone else to “experience the meaning of words,” can easily fail, and for that reason often calls for all manner of formal expedients to better communicate instances of seeing-as like those above. Said otherwise, the preceding examples, when encountered in their own habitats, are enmeshed in subtle weavings of style and substance, ranging from details easy-to-miss, to those difficult-to-see, to what Wittgenstein refers to as virtual “imponderables” (*PI*, II § 227).

Take again the speaker’s postulated dis-analogy that opens the poem: in the first two sections we saw that she contrasts “serious, engravable” Biblical scenes with “our travels.” We readers experience that contrast in the juxtaposition of two opposed perspectives alternated by the speaker, one discriminative and one assimilative.⁴⁸ Compare Isaiah Berlin’s borrowing of Archilochus’ “The fox knows many things, the hedgehog knows one big thing.” For Berlin the distinction poses “one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general”:

For there exists a great divide between those, on the one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system, less or more coherent, in terms of which they understand, think and feel—a single, universal, organising principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance—and, on the other hand, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some de facto way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related by no moral or aesthetic principle. (Berlin 1953)

In saying this Berlin was interested chiefly in Tolstoy, but the distinction can help bring us closer to Bishop’s use of both approaches. First, again most obviously, the speaker’s travels in section two (ll. 32–64) are offered as individual anecdotes, each insignificant in itself, each isolated from the others. Afterwards the speaker vaguely, but impressively, formulates the principle behind such looking: “Everything only connected by ‘and’ and ‘and’ ” (l. 65)—a way of seeing, perfectly viable in itself, in which, nevertheless, parts may add up to little more than an indefinite series or heap of isolated vignettes. It is, curiously, this methodical rule of “‘and’ and ‘and’,” that most critics have considered the architectonic principle of the poem.

The second way we experience this guiding dis-analogy, less overt but equally available on looking, is in the collocation of Bible scenes in section one (ll. 3–25). Although themselves also something of a hodge-podge, nevertheless they are fewer in count, more or less convergent in content (“the Tomb, the Pit, the Sepulcher;” l. 10), syntactically subordinated to their climax in line 25, and all characterized collectively in tone as “sad and still,/ . . . foreign” (ll. 4–5). Through all of them we are told that Arabs move “[o]ften” (l. 6), and over all of them there is “always the silence” (l. 17),

⁴⁸ The terms are my own but are intended to link up, at least loosely, not only with Berlin’s binary but with the various matrices and lists found in McKeon, Watson, and Pepper.

“the smoke rising solemnly” (l. 19). “Each image,” as Bonnie Costello puts it, “is a tableau with figures gesturing toward an unseen center of significance (Costello 1991, p. 133).” Afterwards, again, the speaker caps the account with an assimilative principle of understanding, a principle opposed to “‘and’ and ‘and’”: “[W]hen dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves” (l. 25).⁴⁹ This resolute or assimilative mode—in which the whole is greater than and gives meaning to the parts—has been ignored by most critics, ignored or, as Hammer did, dismissed as “sentimental” and “nostalgic,” at least in its Christian version here.

—Is *that* why the speaker “couldn’t” see “this old Nativity” (l. 69)? because, as Hammer very correctly insists, the speaker herself, however “nostalgic” she may be about all that family Christmas stuff at the end, is never so sentimental as actually to embrace such a way of looking and seeing?⁵⁰ On this line of response, does it follow that we readers are also supposed to choose between these two hermeneutic modes—choose, that is, “‘and’ and ‘and’” over “resolve themselves”? If we are to choose, why does the poet give each principle equal status in parallel positions of climax, and in formulations comprised of an equal number of words? And why pose each one to compete with the other as a universally applicable hermeneutic? If we’re not to choose, then how do these two different but comparable ways of seeing-as relate to each other? Finally, if *speaker* here is to be distinguished from *poet* as implied author (as I have been doing), does each offer *different* ways of relating the two modes?

We can, I think, reflexively enable ourselves to answer these questions, not by theorizing but by entering *in media res* and occupying the middle, specifying how poetic-grammatical-rhetorical elements are organized by these two modes. But here my overall descriptive hypothesis is simple enough: Initially that *assimilative* mode of seeing-as appears to organize the first section, and the *discriminative* mode the second; hence the *dis*-analogy between the two sections implicitly avowed in the opening lines.

Matters alter, however, when the two sections, the Biblical as well as the travel scenes, come to be seen *as analogous*—a possibility, I argued in section 2, more elusive but no less available to us, and, in fact, encouraged by the implied author.⁵¹ What this latter possibility, seeing the two as analogous, entails is at least three-fold. First, *both* sections can be seen as similar under a single organizational mode, either discriminative or assimilative (depending on which a reader makes dominant on a given reading)—again, just *because* they are being viewed as analogues of each other. Second, application of either chosen mode will *generalize* from individual sections of the poem to the poem as a whole, indeed to the world as a whole (the Biblical scenes and “our travels” now being patent metonyms for life as a whole). Considering the two hermeneutic modes as equal possibilities, in other words, the reader could alternate indifferently between seeing the poem (seeing the world) “as” atomistically-ordered, or seeing it “as” holistically-ordered, much as one toggles at will between the duck and rabbit. Third, the reader could also, perhaps paradoxically, see them as mutually constitutive, one mode subsuming or otherwise absorbing the other. In all of these possibilities, the reader would be moving from taking various *sections* of the poem as discriminated from each other by mode, to taking the poem *as a whole* as comprised either by discrete, or by analogically-related, parts.

⁴⁹ cf. Hammer: “Our travels, our experience in the world, our experience of geography, and our experience as geography, should have been, ought to be, serious. It ought to add up to something. It ought to be engravable, something that might be bound in book form. The image of a book with illustrations in a complete concordance holds up an idea that word and image, perhaps word and flesh or representation and experience, might be bound together in a coherent unity, might be shown to exist in concordance or in some kind of correspondence.”

⁵⁰ In his useful essay on Bishop in the English tradition of the meditative lyric (Wilson 2017): asks “why should Christian readers and scholars so frequently repair to Bishop as a subject of enthusiasm and study?” He answers in part by quoting Bishop: “Not, of course, because Bishop was herself a Christian. ‘I have never been religious in any formal way and I am not a believer,’ she wrote to Anne Stevenson in 1964.”

⁵¹ The distinction I want here, between speaker and implied author, fluctuates, depending on which way of looking the reader is employing. As I argue, both modes of looking are active *throughout* the poem: the speaker chiefly aligns herself with the skeptical, discriminative mode; but the implied author deploys grammatical and rhetorical resources—especially middle voice verbs and expressions, allusion, double-voicing and repetition among others—to exemplify an alternative possibility.

In fact, this generalizing requires no “leap of faith” on the reader’s part, but only a small step already provided for in “they all” (l. 25) and “Everything” (l. 65).⁵²

In *The Hedgehog and the Fox* Isaiah Berlin hypothesizes that Tolstoy “was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog.” A similar tension motivates Bishop, up to a point, but not what Berlin says next, that Tolstoy’s

gifts and achievements are one thing, and his beliefs, and consequently his interpretation of his own achievement, another; . . . consequently his ideals have led him, and those whom his genius for persuasion has taken in, into a systematic misinterpretation of what he and others were doing or should be doing. (Berlin 1953, p. 5)

In contrast to this account, the implied Bishop looks, *not* to exploit standing beliefs for or against God (*pace* Hammer), but rather to discipline our own *interest in and attention to* how we live and what we need. This includes what we readers may be missing all along in *how we read*, and what in fact we may be blind to still—one aspect of things occluding another.⁵³ Thus I hear another of Bishop’s admirers, the poet John Ashbery, to be intuiting some of this when he writes:

After twenty years I am unable to exhaust the line ‘And looked and looked our infant sight away,’ and I suspect that its secret has very much to do with the secret of Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry. Looking, or attention, will absorb the object [along] with its meaning.” (Ashbery 1969)

So our question becomes: What happens when we toggle between seeing the whole poem (the whole world) *as* “absorbed” under one or the other of these two proffered principles?

4.1. “. . . ‘and’ and ‘and’.”

Of these two ways of looking and seeing, now taken as directives for seeing-“Everything”-as, the first feels easier to follow.⁵⁴ It is not difficult to see the organization of the whole poem as fundamentally paratactic, from the level of sentence grammar, to that of image sequences, up to the overall “plot,” especially (but by no means exclusively) in section two: “And the wind blew . . . the sun shone . . . the Collegians marched . . . the dead man lay . . . the jukebox went on playing . . . And the poppies, splitting the mosaics . . . the Englishwoman poured tea . . . And the prostitutes/balanced their tea trays . . . Khadour looked on amused . . . ” As images, these are atomized; as travels, they are unthematized; as anecdotes, they portray impersonal forces. Their attitudes and tones, each confined to its own particular venue, range randomly from a pleasantry about goats to noting the sun’s shining “madly” (l. 36) to the matter-of-fact of a “dead man” (l. 39) to prostitutes noisily flinging themselves “naked and giggling against our knees” (l. 53) to “what frightened me most of all” (l. 55). Relations *among* these are almost nil, and their sequence is punctuated only by the percussive “And” “And” “And” beginning lines 36, 43, and 49. As such this entire paratactic-anaphoric structure is a “reification of dissimilarity” and an “elevation of atomistic difference,” with a “conspicuous lack of a middle term (Stafford 1999, pp. 61, 64).”

⁵² For an excellent account of how the infamous “leap of faith” in Kierkegaard is less a leap than a step, see (Ferreira 1991).

⁵³ I am bracketing here any questions of Berlin’s accuracy, but for an opposing view, see (Morson 1989) and (Morson 2007).

⁵⁴ cf. (Bohm 1980, p. 3): “. . . this sort of ability of man to separate himself from his environment and to divide and apportion things . . . is a way of *thinking about things* that is convenient and useful . . . However, when this mode of thought is applied more broadly to man’s notion of himself and the whole world in which he lives . . . then [he] ceases to regard the resulting divisions as merely useful or convenient and begins to see and . . . experience himself and his world as actually constituted of separately existing fragments.”

Within each tableau, moreover, whether we are analyzing elements or synthesizing them, settings, agents, acts and objects appear unmotivated relative to each another. Look at how the Collegians march “[r]apidly, purposefully” (l. 37) but never do reach their destination, much as we never learn their purpose nor why the sun shines madly, or what the wind has to do with anything. It’s true that, on the nearer side of our assumed dis-analogical divide, in section one (ll. 3–25), we do get scenes said to be different because “foreign,” “serious,” “engraversable,” indeed scenes that we are promised will “resolve themselves” (l. 25). But two things place this promise in a cloud of unknowing: first, that promise itself seems a kind of *docta ignorantia*, a learned ignorance in which even the possibility of human-divine relation opens a skeptical gulf that no representation can bridge, not even that of the poem’s final lines—hence the bathos of “family with pets.” Second, I’ve argued that these scenes are in fact optically all-but-indistinguishable from those of her travels, each one also isolated from the others as a spatially separate “illustration.” David Bromwich sees section one (and, by my reasoning *a fortiori*, sections two and three) in just this way:

The broken, randomly spliced rhythm, the discreteness of its sentences, as well as the words “often” and “always,” suggest the episodic quality of the moments chronicled in the illustrations. They tell a story, apparently senseless, and in no particular order, which the poem later calls the story of “God’s spreading fingerprint.”⁵⁵

Additionally, in such “atomistic” seeing, everything is, as Stephen Pepper explains about this mode, “conceived as a huge aggregation or system of essentially separate individuals,” a space-time field “in which the locational or geometric character is highly emphasized (Pepper 1945, pp. 36, 37).” Obviously this neatly accounts for the many individual places and place-names in section two, and characterizes much of the cool mathematical imagery throughout: “The Seven Wonders of the World;” “the Narrows at St. John’s” (l. 32); the “lines/crisscrossing the great square” at St. Peter’s (36–38); an arcade in Mexico (l. 40); “a length of evening” in Dingle harbor (l. 45); mosaics divided by poppies at Volubilis (ll. 43–44); and, “somewhere near” Marrakesh (l. 54), “a keyhole-arched stone baldaquin” (l. 57). Earlier in this same vein we had encountered a “cobbled courtyard . . . /like a diagram” (ll. 2–13), “catty-cornered rectangles/ or circles (ll. 21–22), and “lines/the burrin made” (ll. 26–27). As for actual *resolution* of such diversity, however: *that*, unsurprisingly, is deferred—indefinitely: “when dwelt upon” (l. 25)!⁵⁶

In short: what these illustrations add up to never does reach a sum total, only an indefinite “Over 2000.” However impressive a number that might promise, from the Romantics on numbers no longer provided an appropriate Rosetta stone for deciphering the hieroglyphics of nature seen as “God’s spreading fingerprint” (l. 29). And so they offer no meaningful purchase here. In fact their lack of terminus also serves skeptically to ironize the idea of a “Complete Concordance.” While a concordance may be “complete” in its elements, its individually-indexed entries are unrelated to each other; moreover, a concordance as a whole is a-temporal, and lacks (among other things) rules of syntax—hence by itself can never issue in even one complete utterance, never mind a “fateful pattern of choice” that is a belief system.⁵⁷ After all of which, only add that, as different otherwise as the last six lines of the first section may be, or the last five lines of the third section, these passages now appear as under-determined as the other pictured scenes. Observe the confusing syntax in both,

⁵⁵ “Elizabeth Bishop’s Dream Houses,” in (Bromwich 2011, p. 128): emphasis added. Bonnie Costello (Bishop 2011, p. 133) agrees: “By the end of this passage she has revealed her cultural inheritance as desperately out of touch with contemporary reality.”

⁵⁶ It’s no wonder Hammer, Bromwich and others understand Bishop to regard skeptically any religious claims to wholeness: for support simply consider the speaker’s amused irony in echoing others’ (presumably certain Christians’) paranoid “plotting, probably;” also her attributed slight to such believers in the internal rhyme “squatting/plotting” (ll. 6–7).

⁵⁷ (Bromwich 2011, p. 127). cf. (Watson 1985, p. 101): “There may be an ordered set of statements about [say] geometrical figures, but without principles there can be no proofs, and without proofs a geometry is not functioning as a geometry.”

the interruptions of unpredictable images, the random and indefinite movement *outward* from “lines” to “burrin” to “ripples” to “sand” to storms” to “God’s spreading fingerprint” (ll. 26–29), then *inward* (but *why?*) from “dark ajar” to “rocks breaking with light” to “flame” to “sparkless” to “fed on straw” to “lulled within.” Juxtaposed in this manner, these climactic events prove, in fact if not intention, *anti-climactic*, “senseless” and “oddly inconsequential,” as Bromwich has it—including the Nativity at the end of the poem (Bromwich 2011, p. 128). “Family with pets” (l. 73); I’ll say.

Anyway, that’s one way of looking at it.

Not the only way, though.

4.2. “When dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves.”

An assimilative mode of understanding needn’t be any less natural or useful than a discriminative one, or any more difficult to see by the light of. In “The Bight,” for example, the poem that immediately follows “Over 2k,” Bishop hints at the assimilative mode in the image of “old correspondences” (l. 32). Following “The Bight,” in her well-known “At the Fishhouses,” she figures it as “total immersion” (l. 52), an image that places “a premium not on absolute difference but on nuanced degrees of distinction (Stafford 1999, p. 75).” In this mode in fact, the formerly flat-footed anaphora of “and’ and ‘and’” can now come to be heard as a ritually formal and stately procession, not unlike what Fletcher identifies with that figure in his study of allegory, and what Bishop offers in her pastoral “Anaphora”: “Each day with so much ceremony begins . . . ” (1) (Fletcher 2012).

At present the question is: When looking from within a “fundamentally participatory mode of perception” and with an “associative method,” what *do* we see—that is, what do we see-as? (Stafford 1999, pp. 58, 64) While we might at first feel tempted to clarify “resolve themselves” with abstract terms like “coherence,” “purpose,” “organic unity” and the like, we’d gain little, since the *definiens* are as vague as the *definiendum*, and we’d run the risk of imposing rigid meanings onto the principle rather than gathering its meaning analogically and inductively (historically) from facts we can persuasively describe. I’ll offer three such facts briefly, and then develop a fourth at greater length to demonstrate concretely how they work together. The product of such piece-work should suggest an entirely different way to organize the poem as a whole, one that we can round out in Part 5.

First, then, look once more: in this mode, the speaker is not as objectively removed from places and events as before, nor as disengaged as she, apparently resigned to “‘and’ and ‘and’” herself, seems to think. Notwithstanding the subsequent certainty of her “Everything only connected by,” she expresses personal opinions from a personal perspective *throughout* the poem. This is obvious even from the start, and not only because the second word of the poem is a normative term (that is, “should” *can* be derived from objective moral standards and need reflect nothing personal at all). What I’m pointing to rather is the entanglement of self and world registered in her observation that “The Seven Wonders of the World are *tired/* and *a touch familiar*” (pp. 3–4, emphasis added). One needn’t be a travel-weary tourist to sympathize with such a view, but even if one disagrees—“They don’t look that way to me”—doing so implies that, *either* way, the knower is importantly involved with, enters into, what is known.

Second, in this view the personal perspective of the speaker, in being personal, is not therefore solipsistic or even relativistic. On the contrary it is *inter*-personal—“*our* travels.” This first person plural possessive signals shared norms, values, conventions, hence are appraisive judgments ultimately submitted to the reader’s agreement or disagreement. On this account what is real is what appears in people’s perspectives, in what they say and how they say it.

Third, the words “serious, engravable” (and others like “tired” and “familiar,” “sad” and “still” (l. 4), “silent” and “solemn”) are, logically, neither univocal determinate concepts whose meanings are known ahead of time, nor merely equivocal terms whose meanings change entirely from one to context to another. Rather, they are family-resemblance terms that function as ambiguous grammatical “rules” whose meanings, arising largely out of the contexts in which they are applied, are *analogically* related to each other. Thus the various Biblical scenes, the imagined sandstorm, God’s spreading

fingerprint, and later the symbols of the divine birth: these concrete cases give the terms “serious” and “engraversable” their inferable meanings, and thereby even “resolve” them to whatever extent and however provisionally. All of the ideas and images (“they all;” (l. 25)) are to be understood in terms of how she/they/we *experience* them in use.

Last and most significant: in this assimilative mode of seeing and seeing-as, our basic unit of experience is not, as before, an open field of unrelated inertial forces, but instead an inter-personal, existential *situation*.⁵⁸ Basic here are historical contexts of human activity experienced as such by those involved. To see this better, recall, from earlier, Wittgenstein’s grammatical-rhetorical rule: “We refer by the phrase ‘understanding a word’ not necessarily to that which happens while we are saying or hearing it, but to *the whole environment of the event* of saying it” [BB § 157, emphasis added]). On these grounds we take “environment” and “event” here as involving an existential “situation,” and “situation” to include, as Pepper again puts it, “both agents and circumstances [in which] *action and the situation go together*. The agent is faced by circumstances within the situation, and the act is his response to the problem they present. Through it the *total* situation, including both agents and circumstances, is changed in some way.”⁵⁹ So understood, a situation is therefore “an independent unit constituted by a characteristic *quality*,” and not any “assemblage,” random or otherwise, of parts: “We are always acting within a limited setting, which includes various circumstances, and probably other actors in addition to ourselves. In this sense the situation, including both agent or agents and the circumstances confronting him or them, is the unit of experience.”

To gain a better view of all of this we can build on Angus Fletcher’s analysis of certain grammatical-rhetorical forms found in what he calls the “poetics of passage” of John Clare and Walt Whitman, including present and past participles, and especially “middle voice” verbs and expressions.⁶⁰ Linguists themselves have not established any adequate definition for the middle voice, in part no doubt because it displays a great variety of effects, but Fletcher gives us a good beginning sense of what those can be:

Sometimes, when we perceive things, we notice we are crossing back and forth between an inner world and a world out there, as if in a peculiar way perceptions resembled gifts exchanged back and forth between persons. Such mental activity is both inside and outside at the same moment, while we the perceivers stand between. Surely, if perceptions are neither active nor passive, they must acquire a grammatical form for their expression, a middle voice of some kind.” (Fletcher 2004, p. 165)

We know of course that English lacks the grammatical middle voice, its verbs either in the active voice, in which the subject performs the action (as in the transitive “Henry threw the ball,” and the intransitive “The sun shone madly;” (l. 36)), or in the passive, in which the subject receives the action (“The ball was thrown [by Henry]”). Beyond these the closest thing in English to the middle is the reflexive voice, in which the subject both does *and* receives the action of the verb (e.g., “We congratulated ourselves”). More significantly, it is also the case that active- and

⁵⁸ In his early *Notebooks, 1914–1918*, p. 28, ed., G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe, Wittgenstein made the following remark: “puzzle pictures and the seeing of situations.”

⁵⁹ Otis Lee quoted in (Pepper 1945, p. 55) emphasis added.

⁶⁰ (Fletcher 2004, p. 165): Typical verbs enacting a middle voice include suppose, know, believe, ponder, hold, lose and loose, attach, wish, promise. cf. Hammer, Yale Open Course. Available online: <http://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-310/lecture-25>: “This [Bishop’s] poetics is ultimately a poetry of shifting perspectives and local perceptions. The question that it immediately poses is, well, how do we put these perceptions and these points of view together? The, I think, exciting but also difficult textures of Bishop’s great landscape poems, ‘Florida,’ ‘Cape Breton,’ ‘At the Fishhouses,’ ‘A Cold Spring,’ and others, all pose this very clearly to us, this problem. You might see the grains of sand that the sandpiper searches through in that little poem “Sandpiper” as, again, exemplary of this problem in Bishop—that is, how do we hold onto, organize, and find coherence in a world of discrete and shifting phenomena?”

passive-voiced verbs can function in ways the reflexive or middle voice does. In fact “[m]iddle-voiced expressions . . . are common—provided that one listens for them. To hear them, one has to be aware that the middle voice exists (Eberhard 2004).” Again, this is significant because *any* verb or expression used this way can create effects ranging from the self-reference of the reflexive, to a transactional sense of exchange of aspects, to a mediality of perspective within a situation as a whole. It is easy to spot when Bishop uses the reflexive voice (“the rotting hulks held up their dripping plush,” (l. 46); “prostitutes . . . / flung themselves;” (ll. 51–53); “they all resolve themselves;” (l. 25); “the lines . . . that ignite;” (ll. 26, 30). Strangely, however, these and middle voice verbs and expressions throughout “Over 2k” have eluded critical notice, have not been seen “as” the terminal exchanges for situated “seeing-as” that they open up.⁶¹

Consider an example: “In a smart burnoose Khadour looked on amused” (l. 64). Grammatically the line can be parsed as a sequence of syntactical or semantic units, but normally we don’t process utterances that way.⁶² When we stay attuned instead to the practical use of speech (including imitations of it in poems), we encounter the well-dressed Khadour in situ, at “a holy grave” (l. 56) near Marrakesh. There, what Khadour does (intransitively looks on), what he sees (tourists at an empty grave), and how he thinks and feels (“amused”), comprise a whole situation. At one and the same time Khadour is apart from, merges with, and is changed by what he’s doing—“seeing-a-scene-‘as’ somewhat ridiculous.”

But then of course on second thought it is Khadour himself who is seen by the speaker to be seeing things “as” amusing—precisely because the speaker, like Khadour, is medially involved with the situation around *her*. In reporting what she sees and sees-as, she herself must “see-feel-think-imagine-judge” what Khadour is experiencing, namely, “amused” (itself a concept in which thought-emotion-perception-imagination coincide; the awkward hyphenation signals how English grammar does not always readily comport with an assimilative way of seeing-as).⁶³ Though the speaker may not actually feel this fact herself, her report unites the two of them in an ongoing process that both are interested in, even as she distances herself impersonally, as Khadour does himself, by means of an ostensibly disengaged assessment. Elsewhere Bonnie Costello has astutely called this rhetorical stance Bishop’s “personal impersonal,”⁶⁴ a phrase that nicely captures how middle voice expressions transact exchanges between active and passive, inner and outer, pointing two different ways at once.

To strengthen this claim with another example, consider the lines earlier that begin this single protracted scene in section two (ll. 54–64):

It was somewhere near there
I saw what frightened me most of all:
A holy grave, not looking particularly holy. (ll. 54–56)

“Looking” is a reflexive present participle, but what is doing the looking here is naturally not the grave but the speaker: it is what *she* sees the grave *as*. Her interest in (*inter-esse* = “being between”) and attention to it presents her as in communion with her surroundings, even while her own irony (her phrase “not looking particularly holy”) locates her, as Fletcher says, “both inside and outside at the same moment.” “Saw” is a transitive verb in the active voice, but its effect is also that of the middle:

⁶¹ I count at least nineteen adjectives or past and present participles serving a middle function in section 2 alone: entering, touching, leaping, crisscrossing, glistened, playing, splitting, rotting, dripping, informing, balanced, naked, giggling, asking, looking, carved, yellowed, half-filled, amused.

⁶² Such an account is as artificial and forced as saying that we isolate visual or aural *sensa* in order to infer that they’re words. As Husserl and Heidegger remind us, we don’t abstractly receive, for example, some complex of aural sensations—we just *hear* a motorcycle approaching.

⁶³ For performative sallies into torquing English grammar, see David Bohm, ch. 2. “The Rheomode—An experiment with language and thought.” In (Bohm 1980, pp. 34–60); and the various works of Mikhail Epstein, esp. (Epstein), *passim*.

⁶⁴ (Costello 2003); The phrase itself derives from Wallace Stevens; see Paul Mariani’s biography, (Mariani 2016, p. 143), At one point Bromwich, (Bromwich 2011, p. 129): also notes that but does not explain how at certain points in this poem “we stand with the poet, both in the scene and outside it.”

her seeing doesn't proceed only linearly outward, so to speak, but rather she, and her seeing, and what she sees, also return inward. Thus all of this circulates as a single whole. "What frightened me most" blurs act-er with action and circumstances, seen now as different aspects of one event. The middle voice verbs, instead of leading us to track any one of these elements at a time, create the impression of relations within a larger context, inviting us to look and think holistically.⁶⁵ This scene unites evaluative elements in their historical particularity—what Cavell calls our "cares and commitments"—and positions us in the middle, there to toggle among possible perspectives without getting dogmatically fixed in one.

Not verbs and participles only, but other expressions provide the felt-but-not-obvious impression of order-amidst-disorder and unity-in-diversity. "Entering the Narrows at St. John's" (l. 32) pictures an on-going process, in which the phrase, "the touching bleat of goats reached to the ship" (l. 33) registers external stimulus "as" internal effect, and does so in a setting all of whose elements are unified by the unifying medium of sound. In Mexico "the jukebox went on playing" (l. 42) in its own reflexive surround of sound; "the dead man lay/ in a blue arcade" (ll. 39–40) in his own intransitive acting-as-passive undergoing within an equally surrounding silence. So "the dead volcanoes/glistened like Easter lilies" (ll. 40–41), and "the Duchess was going to have a baby" (l. 48). In Morocco "a holy grave" lies "open" (l. 59) under a "keyhole-arched stone baldaquin" exposed "to every wind from the pink desert" (ll. 57–58)—expressions again juxtaposing outside and inside, action and passion. In fact in each of these situations (and there are many more), elements usually contrast or conflict with one another, but even in that way emphasize their inter-relationships within larger environments, within even the largest possible horizon of life/death, death/birth, and death/rebirth.

Once we pick up on these patterns of "situations-as-experienced-from-the-middle," it becomes easier to see nuanced distinctions among broad correspondences throughout sections one, two, and three of "Over 2k"—even to see them as "a magically maintained cosmic harmony" that appears, nevertheless, paradoxically, as "a great riddle (Stafford 1999, p. 96; Diamond and White 1997; cf. (Mulhall 2015))." But I anticipate. At present I think we might better see Bishop's holism by advertizing, briefly, to both the subject matter and manner of a later Bishop lyric, entitled "Poem." I see "Poem" functioning as an inverse analogy to "Over 2k" in the following way. "Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" exemplifies varieties of seeing-as, from grammatical essences or attributes to metaphorical and symbolic representations, and from practical matters to religious and theological ones, even while its speaker ends by bemoaning her *inability* (—is it? or mere lack of opportunity? or personal failure? or moral bad luck?) to see "our travels," and more broadly to see the world, to see her life itself, as "serious, engravable," that is, both human *and* divine. "Poem" too exemplifies seeing-as; but in helpful contrast to "Over 2k," the poet explicitly marvels at her *ability* to experience an everyday and ordinary moment of seeing-as, a modest and altogether mundane moment, but a moment she *can* experience, and *can* share successfully, with another.

4.3. "Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!"

"Poem" concerns the inheritance of a small painting, "a minor family relic" (l. 7) executed by a great-uncle whom the speaker "never knew" (l. 45), that depicts a locality she recognizes from her past: "We both knew this place,/ apparently, this literal small backwater,/ looked at it long enough to memorize it" (ll. 45–47). Bishop's theme involves two matters crucial for our study. First, the poem indefinitely extends its interest slowly outward, eventually taking the insignificant painting as a metonym for "life itself,/ life and the memory of it" (ll. 52–53)—an analogue to the "all" and "Everything" encountered in "Over 2k." Second, "Poem" emphasizes activities of "looking" at

⁶⁵ About Whitman, Fletcher generalizes that "the important aspect of the verb is the way it expresses a relation to experienced change. The verb, as 'aspect,' expresses continuation. When Whitman uses the verb 'to find' twice, it points to the deepest effect of the middle voice: recognition of interiority. Whitman uses this effect of voice and aspect continuously, and he identifies it with what he typically calls 'thought' or 'a thought';" (Fletcher 2004, pp. 167–68).

a scene, “seeing” a painted representation of it, remembering both in the mind’s eye, and all, again, within our larger economy of *seeing-as*—both reflecting on this activity at some length, and exemplifying it throughout her performance.⁶⁶ Perhaps more than in “The Map,” the poet-speaker dwells at length on how seeing an original scene under certain aspects can be not only experienced, but shared. For she tells us that she and her predecessor had

looked at it long enough to memorize it,
our years apart. How strange. And it’s still loved,
or its memory is (it must have changed a lot).
Our visions coincided—“visions” is
too serious a word—our looks, two looks:
art “copying from life,” and life itself,
life and the memory of it so compressed
they’ve turned into each other. Which is which?

Again we find different aspects of one thing brought together, the speaker (and thus we readers) occupying the middle ground between them. The question, “Which is which?” echoes “How strange,” and motivates her meditation on life as a whole. Why strange? *What* is?

Well, least strange for us by now is that an experience of seeing-as, although it may feel odd because paradoxical—one thing, but see-able in two or more different ways as different things—is not, all by itself, a terribly significant paradox, inasmuch as Wittgenstein’s analysis in the *Investigations* dissolves it, if not the feeling of it. Somewhat more intriguing is how aspect perception, whether in memory or in an art work, combines perceptual seeing with feeling, thinking, and imagining, a puzzling phenomenon that occasions admiring remarks from the speaker, like “how live, how touching in detail” (l. 57) and “it’s still loved” (l. 48). In addition, it feels peculiar that a particular individual, independently of another (“our years apart,” (l. 48), could come not only to experience a particular set of aspects under which they imaginatively considered a locale they enjoyed, but to find that they match. Part of the wonder here is that art and memory can be aspects on a “life itself” (l. 52) that exceeds both; and part is that art and memory can be analogues of each other—the past touching the present, inert objects coming to life, life represented in analogous ways—with the analogizer dwelling in the middle. Hardly unheard of, but strange enough to reflect on. How does this happen? I mean, what are some of the conditions for this to occur in the first place?

“Poem” only indirectly addresses that question, but it displays some of what is involved. For it’s not irrelevant that the painting comes by way of inheritance, that is, as a *gift* (“useless and free,” (l. 6)—the same image Fletcher used to describe middle voice expressions in their uniting inner understanding and outer perception, “gifts exchanged back and forth,” with the recipient square in the middle. In “Poem” the particular exchange is less between testator and legatee—for the painting was “handed on collaterally to [other, perhaps intended] owners” (l. 8)—than it is of the gift or gifts of the painting itself and the interests of its perceiver. We are told as much: whereas others may have “looked at it sometimes, or didn’t bother to” (l. 9)—didn’t bother to acknowledge the gift by attending to it—Bishop had “memorized” the place the painting represents, and now exchanges her own interest and attention (in the account that is “Poem” itself) for (with) the painting, “the little that we get for free,/the little of our earthly trust. Not much.” (ll. 58–59).

⁶⁶ We might easily have extended our earlier assemblage of instances of seeing-as by adding passages from “Poem.” Watch how, in the poet’s view, the painting toggles between “this little painting” on the one hand, and, on the other, “(a sketch for a larger one?),” “[a] sketch done in an hour, ‘in one breath’” (ll. 4, 37). Consider the imaginative suspension of “a thin church steeple . . . or is it?” (ll. 14–15) and “A specklike bird is flying to the left. Or is it a flyspeck looking like a bird?” (ll. 26–27); and her recorded realization of “some tiny cows,/two brushstrokes each, but confidently cows” (ll. 16–17); “Up closer, a wild iris, white and yellow,/ fresh-squiggled from the tube” (ll. 20–21); and “a half inch of blue sky” (l. 23); and the deeply poignant contraries in “the yet-to-be-dismantled elms” (l. 64). And there are other instances.

It would be tendentious at this stage to try to elaborate on these points in the abstract, but even by itself “Poem” does suggest the following: seeing-as involves (i) personal choice to accept or acknowledge, by taking interest in and attending to, (ii) what is given. The “given,” of course, is a venerable philosophico-theological term whose denotations range from the most basic “appearances” (*phainomena*) in (for example) philosophical phenomenology, to the given as divine “gift” of religious history and theology. Moreover, what it is to “attend to” the given in these senses preoccupies contemporary thinkers as much as it did Aristotle and Plato.⁶⁷ So be it. Instead of trying to second-guess the background details of what Bishop gives us, let’s take “attend to” and “the given” as vague and open-ended rhetorical *topoi* to help us hear the conclusion of “Over 2k.” For unlike “Poem,” “Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance” *does* seem to inquire directly into conditions of seeing-as, anyway in the inverse form of its culminating question: “Why *couldn’t* we have seen/this Old Nativity while we were at it?”

5. “—And Looked and Looked Our Infant Sight Away”

Thus we return to the question with which we began: What does the speaker mean by “why,” “couldn’t we,” “have seen,” “this old Nativity?” In J. L. Austin’s phrase, “what do we say when”—when, as in this case, we face an existential “limit-situation” concerning an “Everything” that includes the “travels” constituting one’s life, and (as it happens) the cultural inheritance of a divine birth?⁶⁸ What is being asked? Though neither the later “Poem,” nor this earlier poem, ventures anything like answers to these questions (how could they?), “Over 2000 Illustrations” invites us, as we’ve seen, to frame them in two distinct ways—discriminatively, and assimilatively. It can’t be surprising, therefore, that Bishop’s central question may plausibly be seen in different ways, and that, once more, it falls to us to alternate the given possibilities, now with regard to Section 3, asking how its language connects with the final section of Part 1 as well as with the poem as a whole, and how attending to the gift of the given helps to clarify it.

5.1. “And at St. Peter’s . . . And at Volubilis . . . And in the brothels . . . ”

Everything only connected by “and” and “and.”
 Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
 of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
 Open the heavy book. Why couldn’t we have seen
 this old Nativity while we were at it?
 —the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
 an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
 colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
 and, lulled within, a family with pets,
 —and looked and looked our infant sight away? (ll. 64–74)

Earlier we learned that Langdon Hammer, reading in the mode of “‘and’ and ‘and’,” says the speaker ultimately reduces the traditional two dimensions of life, the sacred and the profane, to one alone. As Hammer puts it, “the sacred is secularized. What Bishop finds there is not the holy

⁶⁷ For a helpful overview see (Nussbaum 1986).

⁶⁸ So Saul converted after a limit-experience on his travels. cf. (Tracy 1996, p. 105): “The concept of limit-situation is a familiar one in . . . existentialist philosophy and theology . . . Fundamentally, the concept refers to those human situations wherein a human being ineluctably finds manifest a certain ultimate limit or horizon to his or her existence. The concept itself is mediated by ‘showing’ the implications of certain crucial positive and negative experiential limit-situations. More exactly, limit-situations refer to two basic kinds of existential situation: either those ‘boundary’ situations of guilt, anxiety, sickness, and the recognition of death as one’s own destiny, or those situations called ‘ecstatic experiences’- intense joy, love, reassurance, creation. All genuine limit-situations refer to those human limits (limit-to) as our own as well as recognize, however haltingly, some disclosure of a limit-of our experience. The negative mode of limit-situations can best be described with Karl Jaspers as ‘boundary-situations’.”

family but ‘a family with pets’.” This is an image that Hammer (and Costello and Bromwich among others) associates with “nostalgia . . . poignant and powerful.” The nostalgia is aimed at sentiments surrounding family religious sentiments and practices—hence also religious beliefs—that Hammer would have us understand are otiose.⁶⁹ If I am following him correctly here, his reasoning is this: “this old Nativity” refers to the “scene of the Incarnation . . . that moment when the Word is made flesh; Christmas morning, that moment when the divine takes human form and so becomes present in the world.” But the Nativity “is a scene that can be remembered but not entered into, as the belief system that it comes out of and refers to can be looked at from afar but not entered into.” Thus, in effect, the speaker *couldn’t* have seen the Old Nativity because she didn’t believe in it in the first place.

Aside from the technicality that the Incarnation refers to Jesus’ conception and not to his birth, in my view this gets things exactly backwards and begs all the big questions. One doesn’t *need* specific beliefs (much less, *per impossibile*, “Christian” beliefs!) to experience the Incarnation. Christian beliefs *derive* from that experience or ones like it. This correction, in turn, makes it a little easier to see that just *what* the speaker means by “this old Nativity” remains an open question. Hammer’s *conclusion* is correct enough, that the speaker, seen this way, is disconnected from the tradition. But his response is reductive and misleading as to the grammar and rhetoric of Bishop’s phrase.⁷⁰

In my view again, a gloss grammatically and rhetorically more adequate to the possibilities the speaker expresses will run like this: *Why couldn’t* I have had in life whatever it takes to have “seen”—to have somehow “encountered,” “entered into,” “believed in,” “experienced”—the divine in (as) the human, the human as divine? Or said again, why couldn’t she have received the experience within or behind the event that is symbolically rendered in the open book before her? Why couldn’t she have seen *some* such event *as* holy?⁷¹ Putting it that way respects the possibility (the likelihood) that the speaker is skeptical of such things altogether, but it also preserves the speaker’s struggle of intelligence involved in trying to comprehend such an experience—its nature as paradox and mystery.⁷² No one doubts the speaker *is* skeptical here; but of what, exactly? In “The Journey of the Magi” Eliot speaks to the aspects of mystery and paradox that Bishop’s “this old Nativity” allows:

This set down

This: were we led all that way for Birth or Death?

There was a Birth, certainly,

We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,

But had thought they were different; this Birth was

Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

⁶⁹ Costello, Bonnie. (Bishop 2011, p. 133) agrees: “By the end of this passage [Bishop] has revealed her cultural inheritance as desperately out of touch with contemporary reality.”

⁷⁰ In referring to the event that the Biblical illustration symbolically represents, Bishop is referring to what she understands is a historically past event, certainly. But just how, in what words, are we to *describe* that event? Hammer responds, “Christmas morning,” and so forth. And that fits. But “Christmas” without further comment is an anachronism; no one at the Nativity was thinking, “Christmas!” or professed “Christian” beliefs. Using it here as short-hand for what is being asked after risks serious conceptual confusion and, worse, the occlusion of genuine grammatical possibilities. For it encourages us to retroject a long history of determinate theological “beliefs” about such matters—one that looks for all the world (rightly or wrongly) like a closed system, as Hammer says—onto what is also, equally plausibly and properly, called the “mystery” or “paradox” or even “riddle” of divine birth. And *those* terms—mystery, paradox, riddle (like my terms selected from “Poem,” “attending to the given” and “gift”), when treated as capacious rhetorical topics and not fixed concepts, might better catch the spirit of Bishop’s inquiry as I’ve presented it from the beginning.

⁷¹ cf. (Zyskind 1970, pp. 373–95): “Rhetoric has always been an art of reading or posting signs, and its contemporary value in this regard could lie in its insistence on treating some of them as principles which . . . need to be examined in the large rather than to be passed over immediately into what they signify.”

⁷² Wittgenstein, CV, 64e, gives the kind of pragmatic and contextualist account of belief that I am interested in: “It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it’s belief, it’s really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It’s passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation. Instruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience.”

The casual familiarity of the phrase “this old Nativity,” and the casual irony of “while we were at it,” are immediately belied by the seriousness of the symbols that follow—as they are also by the multiple mentions of birth and death throughout the previous sections—creating just that mixture in her plaint that I am calling paradox. The speaker is not merely emotionally disillusioned and resigned and skeptical, she is intellectually off-balance. Paradox will do that. Such a gloss has the further advantage of aligning with Bromwich’s description of her account throughout the poem as (literally) “senseless,” another effect of paradox; and with his characterizing her question as one that “has the tone of a child’s pleading” (I should have said, more generally, complaining) (Bromwich 2011, p. 129). She feels disenchantment, “nostalgia” for the missing consequences of an old story no longer able to be entered into, and as far as it goes he is right (Bromwich 2011, p.129). In fact I think we can—we *should*—hear this concluding section in some such way, “as” (at best) disconnected thoughts and emotions at odds with each other but wholly in keeping with the prolonged parataxis of the preceding sections. Hear (*try to hear*).

- “Open the book” (l. 66) as a reluctant self-direction—reluctant, because skeptical of discovery; self-direction (or whatever), because she does still feel nostalgic for something.
- “The gilt rubs off the edges” (l. 66) as the modernist’s ironic self-reminder of the weighty cost (guilt) of such belief.
- “Open the heavy book” (l. 68) as aggravated insistence: heavy, in the sense of burdensome (connected with the earlier “the eye drops, *weighted*” (l. 26)). Seeing such things cannot be sustained: they either defeat vision by dissipating in a “watery, prismatic white-and-blue” haze (l. 31); or, being senseless, they finally deserve being mischievously transformed into the speaker’s witty “family with pets.”
- The list of images—the dark ajar, the unbreathing flame, the straw, like the counterpart list of images in section 1, of lines, burrin, ripples above sand, God’s spreading fingerprint—hear these as if she is trying (unsuccessfully) to *will* seeing a religious aspect, but effecting instead merely
- Little more than a colorful haze (l. 31) or a charming, new aspect on an iconic scene (“family with pets”). After which, hear
- “—and looked and looked our infant sight away” (l. 74) as self-interruption from that failure, and as wishful thinking that echoes (Bromwich again) “her wishfully innocent question”: wishfully, because the speaker is *not* childishly innocent; question, because she still desires what she has been unable to enter into.

That is one way to extrapolate the conventionally-accepted way of picturing the poem. But it is not the only way of looking embodied in the poem itself.

5.2. “...a page made up/of several scenes arranged”

What happens instead when we turn the axis of rotation one final time (“Caught in the toils of an initial letter; l. 24), by reading this concluding section, and the poem as a whole, and the world at large, under the hermeneutic guidance of “When dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves?” Bromwich especially again, notwithstanding his reading of this poem, rightly intuits a vast hermeneutic range in Bishop: “Bishop always respects the claims of unbelievers different from herself. Her mood is almost always generous.”⁷³ Just so. But how, exactly?

Reading Section 3 in the assimilative mode, let’s take the first step toward the poem’s conclusion: “Open the book” (l. 66). This is, of course, another paradox, a formal one. Just as the poem had opened with the concluding “Thus,” so it concludes with the exordial “Open.” It is striking to me that no one seems to have noticed this, but even more striking that no one has suggested that we hear in

⁷³ (Bromwich 2011, p. 130): “Unbelievers different from herself” may suggest that Bromwich takes her to be a believer. She may be, in some sense; but the implied author of this poem does not tip her hand.

this phrasing an allusion to Augustine, that is, hear it “as” spoken after the fashion that Augustine famously must have heard “*Tolle, legge*” spoken (whatever way that is) at the moment of conversion, as related in his *Confessions*:

I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, “Take up and read; take up and read.” Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon.”⁷⁴

Like Augustine, Bishop too repeats the key phrase that we are now imagining her saying to herself (in lieu of imagining her hearing a heavenly voice): “Open the book . . . Open the heavy book” (68). (Now I hear the line as *alternately* impositional or vocational.) Like Augustine too, Bishop places herself—and us readers, believers or non-believers as the case may be—at the moment *before*, on the brink of Augustine’s limit-experience of conversion. The difference here is that the moment is, for her, one that remains indefinitely suspended. The *believing* reader might very well interpret the symbolism of the Nativity without missing a beat, knowing how to look at it. The skeptical *unbeliever* may tolerate it, as Hammer and Costello and Bromwich do. The *inquiring* reader will want to undergo it—since successful seeing-as, like a conversion experience, cannot (not initially) be willed (one either sees the duck or rabbit or one doesn’t). But as for herself, the speaker implies that she doesn’t “see” anything before or upon opening the book, so the question, “Why couldn’t we have seen?” hangs in the air, not alluding to, but in the tone of, Hopkins’ prayerful complaint, “Comforter, where is they comforting?”

Heard this way, Bishop’s question is not chiefly an empirical one. (An appropriate answer to her question is not that she was born too late to have seen that old Nativity, or that Bethlehem wasn’t on the itinerary.) It *sounds* empirical—why didn’t I get what others in life seemed to have gotten?—but taking it that way renders it singularly silly and uninteresting, since everyone knows what she knows, that no one on earth can tell her why she hasn’t received the gift of faith. If there is anything empirical about this at all, it could be her wondering just *how* anyone goes about—even while asking why *she* couldn’t have been led to go about—looking at life “from a religious point of view.” Why couldn’t she have been led to see it so? How is it that one comes to see the human as divine?

Both *what* is being asked and *how* it is asked are more clearly caught, I think, in the analogous “Poem” that we glanced at above. There the speaker, referring to the painting she’d been gifted, had corrected herself: “Our visions coincided—‘visions’ is/ too serious a word—our looks, two looks” (5–51). Why the correction? Well, only consider what she is considering there, namely how she was actually going about seeing things—in effect, how aspect perception had dawned on her in part because she *had bothered* to linger over, by attending to, the given—and not by experiencing a “vision.”

Here also, in “Over 2k,” though *what* she expresses longing for follows in the form of a symbolic representation of a vision, “the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,” it is not a *vision* of this she wants. After all, whatever the event of the Nativity might have been, these images are not what anyone present saw things “as,” but are merely conventional symbols standing in for the experience of the event. In the account of a vision, what one sees is wholly different from the normal run of things; it is an *interpretation* of that which it symbolizes rather than the experience of the event undergone. And it is the *experience* she longs for, not the specific event as described. As in Poem,” what the speaker

⁷⁴ The Confessions of St Augustine (Book 8, Chapter 12) translated from the Latin by J.G. Pilkington. In (Schaff 1882) Augustine was of particular importance to Bishop.

wants is more modest than a vision—though equally transforming: a different “look” to everyday and ordinary things, things that as they stand are (like “our travels”) “tired/and a touch familiar.” The theoretical physicist David Bohm has recently struck the right note in a non-religious context, helpful perhaps for those who may be reading here outside a religious tradition:

[T]here are no direct and positive things that man can do to get in touch with the immeasurable, for this must be immensely beyond anything that man can grasp with his mind or accomplish with his hands or his instruments. What man can do is to give his full attention and energies to bring clarity and order into the totality of the field of measure (Bohm 1980, p. 32), emphasis added.)

Bishop’s version of this is “when dwelt upon.” What sort of condition for seeing is “dwelling upon?”

As it happens the word “dwelling” derives from the Middle English *dwellen*, meaning “to reside” or “to inhabit,” concepts concerned with where one lives, hence with daily habits and practices and beliefs. Historically the notion of dwelling-place was closely associated with rhetorical character (*ethos*), which Aristotle had speculated was the chief of the three sources of persuasion, along with *logos*, the substantive *pragmata* of arguments, and *pathos*, the emotional bearing of arguments and other appeals. This line of thinking, about the fact that *ethos* gets manifested when and where we dwell (and rhetorically for Aristotle, in our *words*), embraces two apparently opposed but importantly related points: the first has to do with the importance of character and will to seeing-as, the second with seeming objections to that idea. Briefly attending to these matters provides *one* way (not the only way) we can bring this essay to a provisional close.

First, as Wittgenstein has noted often in his works, the real difficulty in achieving a new look, a new “outlook” on the world, is not chiefly intellectual, much less academic:

What makes a subject difficult to understand—if it is significant, important—is not that some special instruction about abstruse things is necessary to understand it. Rather it is the contrast between the understanding of the subject and what most people want to see. Because of this the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not a difficulty of the intellect, but of the will. (*PO*, 161)

This difficulty of the will gets exacerbated “by certain analogies within our language” (*PO*, 189), analogies that mislead us in forming and articulating our cares and commitments. For example we can be encouraged to speak of our experiences of the world on the analogy that, like individual nouns, elements of the world look disconnected and unrelated (except by accumulative “and’s”)—hence can look to us, once they are so much as abstractly identified, “tired/and a touch familiar.” Then, where we live, the so-called everyday and ordinary that comprises the matter of our lives, looks merely droll; in contrast “other scenes,/innumerable”—even if “equally sad and still”—come to look attractively “foreign,” interesting. Something otherwise so benign as grammar can encourage a (misleading) paradigm of the interesting and valuable.

Certainly Bishop is aware of this moral dimension of seeing-as, since concrete instances of seeing-as pervade her poems. We have said that she is at pains in this poem as elsewhere to direct her own and the reader’s attention, not just to different ways of seeing the world, but precisely to our everyday and ordinary as *that* which needs to be seen differently. If anything, this makes her “Why couldn’t we have seen?” resound all the more poignantly—at once a plaint, a potential prayer, and a rhetorical appeal, in the tone now of Hopkins’ “Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend/With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.” All of this makes her “inability to see,” her aspect-blindness, at once something for which she—or any aspect-blind reader—has some responsibility, yet something beyond one’s final control or calculation: a gift.

Second, there are at least two possible objections to our considering seeing-as as deeply connected with character and will. The initial objection is also two-fold, the first part of which is the fact that, even for a reader already alive to seeing the world religiously (whatever that means), the penultimate line may in fact afford no aspect-dawning at all. This is easily enough explained, since even Bishop's witty "secular" portrait of the holy family is itself only a slight alteration of what a religious or believing reader *continually* sees the holy family as. That is, since the holy family-with-manger-and-magi is an image endlessly re-circulated on Hallmark Christmas cards and the rest, it has assumed already an *habitual* default view, hence is a view that may be more difficult to visualize under yet a further, "new" religious aspect.

The other part of the initial objection may seem more troubling, the fact that aspect-change, seeing a new aspect, has *duration*, it comes and goes, and it may not always be available, so to speak. This can make it seem that it is *not* part of one's stable character and ongoing picture of life at all. Wittgenstein makes this point about duration in different ways. In the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, for example, he notes: "I could say: a picture is not always *alive* for me while I am seeing it. // 'Her picture smiles down on me from the wall.' It need not always do so, whenever my glance lights on it" (*PI*, 200). In his preparatory studies for that section he had observed that, "It is as if the aspect were something that only dawns, but does not remain; and yet this must be a conceptual remark, not a psychological one" (*RPP*, I, 1021). Both remarks, as he says, are grammatical: possessing, say, an abiding way of seeing the world does not entail that coming to see a new *aspect* of some particular part of that world will abide; it will likely not, precisely because it *is* new. If over time it comes to be internalized as part of the default picture, then it is no longer to be referred as an aspect-dawning, but is rather a continuous seeing- or regarding-as.

The stronger objection about seeing-as (the fact that it deals with one's ongoing life and character) may not apply immediately to Wittgenstein's analyses, but it does bring out something important about Bishop. I mean the centrality of seeing *and* seeing-as "*as*" chiefly visual in her imagination. To give one of many possible examples, "The Monument" begins: "Now can you see the monument?" and ends "Watch it closely." A powerful visual imagination watches closely in "Over 2k" also, though for the speaker at the end, if not for the reader, it devolves into the wit of an image that leads no place in particular. Why is that?

A passage from Walter Ong's seminal *The Presence of the Word* (1967) illuminates seeing-as in a religious dimension. In a discussion of different aspects under which humans have sought to understand the divine Word, Ong speaks of "the Word of God who is Jesus Christ":

We are faced further with the fact that the Word of God in his sensible human nature is at first, like other men, an infant, who does not speak (*infans* is Latin for nonspeaker). A long-standing heritage of profound meditation on this theme of the "unspeaking Word," the *Verbum Infans*, runs from Augustine and other patristic sources through the medieval theologians and a nativity sermon by Lancelot Andrewes in the year 1611 to T. S. Eliot's lines in *Gerontion*, "The word within a word, unable to speak a word, / swaddled with darkness." When the Word does speak, the words of the Word, the sayings of Jesus, themselves become the core of the good news, the Gospel, part of the Bible—which is as a whole the word of God already. Acceptance of God's kingdom, which these sayings of Jesus announce, is dependent upon hearing, directly or indirectly: "Fides ex auditu"—Faith comes through hearing—Paul declares (Rom. 10:17). (Ong 2000)

What I have in mind here of course is the preeminence of sound, especially *speech*, over sight in matters of Christian faith. Is it possible that Bishop's visual imagination also occludes or obscures *religious* aspects of the world that might be "seen-as" in *other* ways (e.g., *heard-as*)? Perhaps. But then I take it as equally plausible that Bishop herself, given her genuine modesty, signals her awareness of this

fact by ending the poem with her desire to “[look and look] our *infant* sight away.” That would signal a desire to get beyond, *emerge from*, the limiting conditions of her own specifically *visual* imagination, so powerful and yet existentially and religiously distancing, at least potentially.

I use the phrase “emerge from” purposely. If we dwell a moment longer on the ethical will as influencing and being influenced by our experience and beliefs, then Bishop’s penultimate image, “a family with pets”—for most people a paradigm of the everyday and ordinary, hence of the droll and humdrum—*may* appear as something more than merely witty. For in reading with an eye for “resolution,” the image of a family with pets may express the *essence* of the human as divine, hence also as gift. Further, if *this* image, of so plain a thing, can be somehow seen as divine, then in principle *every* other image in the poem, and indeed any *other* image we might care to carry in to our talk about the poem, can so function, simply by virtue of its being part of the divine whole.

This last thought leads off into arguments about the justification of religious faith, arguments whose application to poetry might open up rich possibilities.⁷⁵ My thought here, however, runs another way, towards two further lines of development. For I want to gesture toward the possibility, first, that the earlier announcement, “when dwelt upon, they all resolve themselves,” far from looming as the abbreviated formula of a religious meta-narrative, one that is arrogant about its ability to close the deal once and for all, is a paradox of the first water. This should be easy to see, for we only need remember that there is *no end* to what might be seen as the divine in the human and the human in the divine, and no end to what we might say about it, and meanings accordingly “resolved” at best only provisionally: “Over 2,000 . . . ”

Second, looking in exactly the opposite direction, I want to insist on the *paradoxical* nature of what Bishop demonstrates in “Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance.” Here I can only gesture toward analyses by David Burrell and, more recently, by Stephen Mulhall and Cora Diamond, to the effect that the analogical language we use in speaking of God is, in important ways, genuinely “senseless” (in Bromwich’s phrase) or “non-sense” in Wittgenstein’s.⁷⁶ For in applying analogously to God appraisive, perfection terms and transcendentals—“wise,” “good,” “loving,” “unity,” “being,” and so on—we recognize the limitations of analogical projection beyond *any* grammar they presently have or could have. As Diamond has it, analogical God-language “promises a ‘grammar’.” Such language, in short, is paradoxical, at once an infant babbling and yet a stage in orienting ourselves religiously and ethically in our lives. To say so is to recognize that our all-too-human, grammatically-bereft God-talk walks hand-in-hand with our equally human, rhetorical desire to communicate with and about the divine.

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Abbreviations

BB	<i>Blue and Brown Books</i>
CR	(Stanley Cavell) <i>The Claim of Reason</i>
CV	<i>Culture and Value</i>
LC	<i>Lectures and Conversations</i>
OC	<i>On Certainty</i>
PI	<i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (rev. 4th ed.)
PO	<i>Philosophical Occasions</i>
RPP	<i>Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology</i> , vol. 1
TLP	<i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>

⁷⁵ For Wittgensteinian-inflected examples, see (Ferreira 1991); (Verbin 2001).

⁷⁶ See especially (Burrell 1973); (Mulhall 2015).

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