Contingency as Form:
The Poetics of Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the form of Marianne Moore's and Elizabeth Bishop's poetry in light of the notion of contingency, arguing that various formal elements in Moore's and Bishop's poetics, such as metonomy and irony, demonstrate how a new ground for value is linked to, dependent upon, and made from existing ones. The thesis also examines the way in which an aesthetic moment occurs at the instance of exchange between one ground for value and the next, and it foregrounds the way in which the poetic subject -- a subjective position that often manifests itself as a voice or presence behind the speaker -- becomes known at this aesthetic moment. While primarily a close study of form and contingency in four poems, this thesis argues that Moore and Bishop demonstrate intriguing and liberating strategies for subjective and gendered positionings.

The first chapter is a theoretical discussion of contingency, value, and aesthetics. Emphasizing the notion of contingency, this chapter draws upon pragmatists such as John Dewey and Richard Rorty, theorists such as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith and John Guillory, and feminists such as Judith Butler, in order to establish a framework through which to view the poetry of Moore and Bishop. The second chapter is a discussion of Moore's "The Plumet Basilisk" and Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502" with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the poetic subject is manifested in those poems; and the third chapter is an examination of Moore's "Marriage" and Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" with specific emphasis on gendered positionings within those poems.

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I would also like to give special thanks to my family, Ken Strong, Wendy Strong, Greg Strong, and Roger Davis for their continual encouragement and support.

I find it alternately inspirational and depressing to think that I should come so far and try so hard and achieve nothing but approximation.

Elizabeth Bishop in a letter to Marianne Moore, February 5, 1940
(qtd. in Kime Scott 338)

Preface

Marianne Moore was, as Brett C. Millier states, "without a doubt the most important single influence on Elizabeth Bishop's poetic practice and career" (67). Writing a poetic that was influenced by and has been continually compared to Moore's, Bishop, as the younger of the two, was indeed Moore's *protégé*. Further, Moore was not only an influence on the younger poet but also a mentor to her: Bishop wrote a memoir of their friendship entitled "Efforts of Affection," which was published after both of their deaths; she corresponded with her continuously throughout their lives, often sending Moore her own poems for criticism; and she expressed great respect for her poetry, castigating "feminist readers for not paying enough attention to 'Marriage' (a poem that 'says everything they are saying and everything Virginia Woolf has said')" (Miller 22). Yet Bishop also felt that her poetry was distinct from Moore's, and she eventually needed to break away from her guidance and criticism: in a 1937 letter to Moore, she exclaims, "sometimes I'm amazed at people's comparing me to you when all I'm doing is some kind of blank-verse -- can't they <u>see</u> how different it is?" (Millier 68); and, in their well known dispute over Bishop's "The Roosters," she refused the changes that Moore quite forcefully suggested.

If Bishop had a great yet somewhat equivocal respect for Moore, however, so did Moore for Bishop. Upon Bishop's first publishing of "The Map," "Three Valentines," and "The Reprimand" in <u>Trial Balances</u>, Moore pronounced the book "a triumph," and in a letter to Edward Aswell of Harper and Brothers, she describes Bishop as "a person of great promise" (92-3). Yet Moore always expected Bishop to send her her writings for review before publication, and when "In Prison" (a story of Bishop's that Moore did not see

before publication) was published in Partisan Review, Moore expressed her surprise (137). These two writers' mutual respect for one another and their close yet sometimes tenuous and professional friendship suggest a complex relationship which cannot be defined in a single phrase or expressed under a single rubric. Rather, their lives intersect as women, friends, and poets in an ambiguity and uneasiness which might be said to define their poetic itself. Above all, the extent of influence on each other's work is great, and there are, I believe, more similarities than differences in the poetry of these two writers.

I approach the poetry of Moore and Bishop by acknowledging the form of their work, and unlike many critics, I view their poetic form as similar to rather than different from one another. Although their poetic form is apparently different -- Moore uses long, complex, prose-like sentences and syllabic verse whereas Bishop more often uses rhyme and traditional forms such as the sestina -- it is essentially alike in that both writers use poetic tropes such as metonomy and irony to create stunning and intricate masks and personas which determine various subjective positionings. It is this formal aspect of their poetry which draws attention to the notion of contingency and makes it so important to their work, and it is because I see such a close correlation between their poetic form and contingency that I endeavor a full length study of the ways in which one gives rise to the other. The focus of this thesis, then, is neither on thematic nor political attributes of the poetry but rather on the formal qualities that make the notion of contingency so prevalent in Moore's and Bishop's poetics.

It may be useful, at this early stage, to clarify my use of the word "contingency." My conception of contingency comes from readings of various theorists which I examine in the first chapter of this thesis; but since I discuss those theorists quite extensively in that chapter, I will here limit my

discussion to mentioning how contingency is manifested specifically in Moore's and Bishop's poetry. In the simplest and most general terms, contingency is conceived in this study as the way in which a new ground for value is linked to, dependent upon, and made from existing ones. With regard to the form of Moore's and Bishop's poetics, contingency manifests itself in various interesting ways: as the dependence of a continually changing creature (ultimately, the self) on elements of his environment (as in Moore's "The Plumet Basilisk"); as the dependence of a subtle, ironizing voice on the speaker's ground for value, as well as that voice's differentiation from that speaker's ground for value (as in Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502"); as the dependence for identity of the dominant on the dominated, the masculine on the feminine (as in Moore's "Marriage,"); and as the reliance of our own subjective and gendered positionings on that which they exclude (as in Bishop's "In the Waiting Room"). The concept of contingency is worthy of our attention, since, ultimately, an awareness of it draws our attention to our own subjective positions which are not essential but rather unstable, changing, linked to our history, our culture, and our gender. Moreover, contingency is particularly relevant to the work of Moore and Bishop since both poets rejected essentialism and embraced notions of subjectivity and gender which, while always tied to elements of our environment and our history, allow for more flexible, altering and less generalized strategies of positioning.

The term "aesthetics" as well as the phrase "the poetic subject," both of which I use in relation to contingency, are also worthy of comment. The philosophical debate regarding aesthetics is an immense one, and in light of this fact and with regard to the notion of contingency with the poetics of Moore and Bishop in mind, I have limited my readings within this debate.

My understanding of aesthetics has arisen primarily through readings of theorists such as John Dewey, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and John Guillory. I study Dewey's notion of the aesthetic because he was well read by Moore, and I believe that his notion of "experience" (that which possesses an aesthetic quality) as distinct from "value" is relevant to Moore's, and, in some instances, Bishop's poems. As we will see from Dewey's discussion of the aesthetic, in which an intellectual interaction takes place in the exchange between individuals and their environments, giving rise to an "experience," and as we will see from Guillory's discussion of it, which involves a historical account of the concept and its connection with economics, the notion of the aesthetic is intimately tied to the idea of *exchange*. In this way, the aesthetic is very relevant to form in Moore's and Bishop's poetics, for it is the exchange of one ground of value for the next, one subjective position for another -- each of which is contingent on the other -- that gives rise to aesthetic moments in Moore's and Bishop's poetry. Furthermore, it is during these aesthetic moments of exchange that what I will call the poetic subject -- an almost hypothetical subjective position that resists the Cartesian notion of subjectivity -- becomes known. Although the poetic subject is manifested formally in various ways which I will discuss throughout this thesis, it essentially demonstrates an aesthetic moment of poetic agency. It is in this way -- through the manifestation of the poetic subject -- that both Moore and Bishop avoid "egocentric and essentialist assertions of a subjective self while also avoiding the self-erasure which is their opposite and double" (Miller vii).

Throughout this thesis, I engage myself critically in a variety of theoretical discourses; and the way in which I use such different theoretical discourses may, at times, seem odd. The pragmatist vocabulary of Richard Rorty, for example, is not often used alongside the feminist vocabulary of

Judith Butler. Yet in the context of this study, both pragmatist and feminist vocabularies are relevant. Although when I speak of the contingency of value, it makes sense to discuss Rorty, Rorty and other pragmatists do not discuss contingency in relation to gender very adequately or thoroughly, as a feminist critic such as Butler does. And so when I examine notions of contingency and gender in relation to Moore's and Bishop's poetry, I find myself limited by pragmatists and I find it useful to turn to pertinent feminists such as Butler. Moreover, when I deliberate on the contingency of gender, I find psychoanalytic discourse useful both because it is so important to feminism and because it is relevant, in certain instances, to Moore's and Bishop's poetics. Even though I use pragmatist, feminist, and psychoanalytic forms of criticism, then, I do not intend to position myself critically alongside one or even all of these streams of discourses; instead, I bring these various theorists together because they all speak of contingency in various ways which are both interesting and relevant to the poetry at hand. In other words, my intention is not to proclaim myself as a pragmatist, a feminist or a psychoanalyst but to foreground the formal elements of Moore's and Bishop's poetry which make contingency important to and prevalent in their work. In order to do so, I bring forth the discourses and vocabularies that I feel remain most responsible to Moore's and Bishop's own poetic and critical vision and most enhance my own readings of the poems.

Finally, I would like to mention that although this thesis is neither a historical nor a biographical study, I acknowledge that the historical time period in which Moore and Bishop lived is closely linked to the ideas brought forth in their poetry. Moore wrote a great deal of her poetry through the Great Depression, and it is quite possible that the stock market crash of 1929 gave rise to the questioning (both on the part of Moore and of others in her

time) of the stability of various kind of values -- economic, political epistemological, and aesthetic. Bishop lived a great deal of her life in Brazil during times of political unrest, and her dislocation as an American living in Brazil during those uncertain times also may have invoked a questioning of the stability of various kinds of values.

As well, Moore and Bishop were both prominent American poets who were women writing within a milieu of male American poets, such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Robert Lowell; yet, at the same time, they were writing at a time in which great women poets, such as Gertrude Stein, H.D., Adrienne Rich and others, were beginning to receive great attention and respect. These factors might have heightened Moore's and Bishop's awareness not only of the contingency of values but also of their own complicated subjective positions. Also, not insignificantly, Bishop's lesbianism and alcoholism, as Margaret Dickie suggests, may have affected the way in which she plays with concealment, allowing herself to "hide -- behind masks and complicated structures -- a range of emotions and sympathies she did not want to acknowledge fully" (7). The historical time period in which these poets were immersed is important, and if this paper was a larger study, I would historicize my argument more thoroughly. But with regard to these poets' biographies, besides the fact that many critics have already written on such issues, I feel that to speculate upon biographical traces in their work is, in some instances, to simplify their poetry and to overlook their own critical vision, the way in which I believe they would want their poems to be read. For this reason, I limit my study to a close reading of the formal qualities of four poems in light of the significant theoretical concept of contingency.

Chapter One:
Contingency, Value, Aesthetics

"Contingency" -- a concept that implies both that which is dependent or conditional, and that which involves an element of indeterminacy and chance -- has invoked various complicated discussions: Richard Rorty often speaks as though everything we are and everything we experience is thoroughly contingent, yet he insists that we can establish value by creating new languages or redescribing the world around us; Barbara Herrnstein Smith radicalizes the notion of contingency, suggesting that all value is "an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables" (30); John Guillory, in opposition to Smith, suggests that it is time "to replace the philosophical notion of the contingency of value with a historical account of the determination of value" (325); and Judith Butler, who seems to agree with Guillory while embracing rather than rejecting the word "contingency," calls for an understanding of the value of bodies as a "historically contingent nexus of power/ discourse" (33) -- an understanding which would allow for a critical inquiry of their genealogy. These contemporary theorists, along with many others, are current contributors to a historically lengthy philosophical debate on questions regarding value. In this first chapter, I intend to explore some of these current conceptions of contingency and value, and I intend to work through their complexities. By doing so, I hope to open up a path by which to discuss the correlative and contrasting elements of Moore's and Bishop's poetics, a way by which to perceive how notions of value, aesthetics and subjectivity are realized in their poems.

I will begin by discussing how present values, for John Dewey and Rorty, seem to be established through their dependence on previous ones. For as new values are constituted and old ones are lost, there is always a remaining link -- a way by which the new is tied to the old. Conversely, as values are continuously exchanged through the course of time, and as one value gives way to the next throughout history, there exists an aesthetic moment which is the excess created by the unequal nature of the exchange. It is this aesthetic moment -- that which distinguishes the old from the new -- that gives rise to the assertion of agency and the creation of value. I will also address how the process of exchange between old values and new ones relates to the social relations between those who dominate and those who are dominated in a community. Dominant peoples of a community establish their values by distinguishing themselves from the dominated -- their values are thus linked to and dependent on the dominated. Yet the dependency of the dominant on the dominated indicates that the dominated pose a constant threat of disruptive possibility to dominant values. These disruptive possibilities, similar to potential projections of new values from old ones, create the aesthetic moments I wish to discuss. The intention of this chapter, then, is to explore both the ways in which values become sedimented through time and social relations, and the ways in which those values give rise to disruption, aesthetic moments, and re-evaluation. In other words, my project is to think through the notion of contingency -- as both conditional and emergent -- in all of its richness and in all of its potential for constituting value.

For Dewey, the ground upon which we may establish meaning, fulfillment, and what is "good" is "experience." This "experience" consists of an intellectual and aesthetic negotiation with one's environment. It is that

which favours the idea that we are at one with our environment, mutable and changing with it. We do not understand or perceive things in a strictly objective way but rather in relation to our own subjective positionings: "any one thing may be experienced in numerous ways, but these alternatives are alternatives amongst several realms of experience, not alternatives between a reality and various approximations of it" (Wheeler 113). When we "have an

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\experience" and thus view the environment in a new way "as opposed to forcing it to fit our preconceived prejudices" (112), we create something new, something to be "enjoyed, used, and acted upon" (112). By creating something new and useful, we find meaning and fulfillment. Moreover, according to Dewey, our experience might ultimately constitute a value within our community. Indeed, Dewey confirms that experience constitutes the very ground upon which values are based: he says that values are "consequences of intelligent action [experience]," indicating that values are built upon, and thus made of experience ("The Construction of Good" 579).

However, when an experience becomes a value, it is in some ways distinct from that initial experience. In Dewey's words, values are "re-issue[d] in a changed form from intelligent behavior [experience]" (579). As such, values become ground upon which others might "have an experience." This process works as follows: value, as mentioned, is grounded in and made from experience, yet as the experience is complete, the value established, it has become something other than that which we experience; subsequently, as others have an experience, continuing to acutely negotiate and interact with their environment (seen in terms of the existing value), their experiences constitute a new value -- the old value is partly lost, and a new one is gained.[1]

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[1]Here, I am not speaking about individual values -- my values, for instance, as opposed to my neighbour's.

In other words, values are distinct from experiences because experiences involve a *re-evaluation* of existing values, a re-evaluation that may lead to an alteration of those existing values. From this process we can perceive two related points. Firstly, since an experience involves a negotiation of how our environment has been valued in the past, we can see how our present experiences and consequent values are intimately tied to previous ones in history. Secondly, we can see how our ground cannot hold any universal claims outside of its contingency, its dependency on past claims and future ones. If we take a step back from our own position and view the pattern as a whole, then, the movement from the constitution of one value to the next, then we realize that experiences (and consequent values) are temporary and contingent on one another. As we attempt to establish a ground through experience, that foundation gives rise to the next, our ground lost as the articulation of a new one begins.

While Dewey would say that in order to establish a ground for meaning, fulfillment, and what is "good" we must experience the world around us in a new and unique way, Rorty would say that in order to establish such a ground, we must create a new language. Like Dewey, Rorty does not comply with the idea that the world has an objective reality, and that we are external to it. But instead of saying that the world is what we experience it as, as Dewey does, Rorty says that the world is what we describe it as. Whereas Dewey believes that there are many alternative ways to experience things, none of which are more right or real than the other, Rorty believes that there are many alternative ways to describe things -- ways which do not attempt to describe any sort of 'reality' or objective world, but which

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Rather, I am speaking about collective, social and historical ones -- the values of the Romantics as opposed to the values of the Modernists, or, to use Rorty's example, St. Paul's moral values as opposed to Freud's ("The Contingency of Language" 5).

are simply different kinds of perception.[2] In order to find meaning and fulfillment, then, Rorty would suggest that we establish a new kind of language. For if we do not see things in a new way, and therefore create our own language, then we simply become replicas of others, letting "the length of [our minds] be set by the language other human beings have left behind" ("The Contingency of Selfhood" 27). Thus, just as Dewey's "experience" leads to meaning and fulfillment, Rorty's notion of creating a new language suggests a way to find meaning and fulfillment, a way through which to claim a ground for the "good."

The same problem that we noted in Dewey's assertion that experience provides ground for value, however, appears in Rorty's assertion that the creation of a new language provides ground for meaning. Specifically, this problem involves "the tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency" ("The Contingency of Selfhood" 25). That is, as we create a new language, we hope that our claims are universally valid yet know that they hold no validity outside of their interdependence with others. Even the strongest poet, the one who most successfully creates a language, cannot avoid "being marginal and parasitic" (41). For as Rorty says, the creation of metaphors is only possible "against the background of other old words being used in old familiar ways" (41). Just as Dewey's "experience" is dependent, "marginal and parasitic" on past values, new kinds of languages are dependent on past ones. If we take a step back from our own position, our own immersion in present languages, we can see how our vocabularies and

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[2]Although much of Rorty's "The Contingency of Selfhood" is concerned with private self-creation, I am not stressing the creation of languages at an individual level. Rather, I am suggesting that alternate descriptions may be seen along the same lines as Wittgenstein's "language games." That is, they are part of larger, historical patterns of discourse that include collective beliefs, practices, and desires.

values are just a link in a chain of many. Rorty himself, then, must come to terms with the idea that his assertions cannot transcend contingency, that eventually, his ground and language will be lost as another is articulated. Subsequently, voices of the future theoretically must come to terms with the idea that their assertions cannot transcend contingency, their perspectives intertwined with past ones and likely to fade with the passage of time.

In order to know how deeply we are embedded in historical values and languages, we must realize that most of the time, we simply live with the languages our predecessors have created for us: we do not often have experiences or create new languages and come to know ourselves. Dewey explains how we are often prevented from having an experience and from thus establishing a ground upon which we can stand. According to Dewey, most of the time we simply "[submit] to convention in practice and intellectual procedure" ("Having an Experience" 559). Having an experience contrasts this submission to convention in the following way. When we have an experience we *perceive* what we encounter: "Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy ... For to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience" (571). By contrast, when we submit to convention, we *recognize* what we encounter:

> Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some *other* purpose... (570)

When we perceive something, then, we regard it in a way that is not yet known -- we see functions for it that have not yet been created. Conversely, when we recognize something, we see it in a way which has already been established, its functions and purposes previously written and classified.

Rorty also senses how deeply we are embedded in the languages our predecessors have created for us, and how easy it is to use those languages rather than creating our own, new ones. Importantly, as Rorty asserts, we are led to believe that we can make claims about what is right and wrong, true and false, while we speak *within* existing languages. If we focus on individual sentences within existing languages, for example, then it is easy to decide "between 'Red wins' and 'Black wins' or between 'The butler did it' and 'The doctor did it'" ("The Contingency of Language" 5). However, "When we consider examples of alternative language games -- the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson's, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud's" (5) and so on, then it becomes difficult to think of one as more correct than another. From Rorty's viewpoint, then, it is easy to live within existing languages, deceiving ourselves by making claims as to what constitutes meaning and fulfillment, and thinking that our assertions are valid outside of the present linguistic, social and historical context. What is challenging -- even frightening -- is to recognize and acknowledge the contingency of our claims. That is, when we compare the vocabularies that have been established throughout history, when we pay attention to the variety and scope of these vocabularies, we come to the unsettling apprehension that the claims we make are temporal as well as dependent on past vocabularies and invalid outside of them.

Further, in order for someone to have an experience or create a new language from which others can benefit, certain conditions must be met. Existing values and languages must be available for the beholder to negotiate and use as a springboard for his or her new language, and the community must be ready and able to understand that new language. The fact that someone might have an experience, then, does not mean that experience will

be assimilated into the community as a value. As Rorty says, "It is unlikely that Freud's metaphors could have been picked up, used, and literalized at any earlier period. But conversely, it is unlikely that without Freud's metaphors we should have been able to assimilate Nietzsche's, James's, Wittgenstein's" and so on ("The Contingency of Selfhood" 39). When a person's experience or new language does not fit into the values of the community, that person's assertions, tastes and preferences, in Barbara Smith's words, "will appear 'subjective,' 'eccentric,' 'stubborn,' and 'capricious'" (39). By contrast, when a person's experience or new language does fit into the values of the community, that person's claims "will seem so obvious, 'natural,' and 'rational,' as not to appear to be matters of taste at all" (39). Hence, the assimilation or rejection of new values and languages ultimately depends upon social, cultural, and contextual variables. In order for a new language to be accepted as meaningful in any way, it must fit into the existing languages and values of the community.

Yet if particular values are accepted and assimilated into a community, then it might be appropriate to question the ways in which those values are stabilized within that community, and the ways in which those values might remain, strengthen, and come to be assumed throughout time. In other words, how do such values become consecrated, so that a critical inquiry into their genealogy seems to be foreclosed or irrelevant, and so that they are often read as ahistorical or "natural" truth? Although there is always an aesthetic excess as new values are created from old ones, and as one has an experience with existing values, there is also a link that ties the new to the old; in order to answer the above question, then, we must examine how values are established, reiterated, and consecrated throughout history by this link.

Guillory points out that the present conception and thus value of the aesthetic itself has been sedimented, so that a critical inquiry into its history seems to have been foreclosed. Specifically, he discusses how current liberal pluralist critiques of aesthetic discourse adhere to the established conception of that discourse as an affirmation of hegemonic values that claim to be universal or transcendent. These critics also seem to believe that the aesthetic is for the elite[3] and opposed to political and pragmatic goals on the left. In order to conceive of how aesthetic discourse has come to be known in this way, Guillory briefly traces its history. With regard to his narrative, there are several important historical instances.[4] For instance, it is important to realize that before the seventeenth century, there was little distinction between aesthetic discourse and the discourse of political economy, and that, subsequently, "the problem of aesthetic judgment was as essential to the formation of political economy as the problem of political economy was to the formation of aesthetics" (303). The formation of these discourses as separate from one another began at the emergence of "'civil society' as a distinct and relatively autonomous sector of the social order, the sector of economic competition, commerce, and production" (304). By analogizing the order, proportion and harmony of the new economic system to an object of beauty -- an aesthetic object -- moral philosophers were able to satisfactorily

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[3]The idea that the aesthetic is for the elite or the leisure class and opposed to working class issues is manifested in works such as Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy in the nineteenth century, and T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in the early twentieth century. Contemporary critics such as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith and, as Guillory notes, Tony Bennett, critique this aspect of the aesthetic because they believe that aesthetic discourse "appears to subsume the differences between different groups into the ideological 'universality' of aesthetic value," therefore affiming the universality of upper class values and taste (Guillory 271). However, such critics do not necessarily acknowledge that the aesthetic itself is that which exemplifies differentiation in the process of exchange.

[4]By foregrounding certain historical moments in relation to the conception of the aesthetic, I do not claim to fully account for the vast and complicated history of the aesthetic. Rather, with reference to Guillory, I mention these historical instances in order to emphasize both how the current perception of the aesthetic is one which has been sedimented throughout time, and how that sedimentation may be challenged by acknowledging that concept's genealogy.

explain what might have otherwise been seen as individual self-interest and greed (305-7).

Following this historical moment, there seem to have been two instances that contributed to the eventual separation of aesthetic discourse from the discourse of political economy. Firstly, Adam Smith[5] postulated the theory that the excess of beauty over use determines an object's exchange value; Smith's theory therefore dissociates the aesthetic aspect of the object from the useful or pragmatic aspect of the object. This separation clearly forwarded the idea that the aesthetic is for the elite (the accepted belief is that only the elite have the privilege of concerning themselves with what is not useful or pragmatic) as it forwarded the eventual opposition between the aesthetic and the political (the general belief is that whereas the aesthetic is not pragmatic, the political is). Secondly, it was subsequently found that the object's "exchange value in the market [would] not be determined solely by its beauty but more obviously by the cost of its production" (314). At this point, political economy could no longer "find its way back to, or include within its formula for price, the 'beauty' of the commodity" (315); and conversely, aesthetics no longer needed to assume that all commodities were works of art -- they could therefore define the work of art in opposition to other commodities. Hence, aesthetic discourse and the discourse of political economy became two separate discourses, the former defined by that which is not useful, that which is, in fact, in excess of use and therefore for the elite,

[5]Although I indicate that the separation between the discourse of the aesthetic and the discourse of political economy began in the seventeenth century, when I mention this subsequent historical moment, I refer to Adam Smith, an eighteenth century figure; in other words, my movement from one historical moment to another occurs over an entire century. Again, I emphasize that this reading of Guillory's discussion of the aesthetic is not an attempt to account for the complicated and detailed history of that concept; rather, with regard to that concept, it is a very general and broad discussion of the relations between particular historical moments.

and the latter defined by that which is pragmatic and therefore politically active.

The idea that the aesthetic is for the elite and opposed to the political is clearly not a transcendental truth but rather a conception that has been historically established and subsequently assumed by contemporary critics. Interestingly, however, while this current conception of the aesthetic as that which is for the elite and opposed to the political is reiterated and sedimented as one moment in its history gives way to the next, the exchange between those historical moments leaves a space for that sedimented historical value to be disrupted. For example, the exchange value of an item in the economic market, as we have seen, was at one time said to be determined by the beauty that was in excess of the use of the object. Subsequent to this moment, it was found that the exchange value of an item is determined rather by the cost of its production. The movement from the former moment in history to the latter, as we have also seen, sediments and strengthens the notion that the aesthetic is for the elite and opposed to the political. Yet it is by tracing back through these same moments that we are able to disrupt that sedimented value. This tracing is precisely what we have done: we have acknowledged the difference between the notion that exchange value is determined by the cost of production and the notion that exchange value is determined by the excess of beauty over use, and we have acknowledged the difference between the notion that exchange value is determined by the excess of beauty over use and the notion that beauty and use are one and the same -- the proportion and harmony of the economic system analogous to a work of art. The recognition of the difference between such historical moments allows us to see that the idea that the aesthetic is for the elite and opposed to the political is not a transcendental value but a historically determined one. What is

particularly intriguing about the discrepancies between these historical moments is that an acknowledgment of them actually results in an experience of the aesthetic: when we pull back from the present conception of the aesthetic and recognize the contingency of that value, we encounter and experience nothing other than the aesthetic itself.

Ironically, the aesthetic moments that we might encounter and experience as we recognize the contingency of values, as well as the understanding and agency that these moments allow and the new values that they might establish, are often overlooked due to current reductive, preconceived notions of the aesthetic. That is, a reduction of the aesthetic to that which is for the elite and opposed to political goals of the left, that which is "hegemonic in ambition" and "universalist in ... prescriptive ambit" (Bennett qtd. in Guillory 276), precludes a genealogical apprehension of the aesthetic. Moreover, the apprehension of values such as the aesthetic requires further analysis, for it is important to understand that values are constituted not only through their repetition and differentiation throughout time, but also through the relations between dominant and dominated peoples of a community. Just as values are sedimented throughout time, they are sedimented through social relations, and just as there is potential for their disruption through a genealogical apprehension of them, there is potential for their disruption through an apprehension of them which would account for the social relations within which they are constituted. This is the point at which Smith's notion of the way in which values are established within a community calls to be problematized, for her idea that new values in a community must relate to existing ones in order to be assimilated suggests that a community simply consists of a set of existing, homogenous values that are unanimously agreed upon by its subjects. Rather, a community is a

complicated network of interdependent relations that consist more of conflict than of consensus. In other words, if we view a community simply as a set of homogenous values, then we fail to see "the dominated and dominant *in their relations with each other* " (Mary Louise Pratt qtd. in Guillory 277). These social relations are of particular importance to this discussion since it is the continual and dynamic negotiations, realignments and exchanges between members of a community that give rise to aesthetic moments and the creation of new values.

One way of perceiving how social relations might be negotiated and values established is through a reading of Jacques Lacan's "The Mirror Stage"; although this stage depicts a moment of an individual child's early development, its teleology provides a way from which to view how dominant values in a community come to be assumed. The Mirror Stage, which "represents the first effort of the future subject to separate itself from the pre-Oedipal mother" (Moi 238), occurs when the child begins to perceive its image as an Other; the child's body progresses from an "uncoordinated aggregate, a series of parts, zones, organs, sensations, needs, and impulses" (Grosz, Jacques Lacan 33) to a perception of its body as a totality. There are several important points to keep in mind about this stage: firstly, the relation between the child and the perception of itself as a totality (which eventually becomes the ego) is an imaginary and fictional one ("this form [the imago, or desired image of the child] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" [Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" 2]); secondly, the imago and ego with which the child identifies is temporally and spatially located outside of the subject ("the ego's temporal futurity, and its exteriority as a *percipi*, establish its alterity to the subject" [Butler, Bodies That Matter 75]); thirdly, following Freud, Lacan reads the identificatory relation

between the child and its image as a constant site of unstable negotiation which involves the child's libidinal and erotic drives toward its image ("the form the ego takes ... is an effect of the projection of the erotogenic intensity experienced through libidinal bodily zones" [Grosz, Space, Time, Perversion 85]); and finally, this development from a fragmented body to a perception of the body as a totality is marked as a masculine teleology that allows the subject to access the outside world (certain organs [here, Lacan most likely refers to the male genitals] "become the tokens for the centering and controlling function of the bodily *imago* ... [and become] the imaginary epistemic condition of its access to the world" [Butler, Bodies That Matter 7]).

That the child's relation with the image constitutes an imaginary identification and that it is temporally and spatially alienated from the child suggest that the ego -- a "cumulative history of [these identificatory] relations" (74) -- will exemplify a value which is neither transcendent nor stable. Rather, the ego will be fundamentally contingent and dependent on the fragmented body that remains outside of it. Moreover, as dependent, the ego is susceptible to alteration and disruption by that fragmented body. That the imaginary, identificatory relations between the child and the image are continually being negotiated, and that these relations involve eroticism, suggest that the exchange from the fragmented body to the image as a totality is an unmatched, unequal exchange. The excess or remainder that results from that exchange -- the aesthetic -- manifests itself as erotic desire. And perhaps most interestingly, that this trajectory is marked as masculine posits the masculine subject as a unified totality and the feminine as other to this totality. By highlighting this point, I do not wish to suggest that the ego essentially represents the masculine and the fragmented body the feminine, nor do I want to imply that the imaginary, aesthetic and erotic identifications

between the child and its image are directly analogous to the relations between the dominated and the dominant in a community. What I do want to suggest is that when this kind of teleology becomes marked as masculine and then valued and consecrated within a community, it posits the masculine as the dominant and the feminine as the dominated; and when such a value is established, the dominated becomes a site of disruptive possibility to the dominant which is not dissimilar to the threat that the body poses to its ego. This site of disruptive possibility that the dominated poses to the dominant is precisely the potential for the aesthetic, "experience," agency, redescription and re-evaluation.

We can see, then, how the constitution of new values from old ones, the exchanging and transforming of values throughout history, relates to the negotiation and constitution of values by social relations. Just as new values depend upon their repetition and differentiation from old ones, so values of a dominant social group depend upon their constructed differentiation from those who are dominated. In both cases, although values are established, they are ultimately unstable, dependent on that which they were built upon and that which is excluded from them, and fictional or imaginary in that they are not transcendental truths. However, the dominated/ dominant opposition I draw from my discussion of the mirror stage requires further analysis, for the opposition between the dominated, fragmented, feminine body and the dominating masculine ego may be complicated in two ways. Firstly, since the mirror stage involves an *imaginary* rather than a symbolic relation, it does not rest on the opposition of fragmented body and imaginary unity, but rather on the processes of metonymic exchange, or unequal substitution, that culminate in the imaginary unity of the ego: "the ego established through this identificatory relation is itself a relation, indeed, the cumulative history

of such relations" (Butler, Bodies That Matter 74). That the mirror stage involves such metonymic exchanges implies that the gaps or differences created during those exchanges might allow for the constitution of an alternative imaginary, one that is not marked as masculine. Secondly, the gaps created through the unequal substitutions may be conceptualized as a third term, a place in which what is being sedimented -- the ego -- might be concurrently disrupted. It is only through a de-sedimenting perspective, a process of tracing back through those unequal exchanges, that such gaps will be realized. Further, these gaps, as a third term, may be likened to Plato's notion of the chora (insofar as they provide for regeneration and renewal) and they may be likened to the feminine (insofar as they are inarticulable as a subject position and provide for a place of reproduction). Thus, whereas the dominating masculine position occupies a singular place -- the ego -- the dominated feminine position occupies more than one place -- the fragmented body and those gaps or fissures that exceed both the masculine ego and the feminine, fragmented body.

I would now like to clarify and expand upon the idea that values may be sedimented and disrupted through relations between the dominating and the dominated by theorizing upon Butler's reading of materiality. In Bodies That Matter, Butler speaks of how materiality has become sedimented through time and social relations, so that the current perception of it is assumed as irreducible and ahistorical. Specifically, Butler's worry is that many contemporary feminists think that we must take recourse to matter in order to establish a ground for feminist practice; she warns that if we do so, we will find that matter itself does not provide us with an irreducible ground, but is rather "*founded through a set of violations*, ones which are unwittingly repeated in the contemporary invocation" (29). In Dewey's terms, Butler

seems to be asking us not to take the existing value of matter as an epistemological ground, but to "have an experience" with it, negotiating and re-evaluating it; in Rorty's terms, she asks us not to live within existing languages but to use them to create new ones. In other words, like Dewey and Rorty, Butler asks us to re-evaluate the way in which a concept such as matter is currently perceived, to describe it in new ways, and to acknowledge its genealogical history. By doing so, Butler seems to suggest, we will be able to recognize the contingency of present languages, grounds and values, and we will find that present values are not based upon a stable and unaltering ground but rather through unstable exclusions which both produce and are produced by the value itself.

As Butler mentions, the association of femininity with materiality has a long history. The word "matter," for instance, can be traced to a "set of etymologies which link matter with *mater* and *matrix* (or the womb)" (31). Plato also associates the feminine with materiality: in the Timaeus, woman represents a descent into the material -- "man is at the top of an ontological hierarchy, and woman is a poor or debased copy of man, and beast is a poor or debased copy of both woman and of man" (Butler 43); and later in the same work, Plato associates chora, a place or receptacle in which generation occurs, as both a nurse and a mother, likening it to the feminine (40). Yet chora may not necessarily be characterized as material and in fact may be seen as immaterial. Chora differs from matter in Plato's form/ matter binary: whereas in reproduction, man is said to contribute the form and woman the matter, chora is that place where reproduction occurs -- it is that inscriptional space which exists outside of both of these terms. According to Butler, we may perceive "the feminine figured within the binary [matter] as the *specular* feminine and the feminine which is erased and excluded from the binary

[chora] as the *excessive* feminine" (39). What is particularly intriguing about the excessive feminine, or chora, is that Plato prohibits it from being named by any other name ["she 'must always be called the same, for inasmuch as she always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature (*dynamis*)'"], and he prohibits its resemblance to any forms [she "never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form (*eilephen*) like that of any of the things which enter into her" (Plato qtd. in Butler 40)]. Hence, when Plato describes woman as a copy of man (and beast as a copy of both man and woman), he suggests that the (specular) feminine in some way represents the masculine, "even as that resemblance is hierarchically distributed" (43); yet paradoxically, when he describes the excessive feminine, or chora, he clearly wants to disallow both the possibility of a linguistic proliferation of the feminine and the possibility of a resemblance of the feminine to the masculine.

Plato's statement that chora "must always be called the same" may be seen as a catechresis, a metaphorical appropriation and erasure of that space. In Butler's words, "This naming of what cannot be named is itself a penetration into this receptacle which is at once a violent erasure, one which establishes it as an impossible yet necessary site for all further inscriptions" (44). Like the teleology of the mirror stage, in which the imago and eventually the ego constitute a totality which disavows that fragmented body which is other to it, here, the linguistic binding of chora facilitates a masculine subject that is produced and secured only through differentiation from and erasure of that feminine space. The point at which chora is metaphorically named as feminine and thus secured marks the point at which the value of the masculine subject becomes sedimented and assumed as epistemological ground. Yet, as we can now see, this value is not

ahistorical and irreducible ground but is rather marked as a specific historical moment -- a moment that has been continually reiterated over time, not only by male philosophers of the past but also by certain contemporary feminists who, by assuming such a ground for the feminine, inadvertently purify the masculinity they repudiate.

Even as chora and the material are marked and sedimented as feminine, and the subject that is other to it is marked and sedimented as masculine, there is, simultaneously, room for a disruption of those sedimented values. For values, as we have seen, are constituted through exclusions, and those exclusions posit a site of disruptive possibility to the values that rest upon them. It is with these exclusions in mind that, as Butler explains, Luce Irigaray mimes traditional philosophical discourse. Essentially, Irigaray works within and against both the specular and the excessive feminine in order to reconceptualize the condition of both: she "mimes the grandiosity of the philosophical errors that she underscores" (36), occupying the place of the specular feminine yet also resisting it by refusing to exactly replicate or resemble those philosophers she differentially repeats; and, also through miming, she reveals that what is outside of philosophical discourse is also inside it, occupying the place of the excessive feminine yet also resisting it by resembling and repeating those philosophers she underscores and thus transgressing Plato's prohibition of resemblance. While both echoing and simultaneously opposing traditional philosophical discourse, then, Irigaray attempts to establish herself as a valued subject. For, as Butler puts it in "Contingent Foundations," "No subject is its own point of departure" since the "'I' would not be a thinking, speaking 'I' if it were not for the very positions that [it opposes]" (9). However, insofar as the kind of "I" that is generated through its exclusions has been marked as masculine (as

we have seen in my discussion of "The Mirror Stage"), the establishment of this "I" is not, I believe, the sole concern of Irigaray's discourse. Indeed, it is rather the inequality of the match between traditional philosophical discourse and Irigaray's that creates the excess or remainder which constitutes the aesthetic, agency, and the potential for renewal. And it is this space -- or these exclusions -- conceptualized not as "sad necessities of signification," but as a "future horizon" (Butler, Bodies That Matter 53), "a certain leap of innovation or creativity," and an "opening up of the virtual to what befalls it" (Grosz, "Thinking the New" 16), that is of particular interest to feminist discourse as discussed in this paper.

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how we establish values through a repetition and differentiation from previous ones, and how the unequal match between previous values and new ones creates an excess or remainder which gives rise to the aesthetic, agency, and renewal. I began by discussing Dewey's and Rorty's notion of how we can create a legitimate ground on which to base what is fulfilling, meaningful and "good." For Dewey, we must have an experience by intelligently interacting with the environment, an environment that is seen in terms of existing values, whereas for Rorty, we must think of some new metaphors, describe the world in a new way, and thus create a new language. For both of these philosophers, the ground that we might constitute is not stable but contingent -- tied to previous languages and liable to alter if not eventually disappear in light of new ones. As a further development of my argument, I have drawn our attention to Guillory's discussion of the aesthetic and Butler's discussions of the Mirror Stage and materiality in order to emphasize and evince the following points: values are constituted not only through a reworking of the old into the new but also through social relations between peoples of a

community; values are sedimented over time through reiteration and repetition; and although these values are sedimented, there is also room for their disruption and their eventual re-evaluation. I hope that it has become clear that when I speak of contingency, I do not refer to the kind of contingency that Guillory speaks of in reference to Smith -- the idea that "values are merely arbitrary, that they have no ultimate determination beyond chance and circumstance" (324). Rather, I refer to an unstable dependence of new values on old ones, and an unstable dependence of the dominant on the dominated. A recognition of this kind of contingency will reveal that values and subjects are determined through a series of historical moments -- a vast network of historical associations. These historical moments seem to be erased through sedimentation but are variably exposed as that sedimentation is challenged.

Chapter Two:
The Contingency of the Poetic Subject

Since the poetic subject is of central concern to both Marianne Moore's and Elizabeth Bishop's poetics, while reading their poems, we eventually find ourselves asking a crucial and uneasy question: How do their poetic subjects assert themselves in their poetry? For Moore, the poetic subject is realized in aesthetic moments; such moments typify Dewey's notion of "experience" -- they are instances of acute perception and interaction between individuals and their environments. Further, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, these moments or experiences occur when individuals negotiate an environment that they see in terms of existing values; Moore's poetic subject is therefore actualized as she interacts with that which has been previously distinguished and evaluated. Yet since these experiences are also temporal and constantly in movement and transition, they can not be fully grasped, held, or defined in any homogenous way -- the poetic subject, since it is grounded in such aesthetic moments, is never entirely realized. Essentially, then, while Moore demonstrates how the self can be continually renewed through Dewey's experience, she also exemplifies the inability of her poetic subject to be entirely embodied, dissociated from elements of the environment, or exempt from temporal, ephemeral qualities.

Bishop's poetics differ from Moore's in that Bishop perceives a limit to the way in which a subject may renew itself through Dewey's experience, or through the aesthetic. For Bishop, the problem with such renewal lies in the idea that the subject must establish itself through existing values: Bishop's poetic subject is one who attempts to dissociate herself from such values. Yet Bishop, like Moore, is acutely aware that she can not ultimately establish any

universal ethical value apart from existing ones, and that her poetic subject therefore can not be fully articulated or actualized. Bishop's poetics, then, rest on an uncertain ethical boundary. On the one hand, she is concerned with being able to constitute a ground upon which to establish what Dewey calls "good" -- a ground on which we may determine happiness, meaning and fulfillment; on the other, she is aware of the contingency of value -- a dependency of present values on historical ones that ultimately undermines any absolute ground upon which she might stand. It is indeed the balance between the facets of this ambiguity that Bishop's poetic subject negotiates, and it is between the two that she attempts to assert herself.

Beginning with a discussion of Moore's "The Plumet Basilisk," and continuing with a discussion of Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502," I will consider how Moore's poetic subject compares with Bishop's, and I will examine the points at which they diverge. Specifically, I will show how Moore's and Bishop's poetic subjects are similar in the ways in which they establish themselves by a repetition of and differentiation from dominant values; conversely, I will explore how their poetic subjects are different in that Moore's involves a leaping forward, an embracing and celebrating of the aesthetic, whereas for Bishop, the aesthetic moment seems to happen as the poetic subject pulls back from and checks her articulations. One may wonder how, in these two poems, Bishop's poetic subject may be in any way compared to Moore's: Bishop's seems to be intimately linked to the speaker as a kind of voice or presence behind it; conversely, Moore's seems to be quite separate from the speaker, manifesting itself as an ungraspable creature that the speaker attempts to describe. I argue that although it is not apparently so, Moore's poetic subject is as personal as Bishop's, and that Moore's is as much about the self as is Bishop's. When I speak of Moore's speaker attempting to

describe the basilisk, I adhere to the Lacanian notion that the imago and the ego, like the basilisk, are both imaginary and fictional, and temporally and spatially located outside of the subject. Hence, while the speaker of "The Plumet Basilisk" describes the creature, she ultimately engages in a negotiation, redescription and re-evaluation of herself within the world.

Part One

As the speaker of Moore's "The Plumet Basilisk" attempts to describe the basilisk, the creature seems to continually slip beyond her grasp. After naming the creature in the title of the poem, for example, Moore proceeds to distance us from it: in the subtitle, she substitutes its name for a place ("In Costa Rica"); and in the first line of the poem, she replaces that place with another ("In Blazing Driftwood"). After having read only the title, the subtitle, and the first line of the poem, we have already experienced the basilisk receding from us. Also, from the beginning of the poem, the poet metamorphizes the basilisk, denying us a stable image of it: it becomes "the true Chinese lizard face, the amphibious falling dragon" and "the living firework." Likewise, she recurrently displaces the creature geographically, making it unlocatable: although it is "In Costa Rica," it has a "true Chinese lizard face" and "squeak[s]" like Scottish "bag-pipes"; and while The Malay Dragon seems to be an animal of the air (it "has wings out from the waist" and "lives as the butterfly or bat/ can ... conferring wings ... as the air plant does") and The Tuatera an animal of the earth (its "tails" are "laid criss-cross, alligator-style"), the basilisk is amphibious -- he "portrays/ mythology's wish/ to be interchangeably man and fish." It is interesting that in these instances, the poet describes the basilisk by contrasting it with "The Malay Dragon" and "The Tuatera." It is as if she can not describe it directly, and must identify it

through its similarity and difference from others -- through classification. Despite the speaker's attempts to embody the basilisk in language, however, the basilisk is not classifiable or definable. Images that reflect the elusive nature of the basilisk occur throughout the poem: if we remain in the basilisk's presence, he will "take to flight" ("The frilled lizard, the kind with no legs,/ and the three-horned chameleon, are non-serious ones that take to flight/ if you do not");[6] "when captured," he becomes "stiff/ and somewhat heavy, like fresh putty on the hand"; the claws of the basilisk, as an image of the hands of the human self, "are spread flat" against harp strings, extinguishing the basilisk's sound; and "as [we] look" at him, he becomes a "nervous naked sword on little feet." The distinguished basilisk is clearly experienced as a momentary presence that can not effectively be prolonged or appropriated.

Although the basilisk seems to continually escape from the speaker's descriptions of him, he is also intensely "alive there" -- ever-present in the poem. While the basilisk may be an unfamiliar and new presence, we come to know him through familiar elements of the environment. We feel his presence as he is displaced onto various comparable images. For example, the first appearance of the creature, "In blazing driftwood," where "the green [the basilisk] keeps showing at the same place;/ as, intermittently, the fire-opal shows blue and green" parallels the image of the basilisk "nested in the phosphorescent alligator" and "in his basilisk cocoon beneath/ the one of living green." These images also parallel the synaesthetic description of the

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[6]It may be questionable whether or not it is the basilisk who "take[s] to flight" in this instance, especially since the phrase appears in the section entitled "The Tuatera." However, the descriptions of the "non-serious" lizards reflect the previous descriptions of the Malay Dragon and the basilisk respectively. It is as if the Tuatera mocks both creatures: the phrase, "The frilled lizard, the kind with no legs" implies a competitive edge to the previous description of the Malay Dragon -- "minute legs/ trailing half akimbo." Similarly, the phrase "the three-horned chameleon" suggests a parodic description of the basilisk, with his "three-part plume." Thus, it is likely that one of the creatures that "take[s] to flight" is the basilisk.

creature as both a musical and visual image: "as from black opal emerald opal emerald --/ scale which Swinburne called in prose, the/ noiseless music." The "green" that "keeps showing at the same place" exemplifies the basilisk's continuity -- the similarity and unity of the images he inhabits. The intermittent repetition of the words "opal and "emerald" reflects both the transference of the basilisk from one visual image to another, and from one sound image to another, as in the alternating notes of a musical scale. And the doubleness of the word "scale," referring both to the scales of the alligator and the scales of music, reflects the way in which the basilisk balances between sight and sound images. Moreover, the image of fire, demonstrated in the phrase "In blazing driftwood" runs throughout the poem: the description of the basilisk as a "living fire-work" -- an image that captures the instantaneous, celebratory sight and sound of the basilisk -- is redescribed as his "three part plume" and his "three fold separate flame above the hilt"; the colour of fire is reflected in the description of the creature's body as "gold" ("with gold body hid in/ Guatavita Lake"); and the motion of the firework parallels the description of the basilisk as "one of the quickest lizards in the world," the various representations of the creature as a "falling dragon," and the leaping "scared frog, screaming like a bird."

Just as Moore provides us with various parallel images of fire that portray the intense yet temporary, even momentary presence of the basilisk, she provides us with parallel images of wires, bars and branches. Paradoxically, these representations exemplify both how we know the creature through elements of our environment, and how we are removed from the creature as he is displaced from one image to another. For instance, the basilisk "lies basking on a /horizontal branch" just as the "Vines suspend/ the weight of his faint shadow fixed on silk." These images of the

branch that hold him and the vines that suspend him match the "eight green/ *bands* " that are "painted on the tail -- as piano keys are *barred*/ by five black stripes across the white" (my emphasis). Although we know the basilisk through the branch, the vines, and the stripes on his tail, we are also "barred" from his presence apart from these continually displaced appearances of "faulty/ decorum." Further, the creature's repose on the branch parallels his retirement on the strings of the harp. Just as we visually know him through his presence on the branch, we audibly know him through the "minute noises" that "swell/ and change" "Among [the] tightened wires" of the harp. However, again, we not only experience the creature through these sounds, but are also "barred" from him. The steel strings of the harp are compared to the trees of the jungle -- "as avenues of steel to veil." Here, while we experience the "minute noises" of the basilisk "swell and change," hearing and watching his transitions from one form to another, we realize that each individual form is yet another "veil."

These displaced descriptions of the basilisk relate to Dewey's notion of experience, since for Dewey, "every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives" ("Having an Experience" 562). Further, the momentary union of the two completes the experience: "the close which completes it [the experience] is the institution of a felt harmony" (562). Clearly, each of the basilisk's transformations, as they are interactions between the creature and his environment, constitutes an experience. The individual experiences come to a close as the basilisk and the elements of his environment undergo a negotiation, until there is an "institution of a felt harmony." Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, when we have an experience, we create something new, something to be "enjoyed, used, and acted upon" (Wheeler

112). As the basilisk engages in a succession of experiences, he continually renews and re-creates himself. It is as if the basilisk's continual exchanges of one form or "veil" for another, although parallel, are always slightly unequal, and it is as though that inequality creates an awkwardness in the basilisk (exemplified in such instances as when we see his "tail dragging"), an excess or remainder which is the poetic subject's agency and power of renewal. For we have seen how the basilisk is elusive, and, paradoxically, how he is kept intensely "alive there" in the poem; and we have also seen how the creature is both revealed to us through elements of his environment and barred from us through those same elements. Yet when we realize that it is the spaces *between* the basilisk's "veils," the always off centered nature of the exchanges as he moves from one form to another, and not the forms themselves that constitute the poetic subject's agency, then the paradoxically elusive and alive basilisk suddenly begins to make sense. Indeed, although elusive and momentary, the series of aesthetic instances that the basilisk experiences as he continually exchanges one form for another -- the complex network of various yet connecting metonymic instances that represent him -- produce and propel the life of the basilisk, and thus, the poetic subject.

As the basilisk's life is propelled through his exchanges between comparable yet differing individual forms, his life is propelled through his exchange between one representation of communication for another. That is, the excess that is left in the creature's exchange from representing himself through *language* to representing himself through *music* is the basilisk and the force of the poetic subject. Firstly, we can see how the creature awkwardly represents himself through language, never quite fitting his linguistic images but always sliding behind them. For example, Moore articulates the creature's linguistic representation in the following lines:

But when captured -- stiff
and somewhat heavy, like fresh putty on the hand -- he is no longer

the slight lizard that
can stand in a receding flattened
S -- small, long and vertically serpentine or, sagging,
span the bushes in a fox's bridge.

In these lines, as Bonnie Costello notes, "The image [of the basilisk] withdraws behind the shadow of language as the S recedes in alliterative clusters" (143). Just after Moore describes the basilisk's disintegration when he is captured, he begins to renew himself in the language, embedding himself within it but also receding behind it. Similarly, the image of the basilisk's "faint shadow fixed on silk" is reminiscent of the written word on a page of silk. We know the basilisk through this trace, although his self in its entirety does not lie within it but rather recedes behind it. Further, the lines, "As by a Chinese brush, eight green/ bands are painted on/ the tail" strengthen the image of the basilisk as a linguistic sign. Like his shadow on silk, the stripes of his tail remind us of the strokes of a Chinese brush, the writing of a Chinese letter on a page. The "wide water-bug strokes" that the basilisk makes while wading through the water also parallel this portrait: we sense the lizard through the marks he makes on the water, but all that those marks "express" is "a regal and excellent awkwardness," again leaving the rest of the basilisk to fall behind the imprint.

Secondly, we can see how the creature represents himself through music, and how his transfers from linguistic representations to musical ones, although similar, are not exactly alike. For example, the "strokes" that the lizard makes in the water in order to "express" himself parallel yet differ from his "steps/ as articulate" as he makes his way to retirement on harp strings. Just as he represents himself through the marks in the water -- the linguistic

sign -- he represents himself in audible sounds of music, and just as he recedes behind written language, he recedes behind musical tone. We may even view the lizard's presence in the water in terms of both kinds of representation: the visual marks he makes as he wades through the water match "the shattering sudden splash" that allows us -- at the end of the poem -- to both recognize his presence and experience his loss. Along similar lines, the stripes on the basilisk's tail not only indicate a linguistic sign, but also musical sound. There are "eight" of these bands as there are eight notes in a musical scale -- these stripes are a musical "octave of faulty decorum." As well, we *hear* the creature's awkwardness in the "monkey notes" that "disrupt the castanets" and the "Taps" that "sound odd on last year's gourd." And the visual images of the creature resting on a branch and, like a monkey, traveling through the "trees as avenues of steel to veil," become aural ones as the basilisk is "fed on/ sound from the porcupine-quilled palm-trees/ that *rattle* like the rain" (my emphasis). As we can see, then, it seems as though the basilisk balances between the representational mediums of language and music, never fully succumbing to either but rather hiding behind their "veils." Further, we can see how the mismatch between the two mediums might create an aesthetic excess which is where the creature truly lies. Significantly, the awkward representations of the basilisk in both language and music are particularly fitting since we might define a poem (and, specifically, this poem) as a piece of fine musical art, "noiseless music," or language written in a musical style. Like the basilisk who inadequately represents himself in language and in music, the poetic subject somewhat awkwardly represents herself in the poem. Unable to sufficiently represent herself in symbolic language, she prefers the metonymic proximity of

associations rather than the erasure of those associations that the symbolic might entail.[7]

In order to understand the discrepancy between the basilisk and his images -- the gap between the poetic subject and the awkward representations it takes -- and in order to understand how Moore establishes value within the poetic subject, it is helpful to examine Barbara Smith's work. Smith notes that a verbal judgment of the value of some entity cannot be a judgment of "any independently determinate or, as we say, 'objective' property of that entity." Rather, "what it can be (and typically is) is a judgment of that entity's *contingent* value: that is, the speaker's observation or estimate of how the entity will figure in the economy of some limited population of subjects under some limited set of conditions" (94). As the speaker of "The Plumet Basilisk" observes the creature, she does not deduce its "objective" value but sees it as it figures within its surroundings. Indeed, the value of the basilisk -- its "gold body," and its "opal emerald" colour -- is only discovered under certain limited physical and temporal conditions. Also, Smith speculates on the kind of value system that the basilisk seems to exemplify:

> What appears to be needed, and is perhaps emerging, is a total and appropriately elaborated reformulation, and, in particular, one in which the various fundamentally problematic explanatory structures involving duplicative transmission, correspondence, equivalence, and recovery are replaced by an account of the dynamics of various types of *consequential interaction.* (95)

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[7]Interestingly, in "The Plumet Basilisk," as Moore provides us with seemingly endless aesthetic and *metonymic* basilisk transformations, she juxtaposes those images with an ironic image of *symbolic* security in the bourse. The bourse, presumably a symbol of economic worth, is here "roofed by two pairs of dragons standing on/their heads -- twirled by the architect -- so that the four/ green tails conspiring upright, symbolize four-fold security." In this instance, Moore turns the bourse into a kind of circus act, with dragons "twirled" and appropriated by the human hand. But perhaps more significantly, the poem was written in 1932, just three years after the stock market crash of 1929, and so the insecurity of that market at the time the poem was written was well known. The irony of Moore's reference to the bourse is thus evident. Clearly, the poet grounds value in the creativity and contingency of the self represented by the intersubjective nature of the basilisk rather than the falsely upheld, ideal and consecrated value represented by the bourse.

Rather than producing an "explanatory structure" that duplicates for us the reality of the lizard, Moore uses the figure of the basilisk in order to show us that our very interactions with our surroundings change and produce both our environment and ourselves. This continual creativity is, I believe, what Smith means by the phrase "consequential interaction." Just as the value of Moore's poetic subject lies in Dewey's notion of experience and Rorty's idea of continually creating new metaphors to create the self, it lies within this "consequential interaction" -- its dynamic and constant power of renewal.

As we can see, then, while Moore uses poetic tropes to give movement and force to her poem, she simultaneously problematizes those tropes, revealing their clumsiness. Nevertheless, the poet ultimately celebrates that clumsiness, knowing that as humans who "[write] error/ with four/ r's"[8] (Moore, Complete Poems 119), we remain within the temporal and the contingent, recreating ourselves through an always off centered renewal. Essentially, Moore uses poetic language in such a way that each image and transformative exchange can not be reduced to a simple signification. Rather, the basilisk's individual portraits are magical in that they are supported by a whole network of connecting associations. We have seen many of the ways in which these associations work. The "blazing driftwood" in which the basilisk appears, for instance, refers not only to associations of monetary value (as mentioned, the word "blazing" echoes the description of the basilisk's body as "gold") but also reminds us of the creature's temporary nature (the "blazing" fire will soon burn out). Likewise, associations with the word "driftwood" include the branch and vines that support him, his existence in water as well as on land, and so on. Each of Moore's images

[8]This line is particularly interesting since it not only explains the always off centered renewal that humans make through error, but also, through the inclusion of the extra "r," it exemplifies the aesthetic excess or remainder that results from that renewal.

seems to be endlessly metonymic for the basilisk, portraying his presence in many different associative ways. In a sense, it is as if the poet refuses to reduce the creature to a symbolic and sedimented signification which would erase or cover over the metonymic and historical associations which determine who he is. Thus, we find the basilisk -- the poetic subject of the poem -- in instantaneous aesthetic moments as he recedes behind his appearances of "faulty decorum."

Part Two

The first stanza of Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502" begins as "The Plumet Basilisk" does, with the speaker examining her environment and describing an elusive, ungraspable presence. Interestingly, the way in which Bishop's speaker describes this presence reveals a dependency of the speaker's vocabulary on past ones. Specifically, it demonstrates how, in Dewey's terms, new experiences are conditioned by old values, or, in Rorty's terms, how the creation of metaphors is only possible "against the background of other old words being used in old familiar ways" ("The Contingency of Selfhood" 41). The first word of the poem, for example, "Januaries," connotes both the new and the old: since January is the first month of the year, the word suggests newness, virginal freshness -- it seems to be almost synonymous with the word "beginnings"; yet since Bishop presents it as a single word, unusually pluralized as if all Januaries were collapsed into one, she also seems to suggest that there is no distinction between the present January and past ones. "Nature greets our eyes" this January just as she has every other January, as if nothing has changed and nothing is new. The word "Januaries" thus rests between novel and time-worn connotations. Similarly, the implications of the statement "Nature greets our eyes/ exactly as she must have greeted

theirs" are twofold: by mentioning both "our eyes" (the present-day vision) and "theirs" (a vision of the past), Bishop draws a distinction between the two visions, suggesting that there is a new vision to be compared with the old; yet, she says that our eyes and their eyes meet Nature in "exactly" the same way, undermining the idea that the present vision is new by stating that it is an exact duplication of the old. Hence, like the word "Januaries," the full first two lines of the poem lie ambiguously between an old vision and a new one.

The speaker's new vision becomes more complex throughout the rest of the stanza. Her new vision seems to be marked by her experience of the motility and force of Nature. It is as though Nature, as eternally moving, cannot be fixed long enough for her to articulate it. We first notice its movement with the word "greets": Nature is personified, taking an agency of *her* own and moving forward to salute us. Its mobility does not stop at this salutation but continues to impede upon us, "every square inch [of our vision] filling in with foliage." Further on in the stanza, we find that Nature still has not stopped moving: it exceeds the "square inch[es]" -- the scope of our vision -- and verges on the sublime in the phrase "monster ferns." Nature's force has grown to the point of incomprehension, and we thus label it as monstrous. Moreover, just as the speaker cannot contain or fully apprehend Nature's force, she cannot locate its moving presence. Its location continually slips beneath her grasp. As she describes the flowers, she seems unable to locate their presence, and she keeps correcting or adding to her description of them. First, she says that they are "like giant water lilies," then qualifies her assertion by indicating that unlike the lilies, they are located not in water but in "air." This description still not adequate, she indicates that they are "rather in the leaves." Likewise, while listing the colours of the flowers, her vision seems to continually shift. In the line "purple, yellow,

two yellows, pink," the shift from one yellow to two could either be a correction to her vision or an addition to it. If it is a correction, then she suddenly widens her scope of vision to realize that there are two yellows and not just one; if it is an addition, then her vision shifts from one location to another, from a spot where there is one yellow to a spot where there are two. In either case, her sight constantly changes, and Nature's presence is therefore persistently new. Further, the phrase "solid but airy" indicates the speaker's inability to state the substance of the flowers, the meaning of their presence again slipping beyond her vision.

Although the speaker sees the landscape anew as she traces Nature's vivid yet elusive presence, she articulates what she sees through a vision that is clearly conditioned by a historical one. If we re-examine the speaker's descriptions throughout the stanza, we can see how her acts of perception and interpretation show that "our eyes" are conditioned by "theirs." For example, the notion that the speaker sees Nature as art or tapestry is indicated both in the epigraph and in her measurement of Nature in "square inch[es]." Although her vision may be new in the sense that she has never seen this landscape before, it is old in that she articulates it in relation to that which is familiar -- tapestry. This vision of landscape as art is furthered in her description of the flowers. As she lists the colours, it is as if she points to flowers of an arranged garden, or an artistically set bouquet. The use of the word "fresh" (near the end of the first stanza) corroborates this notion. The listing of colours is like a description of a bouquet of flowers, "fresh[ly]" cut for the beholder's pleasure. Finally, that the flowers are "just finished/ and taken off the frame" not only indicates that the speaker sees the landscape as art but emphasizes the stasis of her now complete vision. While

experiencing the movement of Nature, she fixes or stitches it as a tapestry of her own creation -- a creation made from the inherited vision of "their eyes."

That the speaker perceives and articulates the novel while expressing it through the familiar suggests a correlation between her position and Dewey's notion of "experience." In other words, she seems to "have an experience" while viewing the landscape around her. For example, as in Dewey's "experience," the beholder does not adhere to the idea that there is an objective reality to the environment she describes; rather, as we have seen, she shows how the environment is defined by her position in relation to it -- by her continually shifting and changing perspective. Also, like Dewey's "experience," the speaker constantly encounters movement, both the movement of Nature and the movement of her own position. Her movement in perception from "blue" to "blue-green, and olive," from lilies in the air to lilies in the leaves, or from one yellow to two, reminds us of Dewey's words: "In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself" ("Having an Experience" 556). Yet although Dewey's "experience" involves the new, it is also marked by previously established values. As I have said, Dewey's "experience" involves an acute negotiation and interaction with the environment -- an environment that is *seen in terms of existing values*. Likewise, the speaker of this poem experiences what she sees by describing it in terms of known aesthetic items such as a stitched tapestry, or an arranged bouquet of flowers. Hence, we may place Dewey's notion of "experience" alongside the speaker's position in the first stanza of the poem. Both entail an encountering of the new, branded by the old.

If the speaker's position in the first stanza exemplifies Dewey's "experience," then her position in the second stanza exemplifies how novel experiences may transform into values that are in some ways distinct from those experiences. Indeed, we may set the distinction in tone between the first and second stanzas against the distinction between Dewey's "experience" and "value," and between his notions of "perception" and "recognition." The second stanza lacks the dynamic force of the first, the immediacy, movement and the "going out of energy" (571) that typifies Dewey's notion of "perception." The vivid "greenish-white," for instance, is here a "pale-green," the "broken wheel" neither new nor useful, and the birds, as part of Nature, no longer greet our eyes directly but rather present themselves "in profile." Unlike her position in the first stanza, the speaker's position in the second stanza demonstrates a certain distance from her environment, a lack of direct and creative interaction with it. Moreover, that the birds show "only half" of their "puffed and padded,/ pure-colored or spotted breast[s]" further indicates the speaker's detachment from her environment: she does not have experiential access to their appearance. Nevertheless, she still describes their kind and colour, suggesting, perhaps, that she already knows or recognizes their type, that she sees them as they have been described for her. In Dewey's terms, her encounter with the birds is one of "recognition" rather than "perception": "In recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme" (570). Thus, the shift in tone from the first stanza to the second marks a movement from perception, "an act of reconstructive doing [where] consciousness becomes fresh and alive," to recognition, a receptivity that is "too easy to arouse vivid consciousness, [where] there is not enough resistance between new and old to secure consciousness of the experience that is had" (570).

As mentioned, the movement from "experience" to "value" is also marked in the shift from the first stanza to the second. Bishop touches on the notion of value in the second stanza with her mentioning of the "broken wheel." A wheel is an entity that is valued for its use; since the wheel is broken, it is no longer valuable. Smith comments on the relationship between value and the function that a valued item is expected to perform:

> In perceiving an object or artifact in terms of some category -- *as*, for example, "a clock," "a dictionary" "a doorstop," "a curio" -- we implicitly isolate and foreground certain of its possible functions and typically refer its value to the extent to which it performs those functions more or less effectively. (32)

Following Smith, we may note that a wheel is seen in terms of a certain category and is thus valued for certain functions that it performs (such as transportation). Once those functions are lost, so is its value.

Yet as Smith asserts, the value of an object may be re-established when alternate functions are realized:

> The relation between function and classification also operates in reverse: thus, under conditions that produce the "need" for a doorstopping object or an "interest" in Victorian artifacts, certain properties and possible functions of various objects in the neighborhood will be foregrounded and both the classification and value of those objects will follow accordingly. (32)

Smith's account in these two quoted passages is strikingly similar to Dewey's idea that once a value is established, it is distinct from our experience -- we know it for certain previously determined characteristics which we do not presently discover. Yet if conditions ensue, we may "have an experience" with existing values in order to discover and foreground "certain [new] properties and possible functions of various objects." The value of the wheel has been previously established, but its "broken" status annuls that value, leaving it ready for a new use to be discovered, a new property to be

foregrounded. Like our lack of direct, experiential access to the "big symbolic birds," whose "symbolic" value has presumably been set through previous historical conditions, we, along with the speaker, do not have direct, experiential access to the use of the wheel. We can thus see how the previous ground for value is beginning to be lost while a new one is ready to be formulated. The speaker seems to be gradually separating her own vision, a potentially new one, from "theirs," that of the old.

The status of the "broken wheel" and the "symbolic birds" parallels the status of the discourse through which the speaker articulates herself. The two mentioned items are no longer useful or accessible for their foregrounded properties; they are therefore ready for a new use to be discovered, a new property to be foregrounded. Likewise, the discourse with which the speaker is complicit in the first stanza -- a discourse that has been passed down to her through "their eyes" -- is now distant, perhaps even futile, and is in need of a new use. Having distanced herself somewhat from that discourse, then, the speaker begins to ventriloquize it in order to appropriate it. For example, in the line "Still in the foreground there is Sin," the word "Sin" takes on contrary connotations: it can refer to the value judgment the explorers have put onto the landscape or to their very act of putting that judgment onto the landscape. In the first case, the speaker duplicates the voice of the explorers, placing a sinful or evil value upon the dragons and even the scenery, and labeling them as such; in the second case, the speaker ventriloquizes the voice of the explorers for her own purposes, stating that the explorers' value judgments are sinful because they are "*Still* in the foreground" (my emphasis), preventing her from viewing the landscape in her own, new way. Thus, even though she attempts to disengage her vision from "theirs," she is caught up in historical and collective associations and value judgments.

Similarly, the moss, described as "lovely hell-green flames" and the "scaling-ladder vines, oblique and neat" exemplify an ambiguity between her vision and "theirs." The word "lovely," and the phrase "oblique and neat" conform to the idea of articulating nature as art, seeing the Brazilian forests as if they are orderly Portuguese gardens. On this view, the speaker duplicates "their" vision as she does in the first stanza . However, the same words work to challenge the sinful connotations that the explorers impose upon the landscape: although the rocks are "threatened" by moss, that moss is "lovely," and although the rocks are "attacked" by the vines, those vines are "oblique and neat." According to this view, the speaker appropriates their discourse in an attempt to dissociate their sinful value judgments from her perspective. In this way, she works within and against "their" language, balancing between cloning it and taking it for her own use.

When Bishop speaks of the "lizards" who "scarcely breath" because they have fixed their gaze upon the female lizard, she begins to appropriate "their" discourse even more overtly. Although she still speaks "their" language, she allows her own ironic tone to slip through that language:

> The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
> are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
> her wicked tail straight up and over,
> red as red-hot wire.

Ostensibly, these lines relay the voice of the explorers. Just as the explorers see the dragons through an ideology that labels them as sinful or evil, they here see the female lizard through an ideology that labels her as "wicked." Yet even as the poet presents this vision, she mocks it. The subtle tone of these lines reveals a distance from what we would imagine the explorers' voices to be. It is as if the speaker recapitulates their speech while allowing

her own condemnation of their value judgments to come through as an echo.

When set against the details of the third stanza, these quoted lines further reveal Bishop's distance from the very voices through which she speaks. Subtly yet deliberately, the poet begins to associate the lizards with the Christians: the lizards are poised for specular and violent sexual possession ("all eyes/ are on the smaller, female one") just as the Christians attempt a violent sexual possession of the Native women ("they ripped away into the hanging fabric,/ each out to catch an Indian for himself --/ those maddening little women"); the size of the female lizard ("smaller") corresponds to the size of the Native women ("little"), revealing a similarity in the way that the lizards and the Christians perceive their female counterparts; the lizards are petrified in sexual anticipation as the Christians, "Just so," are "hard as nails"; and the female lizard's tail, described as "red as red-hot wire" parallels the phallic description of the Christians as "nails" -- both are metallic and have sexual implications. The poet's association of the lizards with the Christians denotes her distance from both -- although she still ventriloquizes their speech, she no longer sees through the Christians' eyes. In a stunning reversal of perspective, the alignment between her vision and theirs shifts to an alignment between the lizards and the Christians: they are now both the object of her gaze.

Yet the poet's explicit connection between the lizards and the Christians shows not only how Bishop distances herself from their discourse but also how she appropriates it. Like her previous appropriation of the word "Sin" -- where she uses the connotations of the explorers' own word against them -- here, the poet uses their own discourse to tie them to that which they condemn as "wicked," namely, violence and sexuality. Moreover, if we view

these lines on an allegorical level, we can see how Bishop further appropriates their discourse. The scene she describes throughout the second stanza reminds us of the Garden of Eden: it is a pristine and pure landscape that is tainted by "Sin," "Sin" being partly the lizards (or serpent) that represent(s) evil. By connecting the Christians to the lizards, that which represents evil, Bishop uses their own allegory against them. Likewise, by describing the Christians as "nails," the same items that fixed Christ to the cross, she associates them with the very act they condemn, the act of the Crucifixion. Again, the poet uses the explorers' own historical narrative in order to trap them in the "web" of discourse they created.

As well as connoting violence and sexuality in this poem, the word "nails" also suggests connections, links, the "nailing" of one piece to another, or the stitching of pieces together as in a tapestry. Indeed, the "web" that we create by stitching things together not only has the ability to trap us but also provides a base on which to constitute and define ourselves. Speaking about gender construction, Judith Butler states that "To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation" (Bodies That Matter 7). Although the "web" of discourse may enclose us within it, then, it also provides the very materials from which we are made -- it provides the "conditions of [our] emergence and operation." Judging from the details of the poem, we can see how discourses both confine our subjectivity and allow us to emerge as subjects. As the speaker weaves her conception of "Nature" in the first stanza, for instance, it becomes a "monstrous" "web" that impedes upon her, providing a way through which to articulate her new vision but threatening to trap her within her own articulations. Similarly, as the Christians stitch the female lizard's tail in a

particular way, "straight up and over," they do so with the material from which they themselves are made. (As mentioned, both the female lizard's "wire" tail and the Christians, as "nails," are made from metal.) Although they are ensnared within the narrative of the lizards, that narrative allows them their identity as Christians. Further, the Christians have "stitched" or created the narrative of the Garden of Eden as they have created the narrative of the Crucifixion. They are now implicated in both stories, trapped within them yet allowed their subjectivity through them. Thus, as we are enmeshed within the web of present discourses, we are also reliant on that web for our very being.

Bishop's appropriation of the explorers' language, then, not only implicates her within it but also, to a certain extent, allows her to emerge as a subject. As the alignment between her vision and theirs shifts to an alignment between the Christians and the lizards, both being the object of her gaze, she fully appropriates their language. In the third stanza, for example, she describes the Christians as "tiny." Here, it is as though she identifies with the "monster ferns" -- the immense Brazilian forest that looks upon the "tiny" Christians -- rather than identifying with the Christians who look upon the immense forest, as she does in the first stanza. She is now aligned with the monstrous web of language from which she was previously excluded and with which she is now able to constitute herself as a subject. Also, the poet further appropriates the explorers' language by specifically gendering it as female, by referring to it metaphorically as a "tapestry" and a "hanging fabric" -- female representational mediums of embroidery.

However, as we again examine the details of the poem, we find that the narrative she is now able to stitch with language is no better than the narratives that the explorers created with language -- the narrative of the

Garden of Eden and the narrative of the Crucifixion. Just as the Christians impose "Sin" onto the landscape they encounter, Bishop imposes "Sin" upon the Christians by implying that the word "Sin" might also refer to the Christians' act of labeling the dragons of the landscape as sinful. Just as the Christians condemn the female lizard as "wicked," she condemns the Christians as violent and "wicked" by associating them with both the female and male lizards. And just as the Christians condescendingly label the Native women as "little" ("those maddening little women"), Bishop objectifies the Christians and sees them as "tiny." Further, as Mutlu Konuk Blasing suggests, "The important question within "Brazil" is: how do we know the way Portuguese colonizers approached Brazil?" (88). As the explorers attempted to conquer a geographical interior, then, Bishop "sets out to conquer, aesthetically and rhetorically, a historical ... 'interior'" (90). Likewise, as the Christians attempt to account for origins, "Januaries," or beginnings with the narratives of the Garden of Eden and the Crucifixion, so Bishop attempts to account for the origin of Brazil -- the beginning of a culturally hybrid country. Hence, as Blasing says, "If she condemns the colonizers for their allegorical preconceptions that enable their geographic conquest, she does so by duplicating their rhetoric exactly" (90).

The poem becomes most fascinating when we realize that Bishop herself is aware of how she is embedded within present and historical discourses, when we realize that she is aware of how she duplicates "their" rhetoric exactly and claims a ground for value as she speaks. This awareness is evident partly through the details I mentioned in the above paragraph, and partly near the end of the poem, when the Christians violently invade the Natives' territory:

they ripped away into the hanging fabric,

> each out to catch an Indian for himself --
> those maddening little women who kept calling,
> calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
> and retreating, always retreating, behind it.

Of particular interest in this quoted passage is the effect of the juxtaposition of the first two lines with the second two lines. The poet speaks in her own voice for the first two lines of this passage, condemning the explorers for raping both the landscape and the women; by contrast, she imitates the voice of the explorers in the second two lines of the passage, implying that they condemn the women and treat them in a derogatory way when they call them "maddening little women." Yet when the first two lines are set against the second two, we can see how Bishop's disparagement of the explorers parallels the explorers' disparagement of the women. Bishop's take on the explorers is no more "correct" or "good" than the explorers' take on the Native women. Hence, after speaking in her own voice and condemning the Christian explorers with the lines, "they ripped away into the hanging fabric,/ each out to catch an Indian for himself," the speaker retreats behind the explorers' language as she lets her voice give way to theirs. Just as the Native women retreat behind the "hanging fabric" into which the explorers so desperately rip, and just as those women retreat behind Nature -- their voices so faint they are confused with the calling birds of the Brazilian forest -- the speaker ultimately retreats behind the discourse she has explored.

Clearly, while creating a story about the way in which the explorers approached Brazil, the speaker of the poem asserts a moral stance: she posits the explorers as "wicked" and "sinful" by depicting their violent intrusion into Brazil. However, by drawing attention to her own mediation in asserting such a stance, Bishop exemplifies an awareness of the contingencies of language that make the speaker's ground suspect. Having demonstrated

that her ground for value is no more legitimate than previous ones, and having demonstrated that she cannot fully dissociate herself from previous languages and value judgments, the poetic subject finally exempts herself from the discourse altogether. It is at this point that the poetic subject recognizes and reveals the gap between the exchange of the explorers' discourse for the speaker's, the difference that her repetition entails. And it is as this point that she both experiences that gap as an aesthetic moment, and -- since that gap is the force that gives her a subjectivity that is distinct from the explorers' -- identifies with it. The constant calls of the Native women at the end of the poem ("those maddening little women who kept calling,/ calling to each other") become a metaphor for the voice of this poetic subject -- the voice behind the speaker that keeps "retreating, always retreating" behind the existing language. The parenthetical reference to the birds waking up marks the speaker's departure from this language: she no longer confines the birds to the "symbolic" status that the language imposes upon them. As she frees the birds from their petrified gaping ("beaks agape"), she theoretically attempts to free the lizards from their frozen fascination with the female lizard, and the Christians from their wanting knowledge of the Brazilian landscape and the Native women. But this hypothetical freedom from the symbolic order -- this disentanglement from the web of discourse -- remains faint, confused, and unlocatable. Bishop ultimately leaves us with the sound of this distant echo that is the poetic subject's barely audible yet constant call.

It is clear that there are both similarities and marked differences between Moore's and Bishop's poetic subjects. The speaker of Moore's "The Plumet Basilisk" shows how we may only experience the elusive basilisk through familiar elements of our environment; as the basilisk continually

transforms, we see him in aesthetic interactions between himself and known items such as pieces of driftwood, branches, and harp strings. Likewise, in the first stanza of Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502," the speaker attempts to describe the vivid yet elusive presence in Nature; however, in order to articulate this presence, she must also describe it through that which is familiar to her, namely, arranged gardens and artistic tapestries. Even as Bishop's speaker dissociates herself from that vision in the second and third stanzas, her poetic subject, like Moore's, endures by that which she knows through previous evaluations and articulations. In other words, both poetic subjects are contingent on a vast historical network that supports them: as Moore's exists upon the vines that uphold him and the wires that sustain his sound, Bishop's exists in and through the web of discourse, tapestry, and the shroud of Nature that identifies her. Yet the poets' poetic subjects differ in the ways in which they determine their veils of identity. For Moore, as the basilisk travels through "avenues of steel to veil," that awkward veil, like the others, is a renewal of the basilisk's identity, and as long as he continues to renew himself, he will be kept "alive there." For Bishop, however, the veil of language, tapestry and Nature that identifies the poetic subject is not enough to provide an adequate identity. Bishop, unlike Moore, does not celebrate her subject's awkwardness. Further, although both poetic subjects disappear at the end of their respective poems -- Moore's "quenched in the rustle of his fall into the sheath" and Bishop's "retreating, always retreating behind" the existing language -- there is a slightly more positive feeling to the basilisk's "temporary loss" than to Bishop's poetic subject's retreat. For Moore's poetic subject, loss is always renewable in a leaping forward and embracing of continual exchanges that give rise to aesthetic moments; for Bishop's poetic subject, however, the aesthetic moment is realized when she pulls back from

and checks her own articulations, suddenly acknowledging the excess that her repetition and differentiation has created. Unlike Moore's poem, then, Bishop's does not leave us with much hope for renewal in aesthetic language.

Chapter Three:
The Contingency of Gender

Both Moore and Bishop identified with and yet at the same time were skeptical of feminist politics, and both seemed hesitant to publicly proclaim themselves as feminists. Moore, for instance, as many critics have noted, often seemed to belittle herself, and in the notes to her poem "Marriage," she ironically discourages a reading of the poem as deliberately subversive or feminist, describing it as "Statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly" (Complete Poems 271). Bishop, as is also well known, refused to have her poems placed in anthologies that included only women poets. Along with Moore, she was offended by those who considered her one of the best women poets in America, and would much rather have been considered without the gender qualification. Yet both poets were acutely aware of gender issues, and both of their poetics are, if only implicitly so, feminist. What makes these two poets particularly unique and important, in fact, is their refusal to accept simplistic, categorical or essentialist notions of gender. Specifically, both poets refuse to take recourse to essentialist arguments as ground for feminist practice; along with Judith Butler, they would argue that to do so would be to take what has been "*founded through a set of violations*" (Butler, Bodies That Matter 29) as irreducible ground. Indeed, it is this kind of ground, mistakenly perceived by many as irreducible, that both Moore and Bishop critique. What Cristanne Miller says of Moore is equally true for Bishop: neither of them "seek a 'feminine' as opposed to a masculine language or tradition but instead reject essentializing and accept liberating strategies wherever they find them" (Miller 7).

With reference to Moore's "Marriage" and Bishop's "In the Waiting Room," I will discuss how both poets perceive gender as contingent upon a prior set of evaluations and oppositions. In "Marriage," for example, Moore demonstrates how values are upheld by previously established political, social and economic institutions, and she shows how those dominant values rely on a realm of exclusion that is other to them. With various images throughout the poem, she marks the dominant values as masculine and the realm of exclusion upon which they rely as feminine; further, also through imagery, the poet posits this feminine realm as a site of future potential, a site of possibility for the establishment of new values. Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" parallels "Marriage" in that it too posits the masculine position as one of dominance and the feminine one as one of exclusion -- that which is denied in order for that dominance or superiority to continue. This poem is extremely intricate in the way that it manipulates subject positions, and these positions become especially intriguing when we realize that they are most often gendered as masculine, marked, that is, by that which they exclude. I find Bishop's poem, however, ultimately more restrained than Moore's. Whereas Moore's poem humorously mocks established, upheld, and consecrated values while it celebrates aesthetic renewal, the aesthetic moment in "In the Waiting Room," like the aesthetic moment in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," occurs as we draw back from these gendered subject positions and recognize their absolute contingency.

Part One

Moore's "Marriage" is not only a fluctuating and altering consideration of that subject, but also a questioning of how "institution[s]" (62) such as marriage come to be valued and desired. Moore resists the notion that there

is a logocentric, singular or true meaning to valued customs such as marriage, and that they are inherently desirable; instead, she demonstrates how values have become sedimented throughout time and through social relations, and how there is both an unstable dependence of new values upon old ones, and an unstable dependence of the dominant on the dominated. Moore's choice of subject for this poem -- marriage -- is a particularly fitting one, for it not only allows her to explore how one of the "most entrenched of all bourgeois institutions" (Joyce 103) has become valued and consecrated, but it also allows her to show that an examination of gender relations illuminates how values are established amongst the dominant and the dominated.

Moore begins the poem by describing marriage as a sedimented, established value, or a sacrament: as an "institution" and an "enterprise," one has "respect" for it, "has believed" in it, and thus, "need not change one's mind" about it. Marriage seems to have gained a concrete value that no longer needs to be questioned. Yet even as Moore describes the value of marriage as concrete and sedimented, she subtly implies its reliance on existing values and, specifically, the economic system, suggesting that its value is not stable but dependent. As an established law, custom and practice, an "institution" depends on the judicial and economic systems of a community; and as a business firm, company, or activity which has some sort of commercial end in view, an "enterprise" is also dependent on an economic system. Moreover, the words "institution" and "enterprise" are echoed throughout the poem by other words and phrases that remind us of a value's dependence on the economic system. For example, the poet refers to various items of monetary value: she associates marriage with "gold" and "stately buildings" (63), describes Eve as "a statuette of ivory on ivory," (a state that Eve achieves by earning "wages for work done") (68), and depicts Adam as a

guardian of "emerald mines," "silks" (63), and "other shining baubles" (67). It is as though Eve's very being as a frail statuette would collapse if it were not for those items of economic value -- ivory on ivory -- that seem to hold her together; and, likewise, it is as if Adam's very being as a guardian of items of monetary value would also collapse if it were not for those items on which his identity depends.

Further, the poet's description of a golden wedding ring ["this fire-gilt steel/ alive with goldenness;/ how bright it shows -- / 'of circular traditions and impostures'"(62)] reiterates the way in which values are dependent on previously established ones -- ones which are embedded within the economic system. A wedding ring is a marital symbol (limited to certain societies) and an economic symbol of value and worth; without a common understanding of what the wedding ring symbolizes, and without an economic system on which to base the value of it, the ring is meaningless. The line "of circular traditions and impostures" is particularly intriguing. The word "impostures" suggests, perhaps, that the wedding ring or marriage itself is imposturous: it claims to be an ideal truth while it is merely tradition. The phrase "of circular traditions" is also intriguing in that it is paradoxical in its implications: on the one hand, since a circle has neither a beginning nor an end, it seems to represent the eternal, and thus the unchanging; on the other hand, since a circle is fixed to nothing outside of itself, it suggests that marriage, as a "circular tradition," has no stable ground or origin. As such, it has become a symbol, presumably based on experience and upheld by histories, institutions and beliefs, which are always unstable and susceptible to change. Like Bishop's speaker's new vision at the beginning of "Brazil, January 1, 1502," which is dependent on a historical one, the value of the ring in "Marriage" is ultimately contingent on previously established contexts.

Although presently consecrated or sedimented values are contingent on previous ones, they are also dissociated from "experience": this dissociation is, in part, what accounts for values' susceptibility to alteration and disruption, disruption which is, in fact, experience itself. In Dewey's terms, values and experiences are both inextricably linked and yet, in some ways, dissociated from one another. Dewey describes values as "enjoyments which are the consequences of intelligent action [experience]," indicating that values are indeed grounded in, built upon, and thus made of experience; however, he also suggests that values are "re-issue[d] in a changed form from intelligent behavior [experience]" ("The Construction of Good" 579), indicating that they have become something other than that which we experience; in their "re-issued forms," they exceed what we experience.

Significantly, in "Marriage," the "goldenness" and "bright[ness]" of marriage or the golden wedding ring that the speaker seems to describe with these same words simultaneously express economic worth as a dominant value and the disruption of that value -- the bringing of that value into the flow of our experience. Although the "goldenness" and "bright[ness]" of marriage or the ring suggest that it has become a dominant value of economic worth [a worth which is "impostur[ous]" and "[commits] many spoils" (62)], those same words -- "goldenness" and "bright[ness]" -- suggest an aesthetic, experiential, and affective quality to marriage or the ring, a quality which is the disruption of that value. Similarly, the words "striking" and "grasp" in the description of marriage as "that striking grasp of opposites" (69) encompass a twofold implication: the word "striking" may refer to an act of violence, and the word "grasp" might refer to a tight and violent hold; conversely, the word "striking" may refer to sudden beauty or attractiveness, and the word "grasp" might refer to understanding and comprehension. A

description of the aesthetic moment that results from a disruption of the dominant value is thus embedded within the description of the force and violence of the dominant value itself. Although the dominant value and the aesthetic experience are dissociated and opposed to each other in that their definitions are opposite, they are also intimately linked to one another, the description of one identical to the description of the other.

Interestingly, Moore demonstrates the way in which an experience may become a dominant value that is distinct from that experience by the way in which she allows her tone to vacillate between awe and pathos. For instance, she seems to describe the aesthetic excess that results from a disruption, or a metonymic, unequal exchange when she describes marriage as "this fire-gilt steel/ alive with goldenness/ how bright it shows." In this instance, she clearly expresses a kind of admiration and awe for marriage. However, she juxtaposes those lines with the lines, "'of circular traditions and impostures,/ committing many spoils'" (62), allowing her tone to fall from admiration to contempt, from excitement to disappointment. It is as if this movement in tone from awe to disdain demonstrates the instantaneous nature of the aesthetic moment, the way in which an "experience" -- the awe -- soon becomes a dominant value -- the disdain and disappointment.[9] And it is as though this momentary quality of the aesthetic signifies the possibility, but not the actuality, of a new value, for like the instantaneous appearances of the

[9]We can also perceive Moore's movement in tone from awe to pity in "The Plumet Basilisk." For instance, in that poem, she follows a description of the basilisk as one who "take[s] to flight" with the phrase "if you do not," conveniently placing the line break after the word "flight." The poet therefore allows us to perceive the creature's courageous nature before she lets that vision of him to fall into an image of pathos, an image that indicates that he flies away not because he is courageous but rather because he is afraid. Similarly, images which express awe for the creature are interspersed with images of pathos for the creature, such as the pathetic and humorous description of him as a "nervous naked sword on little feet." As in "Marriage," in these instances, Moore seems to depict the way in which an "experience" becomes a dominant value when it is appropriated.

basilisk, these aesthetic moments cannot be fully grasped, held, or defined in any homogenous way.

In many ways, the notion that experiences are both linked to and in some ways dissociated from dominant values may be conceptualized alongside Lacan's mirror stage. Just as values are grounded in and built upon experiences, so the child's perception of itself as a totality is built upon that fragmented body which is excluded from it. And just as values are re-issued in a changed form from experiences, so the eventual establishment of the ego is re-issued in a changed form from the "sensations, needs, and impulses" (Grosz, Jacques Lacan 33) of the fragmented body. Interestingly, Adam's image of himself in "Marriage" adheres to the child's image of itself as a totality during the mirror stage. That the poet describes Adam as a "crouching *mythological* monster" (63 my emphasis) suggests that Adam's image, like the child's image of itself as a totality, is a fictional and imaginary one. That Adam sees himself as an "idol" (64) implies that this fictional and imaginary image is located outside of his body -- it seems to occupy the eternal realm of a god rather than the temporal and ephemeral realm of a human. Moreover, that Eve's eating of the apple in the garden of Eden is described as "that invaluable accident/ exonerating Adam" (63) suggests that like Adam's status as a "guardian," which depends upon those valuables that he guards, his status as "exonerated" depends upon his dissociation or alienation from "that invaluable accident" of Eve's -- that fragmented, flawed, and "accidental" body from which he excludes himself.

Perhaps the most intriguing and significant instance in which the movement from experience to value or from fragmented body to unified image occurs is when Adam's naming of his surroundings in the garden of Eden soon becomes a kind of oratory, a "formal customary strain" (64) which

is very different from his experience of naming. Adam's naming is particularly interesting since it seems to signify the aesthetic excess that results from a metonymic, unequal exchange. That the phrase "Alive with words" (which describes his stance as he names) corresponds syntactically with the phrase "alive with goldenness" (which describes the aesthetic quality of marriage or the wedding ring) suggests a parallel between the aesthetic quality of marriage or the ring and Adam's status as he names. And the words "Alive," "vibrating," and "touched" in the lines "Alive with words,/ vibrating like a cymbal/ touched before it has been struck" suggest that the exchange between Adam's environment and himself in his process of naming involves an erotic quality that is the aesthetic excess produced by that exchange. Moreover, this eroticism may also be likened to the development of the child's image in the mirror stage, since that development involves an unstable negotiation which is the child's libidinal and erotic drives toward its image. Just as the child negotiates with its surroundings in order to develop an image of itself, then, so Adam becomes "Alive" and recreates himself by negotiating with his environment.

Adam's negotiation with his environment not only causes him to become "Alive with words" but also gives his environment a life of its own. It is as if the erotic exchange between Adam and his environment creates an aesthetic excess which is the power and force of renewal and recreation. For example, the description of Adam as "a cymbal/ touched before it has been struck" suggests that one of the nightingale's silences by which Adam is later "plagued" ("Plagued by the nightingale/ ... with its silence --/ not its silence but its silences") is actualized -- changed into sound that may now be heard. Similarly, he converts the latency of water into "the industrious waterfall,/ 'the speedy stream/ which violently bears all before it'" as he transforms the

air into wind, which can henceforth be felt -- "at one time silent as the air"/ and now as powerful as the wind." By contrast, however, when the tone changes with the description of Adam "'Treading chasms/ on the uncertain footing of a spear,'" Adam begins to lose control of the very forces which he himself has actualized, and he is subsequently "struck" rather than "touched." Like Bishop's speaker in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," Adam becomes trapped within the web of meaning he has created, "treading" the water of his now "powerful" and "violent" stream. However, like most of Moore's images, the image of Adam treading water is not entirely negative but rather ambiguous in its connotations. The new power of the wind and the water that causes Adam to "[Tread] chasms" may be associated with the image of "Euroclydon" (65), the biblical storm (Acts 27) that caused a Roman ship to wreck and freed Paul and his people from their captors. Since this association includes an element of freedom, we may assert that the dangerous and destructive connotations of "Treading chasms" and "Euroclydon" are coupled with covertly charitive ones.

In order to bring forth the significance of the paradoxical connotations of images such as the one of Adam "Treading chasms," we might more closely examine that which Adam dominates. For example, the "silence" that Adam has transformed into the sound of a cymbal, as an actualized value, dominates over other silences; and the "stream" that "violently bears all before it" dominates over all that is in its way. The creation and manifestation of these values therefore create a realm of exclusion which is posited as that which is other to the dominant value. Significantly, it is through these exclusions that we can see how the contingency of gender manifests itself in the poem. As we have seen in my discussion of the mirror stage in the first chapter of this thesis, the development from a fragmented

body to a perception of the self as a totality is marked as a masculine teleology, and as we have seen in this chapter, Adam's act of naming in "Marriage" parallels this masculine trajectory. What remains to be seen, then, is how Moore posits the masculine as the dominant and the feminine as the dominated realm which is excluded from that trajectory.

As Adam engages in the act of naming, and as he concurrently establishes those names as dominant values which produce a realm of exclusion, his values are likely to be disrupted, altered, and changed as new ones are created. We can see how this disruption occurs as Adam's powerful act of naming shifts to his powerless act of "Treading chasms": it is as though the values he has created are already being disrupted by the very exclusions those values necessitate. Moreover, the ambiguous connotations of Adam "Treading chasms" are parallel to other images of those exclusions over which Adam's values dominate. Interestingly, many of those exclusions are associated with both poison and woman, and at first glance may be perceived as though they are contemptuous. For instance, the word "Plagued," in the lines "Plagued by the nightingale .../ with its silence --/ not its silence but its silences" implies that Adam is infected, poisoned, and destroyed internally by the silences; the silences are associated with woman since woman has previously been described as "unsafe" (as a "Plague" or poison is) and since they are exemplary of "chora" -- the silences are unrealized and unactualized sound as the chora is absence of body or form. Similarly, Adam's statement "'It clothes me with a shirt of fire'" (65), which is a reference to the death of Hercules, is also associated with both poison and woman. In the story of Hercules' death, Hercules' wife, Deianeira, smears Hercules' tunic with a substance that she believes is a love charm, but is actually a poison that burns and erodes his skin (Tripp 295); Adam's association with Hercules in this

instance therefore suggests that woman -- that realm of exclusion that his dominant values produce -- poisons him. The association of Adam with Hercules' death is particularly relevant since the poison that Deianeira smears on Hercules' tunic is the poison with which Hercules balms his arrows. Through this association, we can see how Adam becomes snared by his own power: "woman" may use his own weapons -- the very weapons that allow him to dominate -- in order to "poison" him.

Other associations of poison and woman with that which Adam dominates occur with the reference to Eve eating the apple in the garden of Eden, described in this poem as "that invaluable accident." That the apple causes the Fall indicates that it is poisonous, and that Eve's eating of the apple caused Adam to fall with her shows how the feminine might "poison" the masculine. Further, woman is directly associated with poison in the lines "The fact of woman/ is 'not the sound of the flute/ but very poison'" (67). Importantly, the speaker of the poem, while contemplating marriage, says, "and each fresh wave of consciousness/ is poison" (63), implying that like Euroclydon, poisoning may not only have negative connotations but also charitive ones: the "fresh wave of consciousness" is reminiscent of "having an experience," and may thus be perceived as a positive and charitive disruption of the dominant value and consequent creating of a new one. But perhaps the most interesting reference to poison occurs at the beginning of the poem, when the speaker indicates that marriage "[commits] many *spoils*" (62 my emphasis). On the one hand, the word "spoils" may refer to something that is unfit for use, something that deteriorates and decays as in the spoiling of food; in this regard, this phrase may indicate that marriage -- presumably one of Adam's dominant values -- "spoils" other experiences that remain unrealized. On the other hand, "spoils" may refer to the taking of

goods or valuables by force, as in the spoils of war; in this regard, the line has a quite violent connotation. From these perspectives, the unrealized or unactualized exclusions play the role of the martyr, either decaying in the service of the dominant value or suffering violence by that value. However, the notion that these exclusions "spoil" or decay like food also suggests that they have the potential to "poison" their possessor. Hence, the suffering connotations of these "spoils" are paradoxically coupled with powerful ones.

Furthermore, the pun on "spoils" is reflected in another reference to Hercules: "that is with Hercules/ climbing the trees/ in the garden of Hesperides" (66). In classical mythology, Hesperides are nymphs who guard a grove of golden apple trees. Hercules climbs the trees in order to steal the golden apples. Interestingly, according to one version of the myth, *since the apples are not to remain long anywhere but in Hesperides' garden,* Athena returns them promptly (Tripp 304). According to another version of the myth, Athena gives the apples back to the original guardians because "*it was not proper that the sacred fruit should remain in anyone else's keeping*" (Tripp 287 my emphasis). The apples therefore decay or "spoil" when they are taken from their place, and they lose their value and become "spoils" of war when they are stolen from their guardian's control. It is particularly noteworthy that like phrases such as "that striking grasp of opposites," and images like the one of marriage or the wedding ring as golden and "bright," these "spoils" signify both a dominant value and the potential disruption of that value: as goods that have been removed from their context and thus from our direct experience of them, they are values that have spoiled, no longer portraying that aesthetic excess that is the power for renewal and recreation; conversely, as exclusions that suffer violence by a dominant value, they represent a "future horizon" (Butler, Bodies That Matter 53) which is

aesthetic excess -- that powerful potential to "poison" and disrupt a dominant value in an attempt to begin anew.

We have seen how currently dominant values are dependent on previous ones, ones which are established within an existing and established economic system, and we have seen how those values are susceptible to disruption. Moreover, we have acknowledged that the possibility for the disruption of a value is embedded within the value itself; we have acknowledged how that notion is reflected in the very form of Moore's poem, in phrases such as "that striking grasp of opposites" and images such as that of Euroclydon; and we have noted how dominant values are most often marked as masculine in the poem as the disruptive possibilities that accompany them are most often marked as feminine. In an attempt to draw out the significance of these details, then, I would now like to emphasize the duality of the feminine position in the poem as well as the contingency of that duality on the masculine position. For essentially, the feminine position in "Marriage" occupies and resists both the specular and the excessive feminine,[10] and the stability of the masculine position in the poem depends upon the feminine occupation of those two realms. There are, for instance, the various silks over which Adam hovers, listed as shades of white -- "-- ivory white, snow white/ oyster white and six others" (63). These whites are not only directly associated with the feminine through their connection with Eve, who is described as "a statuette of ivory on ivory," but they are also covertly associated with both the specular and the excessive feminine. As valuables that are part of Adam's economic system -- a system of naming which he began in the garden of Eden -- Eve occupies the place of the specular feminine: she is a copy or replica of those values produced by his system. Yet

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[10]Refer to page twenty three and twenty four for an explanation of the specular and the excessive feminine.

as "whites," which are absences of colour as the "silences" are absences of sound, she occupies the excessive feminine, that realm which is inarticulable and unactualized. And, as I have previously mentioned, Adam's identity as a guardian of those valuables would be lost if they were removed from his possession. The image of Eve as a "statuette" also indicates her occupation of both the specular and the excessive feminine. This image represents the specular feminine since it replicates the masculine image of Daniel Webster's statue, an image which, because of Webster's status as an orator, is also associated with Adam. But because this "statuette" seems as though it is about to crumble, it also suggests that Eve may not maintain this occupation of the specular feminine; if she does not maintain it, then she will be excluded from Adam's economy. It is precisely this excluded realm -- the excessive feminine -- which is the potential for (but not the actuality of) resistance, the "future horizon," or renewal and recreation.

Finally, it is important to realize that the nature of the aesthetic moments or disruptive possibilities in the poem, as we have seen, are fundamentally ambiguous. The "poison" that depicts the danger of woman, for example, is often described as "beauty": marriage, described as "poison" in the lines "and each fresh wave of consciousness/ is poison," is previously described as beauty in the lines "the strange experience of beauty/ its existence is too much" (63); the apples that Hercules takes from "the garden of Hesperides" are not only poisonous but also "golden," thus possessing a quality of beauty; and the "shining baubles" (67) that Adam guards, reminiscent of the poisonous golden apples as well as the golden wedding ring and the various whites of silk, also signify not only dominant, economic value but also the disruption of it -- a disruption which is beauty itself. Also, the speaker of the poem presents us with a stunning image of the beauty of

marriage with her description of two panthers ("The blue panther with black eyes,/ the basalt panther with blue eyes,/ entirely graceful --") while she steps back to admire their restrained power and grace ["one must give them the path --" (66)]. In addition, in light of Moore's celebration of the basilisk's awkwardness in "The Plumet Basilisk" and her celebration of the way in which humans "[write] error/ with four/ r's" in "The Pangolin," the description of Eve in "Marriage" as "the central flaw/ in that first crystal-fine experiment" and as causing an "invaluable accident" may also be seen as beautiful. In Pamela White Hadas's words, "the beauty in 'Marriage' seems always to be crouching and waiting for a chance to break in and overwhelm the careful celebrations, the witty satire, the pure descriptions, in short, all the defensive maneuvers, the silences, the necessary restraints" (146). While brilliantly yet covertly subversive, then, "Marriage" revels in the poisonous, the beautiful, the momentary, and the feminine. Ultimately, the poet celebrates the potential for aesthetic renewal itself.

Part Two

Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" is a poem of complex and stunning subject positions which are continually established and threatened throughout the poem. Because these subject positions are threatened, the speaker experiences a crisis; yet through this crisis, she ultimately both forfeits one kind of identity and acquires another kind of agency. Essentially, "In the Waiting Room" shows that the value and subject positions of the speaker of the poem, the poetic subject, and ourselves as readers, are determined by a disavowal of that which is other to us: the boundaries that we erect between those of the past and ourselves in the present, and those in foreign lands and ourselves in familiar settings, give us a sense of dominance and superiority

over others and therefore enable us to establish ourselves as individuals. As the poet subtly and brilliantly demonstrates, when those barriers are disrupted as we step back and acknowledge that they were established, we may recognize the fragility of our subject positions as well as the contingency of those categories of gender on which such subject positions tenaciously rely.

From the beginning of the poem, the speaker, an almost seven year old child, attempts to establish herself as an individual by defining herself against others; continually, however, as the child attempts to erect borders between herself and others, those borders are simultaneously shattered. For example, she distinguishes herself from the others in the waiting room by indicating that the room "was full of grown-up people," people who are distinct from her because they are much older than her; yet when she reads the *National Geographic* and is horrified by the photographs in it, she says that she is "too shy to stop," indicating that she does not want to distinguish herself from the adults and allow them to perceive her as a squeamish child. As she attempts to separate herself from the adults in the waiting room, then, she concurrently seeks to assimilate herself with them. Such boundaries are further established and disrupted with the speaker's statement, "(I could read)." This assertion distinguishes herself from other children her own age, who perhaps cannot read, and as such, it posits herself as superior to them, more like the adults in the waiting room than other children; yet as we have seen, the speaker has already distinguished herself from those adults and thus defined herself as a child. Again, the separation between herself as a child and others as adults is both asserted and challenged. Further, the speaker attempts to posit herself as superior to her aunt, as if she was the adult and her aunt the child: "... I knew she was/ a foolish, timid woman." However, the child's description of herself as "shy," parallels her description of her aunt

as "timid." She thus blurs the boundaries between herself and the woman with whom she denies an identification.

When the speaker begins to study the photographs in the *National Geographic*, her identity seems to rely on the boundaries between both her environment and the places she studies in the photographs, and herself and the representations of those in the photographs. Again, however, as those boundaries are asserted, they are also challenged. For instance, the romanticized image of the explorers "Osa and Martin Johnson" parallels the familiar image of the people in the waiting room, the "breeches" and "boots" of the explorers correspondent to the "trousers" and "boots" of the people in the waiting room. Moreover, the explorers in the photograph are named as the speaker is later in the poem -- "you are an *Elizabeth*"; this parallel suggests that there is a similarity not only between the speaker's familiar environment and the foreign one in the picture, but also between the speaker herself and those people in the image she negotiates. Along similar lines, the images that the speaker studies rest upon both an identification with the figures in those pictures and a denial of that identification. That "A dead man" is "slung on a pole," for instance, suggests that as a human being with a body, the speaker might associate or identify with that corporeal image. However, that the man in the picture is "dead" and "slung on a pole" like an animal, and that the image is accompanied by the caption "Long Pig," a phrase which implies that the image is of an animal rather than a human, suggest a denial of that identification. Likewise, since the speaker seems to be thinking about her birthday ("I said to myself: three days/ and you'll be seven years old"), she might identify with the "Babies" in the pictures she views -- they, like her, have birthdays; yet, since the babies have "pointed heads/ wound round and round with string," she might deny that identification,

viewing them as foreign and unfamiliar. And, since the speaker will eventually become a woman with a "naked" body and "breasts" as her birthdays progress, she might identify with the image of the "black, naked women" whose "breasts were horrifying"; yet since the women in the photographs are "black ... with necks/ wound round and round with wire," she might deny that identification, viewing them, like the "Babies," as foreign and unfamiliar.

When the speaker says of the women in the photograph, "Their breasts were horrifying," her tone alters from the tone of the previous lines. Whereas previously, she seemed to neutrally, even factually describe her own surroundings and the photographs in the *National Geographic,* here, her strong reaction to them is suddenly evident. This reaction seems to strengthen her now almost desperate attempt to dissociate herself from the images as it anticipates her impending crisis: the simultaneous erecting and disrupting of boundaries tenuously remains. As mentioned, the child will become a woman as her birthdays progress, and so she identifies with the women in the images; but she also perceives the women's breasts as "hanging" and "horrifying," and thus denies that identification. Interestingly, since she is repulsed by the image of the women's breasts, and finds them "horrifying," she retains the heterosexual matrix that such repulsion implies, but since she is also attracted to such images ("I read it right straight through"), she yields that heterosexual norm that might determine and stabilize her identity. As Lee Edelman puts it, the images "may horrify ... because they evoke an eroticism that undermines the institution of heterosexuality -- the institution that determines sexual difference as well as its inscriptions" (194).

It is particularly noteworthy that this moment of eroticism occurs at the threshold of the speaker's crisis of identity, at the moment at which she is no longer able to maintain the boundaries between herself and both her surroundings and the photographs that she describes. It is as if the speaker suddenly recognizes the fragility of her subject position and the way in which it relies on those images she negotiates, and it is as though she feels the gaps that have been created through the similar but unequal exchanges between herself and those figures. For as we have seen, there are both similarities and differences between the speaker and the others in the waiting room, and between the speaker and the representations in the *National Geographic.* And we can infer from my discussion (in the first chapter of this thesis) of the way in which unmatched exchanges result in aesthetic and erotic experience that the sudden recognition of the excess that remains from the exchanges in this poem creates this erotic and aesthetic moment. In terms of the speaker's reading of the *National Geographic,* Robert Dale Parker suggests that "By making almost explicit the presumption in the way westerners often objectify other cultures, the magazine can also expose the contrivance behind that presumption" (130). It seems to be the drawing back and acknowledging of this presumption, then, facilitated by the identification with the representations in the magazine, that cause the child's crisis of identity and consequent experience of the aesthetic and the erotic.

However, although this aesthetic moment marks a breakdown in the speaker's identity, it also facilitates a kind of agency, and both the crisis and the agency are pronounced with the "*oh!* of pain" that the speaker "overhear[s]." When the speaker says, "Suddenly, from inside,/ came an *oh!* of pain," the "inside" from which the sound comes is fundamentally ambiguous, for the boundaries between the "inside," and the "outside" have

been and continue to be blurred. If the "*oh!* of pain" comes from inside the dentist's office, where the speaker's aunt is ("--Aunt Consuelo's voice--"), then it is outside of the speaker; yet the idea that the location of the sound is outside of the speaker is complicated by the speaker's statement, "it was *me*:/ my voice, in my mouth." Likewise, if the sound comes from inside of the magazine that the child reads, then it is outside of the speaker, her aunt, and their present environment; yet this "outside" is challenged by the notion that the sound comes from the child ("it was *me*"), her aunt ("--Aunt Consuelo's voice--"), and "inside" of the dentist's office or the waiting room. As the sound of the cry appears to vacillate in location between the speaker, her aunt, their world, and the one represented in the magazine, blurring the distinctions and boundaries between them, it is, in a sense, freed from appropriation by a singular person or place. It is almost as if the sound comes from those aesthetic fissures created by the very exchanges between its ambivalent locations.

When we recognize the fragility of the speaker's subject position, and when we recognize how tenuous the boundaries between the "inside" and the "outside" are, then we begin to see how various metonymic associations throughout the poem further challenge those barriers as they paradoxically proliferate meaning in the poem. For example, many of the images throughout the poem are metonymically associated with one another: the speaker's description of the setting outside the waiting room ("It was winter. It got dark/ early") parallels the image of the volcano in the magazine ("the inside of a volcano,/ black, and full of ashes;"), the darkness of the night similar to the blackness of the ashes and the temperature of winter similar to the cool ashes of the volcano; the dark nights of winter, and the black, cool ashes parallel the "cold, blue-black space" into which the speaker falls, the

"outside" of winter and the world that the speaker feels she is "falling off" similar to the "inside" of the volcano and the interior space into which the speaker falls ["*into* cold, blue-black space" (my emphasis)]; and the description of the volcano and the space into which the speaker falls are associated with the depiction of the waiting room as "sliding/ beneath a big black wave,/ another, and another," the succession of the waves in this description similar to the outpouring of lava in the volcano and "the sensation of falling off/ the round, turning world/ into cold, blue-black space." Interestingly, near the end of the poem, the waiting room is described as "bright/ and too hot"; this phrase associates the waiting room not only with the picture of the volcano in the magazine but also with Africa, the very location in which the figures in the magazine reside. Since the waiting room is associated with the dark winter outside of it, the "cold-blue black space" that seems to be inside the speaker herself, the image of the volcano and the images in Africa, then, it is completely displaced and unlocatable. Although the speaker seems to re-locate and stabilize herself in the last stanza of the poem, ambiguity is ultimately maintained. The word "it" in the line "Then I was back in it" seems deliberately vague. Even though the direct antecedent to "it" is the waiting room, that place has just been associated with many others, and so "it" may also refer to the "cold-blue black space," the volcano, or, implicitly, even the speaker's deceptively sound subject position; and even though the speaker finally seems to neutrally describe her location in the last stanza of the poem, the description of "Outside" as "night and slush and cold" furthers the metonymic associations with those images I have just discussed and thus maintains the instability those associations create.

In order to draw out the significance of the collapsing of boundaries, the proliferation of metonymic associations, and, ultimately, the contingency

of gender in the poem, we might examine how the establishment of a subject position that is stabilized by disavowal is marked as masculine whereas that which is disavowed is marked as feminine. In this poem, as we will see, the speaker's subject position as she establishes boundaries between herself and that which is other to her may be seen as masculine as her identification with those others may be seen as feminine. As the speaker views the photographs in the *National Geographic*, her identity as distinct from them relies on a denial of the corporeal -- a denial of an identification with the "dead man ... those awful hanging breasts" and the sexuality implicit in the images of "Babies"; likewise, as mentioned in the first chapter, the subject position which is marked as masculine in the teleology of the mirror stage rests upon a dissociation from that fragmented body which is other to it. In this way, then, the speaker's position, since it parallels the masculine position in the mirror stage, may be pronounced as such. Also, the feminine and the maternal are implicit within the corporeal images with which the speaker must deny an association in order to maintain her identity, for the blatant "hanging breasts" and the "Babies" are feminine and maternal images. As the speaker attempts to maintain the barrier between herself and those images, then, she attempts to maintain the barrier between her masculine position and their feminine one. Also, just as significantly, since her aunt is a "woman," the speaker's attempted dissociation from her is yet another attempted dissociation from the corporeal, feminine and maternal qualities that she disavows.

However, as the speaker draws back from the subject position she attempts to maintain, and as she begins to identify with the figures she disavows, her masculine subject position begins to yield to that which it opposes. The crisis of identity that the child experiences as she identifies with

the corporeal attests to both the contingency of the ego (or the masculine subject position) on that fragmented body that lies outside of it, and the loss of that ego which occurs when that body is no longer disavowed. By associating with the corporeal and feminine figures she negotiates, the speaker resists the masculine position that is expected of her; yet by doing so, she simultaneously remains within that masculine economy, enforcing the excluded realm upon which the masculine relies. But the speaker's position is intriguing not only because she identifies with the corporeal but also because she falls "into cold, blue-black space." Here, it is as if the child identifies with the very gaps that are created by the unequal exchanges between herself and those corporeal figures she negotiates. These gaps -- which may be likened to chora or the excessive feminine since they are that realm which is inarticulable and unactualized -- facilitate the desedimentation and recognition of the contingency of the speaker's position. This desedimentation results in an aesthetic moment which causes the child to simultaneously feel "all together" -- connected to others -- and "just one," alone amongst many.

While examining the way in which the speaker's position depends on her perception of the world around her and the way in which she defines herself with and against that world, we must be aware of our position as readers -- a position that parallels that of the poet's, or more precisely, the poetic subject's. It is in this way that we might more fully bring forth the significance of the speaker's position. Interestingly, when we study certain details of the poem, we find that the speaker is simultaneously a child and an adult who looks back upon herself as a child -- the child and the adult voices, in fact, seem to be intertwined. While the short sentences at the beginning of the poem ("It was winter. It got dark/ early") imply that the speaker is a child, the specific detailing of place ("In Worcester, Massachusetts"), the way in

which the date is mentioned ("and it was still the fifth/ of February, 1918"), and the phrase "even then," which is clearly a gesture toward the past, suggest that the speaker of the poem is an adult looking back upon her childhood. It is from this position of distance in place and time that the poetic subject -- that adult voice behind the child-speaker -- makes herself known. And it is from this position of distance that we, as readers, along with the poetic subject, may dissociate ourselves from the speaker. Like the poetic subject, we might be distanced in place from "Worcester, Massachusetts," as we are distanced in time from "February, 1918" and in age from the child who speaks throughout the poem.

To negotiate our relationship with the representation of a child-speaker in a poem is to negotiate our relationship with an image in a text. In this way, our position as readers of the poem and the position of the poetic subject who 'reads' her childhood parallel the speaker's position as a reader of the *National Geographic*. Moreover, like the speaker, who attempts to draw boundaries between herself and the images she negotiates, the poetic subject attempts to draw boundaries between herself and the speaker. The deliberate inclusion of the place and time of the occurrence as well as the construction of the speaker as a child attest to this establishment of barriers. Importantly, just as the child posits herself as superior to those around her -- the people in the waiting room, her aunt, and the images in the magazine -- we, along with the poetic subject, posit ourselves as superior to the speaker. As the speaker perceives her aunt as "a foolish, timid woman," we may perceive the speaker as a "foolish," shy, and naive child. Yet as the boundaries between the speaker and her environment are disrupted, so are the boundaries between the poetic subject and the speaker. This collapsing of boundaries is most explicit when the poet names herself in the poem: "you are an *Elizabeth*."

Specifically, it is this stunning and blatant inclusion of the poet's name -- an inclusion that occurs at the very moment of the child's identity crisis -- that exemplifies the way in which the poetic subject is both "outside" and "inside" of the poem. For just as the speaker is "outside" of those images she perceives, established in her masculine position against corporeal and feminine images, so the poetic subject is "outside" of the speaker of the poem, established in a masculine position that perceives a feminine child; conversely, just as the speaker is "inside" of those images she perceives, her stabilized position threatened in a moment of identification with them, so the poetic subject is "inside" of the speaker as her seemingly sound subject position collapses into the object of her contemplation. Like the speaker, the poetic subject is both "here," inside the poem, and "overhear [over here]," outside of it.

"In the Waiting Room" therefore presents us with a regress of gender positions: the speaker assumes a masculine subject position as she attempts to define herself by denying her identification with images which are marked as feminine; we, the readers, along with the poetic subject, assume a masculine subject position as we define ourselves against the feminine image of the naive, even "foolish" child that is the speaker; and, unless we draw attention to the contingency of our own subject position, a future subject might perceive our negotiation of the text as naive and "foolish" -- that subject position would be marked as masculine as ours, that which it would disavow, would be marked as feminine. It is only when we pull back from our own subject position and realize the dependency of our position on the speaker's that we come to realize the contingency of these gendered positions, and it is only when we do so that we come to realize that the speaker, like the images in the *National Geographic*, is nothing other than a constructed

representation that we negotiate. Only then do we find what is disturbingly true -- that the establishment of an "I" slides into "we" and our identities blur as "I--we--" fall into the "cold, blue-black space" that is the recognition of contingency itself.

As we have seen, both Moore and Bishop demonstrate an acute awareness and sensitivity to gendered subject positions in their poems. Moore's "Marriage" shows how values may become established "institution[s]" and "enterprise[s]" as it questions and mocks their validity; simultaneously, the poet exemplifies how those values rely on a realm of exclusion which is marked as feminine. It is probably not coincidental that Moore looks back to the figures of Adam and Eve as she questions such values: "I wonder what Adam and Eve think of [marriage] by this time" (62). It is as though she reaches back to the apparent origins of her history and culture in order to contemplate and revise their meaning. Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" demonstrates how the value of our own subjective positions rely on a disavowal of that which is other to us, and it shows how such subject positions are marked as masculine whereas that which they disavow is marked as feminine. The way in which Bishop's poem presents a regress of gendered subject positions -- the masculine positions becoming feminine as they are perceived from a future perspective -- ultimately shows how gender is a construction or a representation. Although both poets view gender as contingent upon a prior set of evaluations, then, Bishop emphasizes the notion that gender is a representation even more than Moore does.

But perhaps the most interesting difference between the two poems lies in their tone. Moore's poem is humorous and mocking, and although it ends with an image of stasis and authority ("the Book on the writing-table;/ the

hand in the breast pocket"), that image is tinged with irony. By contrast, since the "*oh!* of pain" -- the moment of agency in "In the Waiting Room" -- is not developed (it "could have/ got loud and worse but hadn't"), Bishop's poem seems to possess a certain cynicism that Moore's does not. However, that cynicism, evident by the lack of development of the moment of agency, might be undermined by the word "hadn't." For that word is somehow less final than the word 'didn't,' and it thus leaves the possibility for the development of agency open. "*Elizabeth*[s]" cry of pain, perhaps, "could have/ got loud and worse but hadn't" ... until later.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the ways in which contingency is demonstrated in the form of Moore's and Bishop's poetics. Essentially, I have argued that as we discover a ground for value in Moore's and Bishop's poems, that ground gives way to another, revealing that any ground for value is contingent on the previous and anticipates the forthcoming. Of particular significance to my discussion is the way in which the exchange of one ground for value for another gives rise to an aesthetic moment, a moment in which the poetic subject expresses a kind of agency and in which something new and emergent is created. Further, as well as arguing that one ground for value gives way to the next throughout history, I argue that values are constituted through the relations between dominant and dominated peoples of a community, and that although those values are sedimented, there is room for their disruption and re-evaluation. It is this potential for disruption that gives rise to an aesthetic moment of agency, to that which is new, emergent, and creative; and importantly, it is this aesthetic moment of agency that expresses a significant element of hope and optimism in Moore's and Bishop's poetics.

I have limited my study to readings of four poems because I believe that such close readings of these poems exemplify the complexities of the formal qualities in Moore's and Bishop's work that make these two poets so prominent, brilliant, and worthy of study. Moreover, close readings of the formal elements of these poems in light of the notion of contingency show us how Moore and Bishop might have been thinking about processes of positioning, and they enable us to reflect upon our own subjective positionings. At times, I have speculated that Moore's poetics are more

optimistic than Bishop's, primarily because, in certain instances, Moore seems to celebrate and embrace aesthetic moments whereas Bishop expresses aesthetic moments as she pulls back from her own subjective articulations and recognizes, but does not necessarily celebrate, their contingency. But despite this subtle yet intriguing difference between them, I find both Moore's and Bishop's poetics liberating because both poets constantly challenge assumed subject positions, and they both continually re-align and shift those positions to create new ones -- even as those new ones are constituted through error and approximation. This continual creation of a subject-in-process, and the constant self-reflection upon that subject, is important, especially to feminist politics, not only because it challenges essentialist notions but also because it attempts to create the new from the old. In the study of Moore's and Bishop's poetics, and in the writing of this thesis, I too offer only approximation. But above all, I hope to have shown how an examination of form in the poetry of Moore and Bishop enables us to see that our values and our own positionings, while always contingent, are subject to question, recreation, and renewal.

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