Peripatetic poetry: (Un-)generous tributes and (un-)endings in Leontia Flynn, Elizabeth Bishop, and W.B. Yeats

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ABSTRACT: While we can demarcate the literal end of a poem on a piece of paper, the endings of poems are many and varied, and linked to their potentially un-ending conversations with other works. In the case of the Northern Irish poet Leontia Flynn, her conversations with Bishop are complex, finding expression in her sonnet "Elizabeth Bishop," in the ways that she characterises Bishop, and in how she mediates between Bishop and W.B. Yeats. Both Flynn and Bishop are readers of Yeats, and they meet him at the level of poet and poem, complicating their relationships still further. Jonathan Ellis describes how Seamus Heaney wrote a "generous tribute" to Bishop in the form of a poem, but this article asks what happens when such "tributes" are more "ungenerous" in nature, and what they tell us about the ways in which Flynn, Bishop and Yeats speak to each other through their poems.

KEYWORDS: endings, allusion, poetry, Bishop, Flynn, Yeats, readers

While we can demarcate the literal end of a poem on a piece of paper, the endings of poems are many and varied, and linked to their potentially un-ending conversations with other works. Graham Greene's famous opening to *The End of the Affair* declares that "[a] story has no beginning and no end," and this is both conceptually correct—a story has a more complicated shape than going merely from x to y—and graphologically incorrect in the sense of words being put to paper (Greene 1). Poetry, meanwhile, has even more endings than the "stories" of prose, as it is eternally preoccupied with those ideas that go beyond words. Jahan Ramazani's study *Poetry in a Global Age* tracks the exhaustive, and exhausting, lives of poems while stressing that "Another study of the same subject would have pursued other paths and selected other poems" (Ramazani 24). So, not only is it challenging to uncover the reasons or purposes behind a poem—even if a poet is explicit about their own inspiration, this might change during the

drafting and completing stages—but readers will also bring many other responses to poems, which in turn will give them further "ends." Of course, a reader who makes associations between poems is also seeking endings elsewhere.

In his lectures as part of his role as Oxford Professor of Poetry, Paul Muldoon commented on the subject of "endings," collecting his thoughts eventually in the aptly titled collection *The End of the Poem*. His conceptualisation of endings is useful:

> [O]ne of the unlikely, generally overlooked, aspects of reading a poem is that one may begin […] at the end. One may scan the poem as a shape on the page, taking in aspects of its geometry, well before one embarks on what we think of as a conventional line-by-line reading. (Muldoon 7)

We might even add to Muldoon's examples the question of where the poet-as-reader might end—or end up—when reading a poem by a predecessor. This circuitous, and often playful, approach to endings is something that I'd like to think about by considering contemporary Northern Irish poet Leontia Flynn's "ends" in approaching Elizabeth Bishop—as poet and as caricature, as well as through Bishop's poetic work—and then tracking this back to the ways in which Flynn forges a response by Bishop to Bishop's predecessor W.B. Yeats. What can we learn from the process by which Flynn both reads and responds to Bishop, and by which she figures Bishop as a reader of Yeats? In turn, what can we make of Bishop's responses to Yeats – made, in general, outside of her poems – and of the more oblique connections that critics have made between their works? Along the way, I also want to think about how far we can trace the links—or apparent links—between poems, before the process becomes facetious, relying on highly subjective readings and responses. Bishop, as a relatively canonical and popular poet, with a scholarly following, is someone whose work might lend itself to such questions. How do we know when to stop joining the dots—when we have reached our own scholarly ends, if indeed such a thing is possible?

Jonathan Ellis opens a chapter on "Elizabeth Bishop in Ireland" with the claim that, "Irish authors, North and South, love Elizabeth Bishop" ("Elizabeth Bishop in Ireland" 307). Here, he makes a good case for the subtlety of Bishop's work in relation to poetry by (Northern) Irish writers like Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney, poets who value elusiveness in their work, as in others'. For Ellis, such tributes are knowledgeable and largely kind: for instance, of Heaney's poem "A Hank of Wool," which Heaney dedicated to Bishop, Ellis notes, "[i]n one small poem, Heaney crams a lifetime of Bishop's writing. It is a generous and heartfelt tribute"

(311). Though written in 1979, the poem ended up as a posthumous tribute to Bishop, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in March 1980, with the fuller title "A Hank of Wool; i.m. Elizabeth Bishop," after her unexpected death.[1] But what happens when such "tributes" are neither "generous" nor "heartfelt" "in memoriam" pieces, and what critical value do they have? What do they say about the ways in which poems intersect? Sometimes such intersections happen at the level of poet as well as poem—and often the poet is deceased before such *un*generous tributes are recorded. This is true in the case of another Northern Irish poet, Leontia Flynn, and her poetry and commentary in relation to Bishop, most of which appears in *Drives* (2008), her poetry collection containing poems addressed to, or about, cultural and literary figures. Flynn's attitudes towards Bishop reflect a complex, but necessarily one-sided, relationship between living and deceased poet. But Bishop could be ungenerous too; and in this article, I wish to track such ungenerous tributes by discussing the specific examples of Flynn's "tributes" to Bishop and to Yeats, and Bishop's responses to Yeats.

Flynn's second collection *Drives* is described on the flap as "a book of restless journeys, real or imagined, interspersed with a series of sonnets on writers" (Flynn *Drives* flap). In *Drives*, some references and allusions are foregrounded – appearing in the title of the poem, such as in Flynn's sonnet "Elizabeth Bishop" (*Drives* 34)—but others are more subtle, and contingent on the reading experiences of the critic or reader. In the Acknowledgements to *Drives*, Flynn admits to some direct uses of writers' phrases in her poems, but otherwise states, "Elsewhere borrowings from other writers are indicated or paraphrased" (59).[2] As part of Flynn's postmodern play, almost every poem that we encounter in *Drives* contains allusions or references to other poems, thus extending potentially endlessly Flynn's technique of "paraphrasing." One example is the way that Flynn uses both Bishop and Yeats in *Drives*, by reading Bishop, and then reading Yeats through, and around, Bishop. Flynn sets herself up as a reader and a (re-)writer of her literary antecedents. The "sonnets on writers" within *Drives* include those addressed to F. Scott Fitzgerald, to Dorothy Parker, and to "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition."[3] The collection also includes a parodic poem, "Washington," which evokes P. B. Shelley's sonnet of political hubris, "Ozymandias."[4] Although not a sonnet itself, Flynn's poem critiques present-day "traveller[s]," "mapless, in rapid tourist mode" (*Drives* 29). Each example riffs on Flynn's notions of "borrowings" and "paraphras[ing]," upturning the ways in which Flynn reads, imitates, borrows from and re-writes other writers' words and ideas.

Interestingly, too, *Drives* also includes a poem, "Robert Lowell," which consists of two loose sonnets (36–37). This longer double sonnet seems apt when we consider the ways in which Bishop's long-term correspondent Lowell played with longer runs of sonnets in his own work, and how he moved from writing more formal sonnets to looser sonnets. As Christopher Bakken notes in a review of the *Collected Poems of Robert Lowell*, "For several decades Lowell counted to fourteen, stretching and slackening the sonnet form during each phase of his career" (np). Flynn's double sonnet "Robert Lowell" sees the relative formality of Sonnet I broken down by the looser lines of Sonnet II, as if synecdochally representing this "stretching and slackening" of Lowell's sonnets. "Robert Lowell" discusses the relationship between life and art in Lowell's own sonnets, and critiques their confessional nature—contemplating the balance between art and life in his work, and speaking to other sonnets in the same collection such as "Elizabeth Bishop" and "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition" (*Drives* 46).

While we can see Flynn's own "stretching and slackening" of the sonnet form in *Drives*, her choice of the same form (with variations) for "Elizabeth Bishop" is less explicable. Bishop was far from a prolific sonneteer. In fact, in a discussion of what has often been read as Bishop's last poem, her playful sonnet "Sonnet" (published posthumously in *The New Yorker* on 29 October 1979), Lloyd Schwartz claims that this poem was only the second sonnet in her oeuvre, out of a total output of around 101 poems. Schwartz notes, "[h]er only previous mature sonnet, 'The Prodigal,' written nearly three decades earlier, was a double sonnet" (np). Nevertheless, we can see overlaps between Bishop's "The Prodigal" and Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," which suggest that the earlier poem might have been in Flynn's mind when composing her sonnet on Bishop. First published in *The New Yorker* in March 1951, "The Prodigal" is a double Petrarchan sonnet that seems at surface level, in Jocelyn Heath's words, "like [an] autobiographical parable of an alcoholic expatriate" (133). Although the protagonist is male, Heath suggests that the switch in gender creates a sense of "exile by distancing autobiography from narrative in the poem." While Heath discerns a hidden queer reading behind what seems initially like autobiography, it is nevertheless notable that Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," itself a loose Petrarchan sonnet, alludes to Bishop's alcoholism.

Bishop's "The Prodigal" uses playful rhymes to lighten the description of the "prodigal [son]," who appears to be a pig farmer, an alcoholic who reads into his pigs a "self-righteous" disapproval of his drinking. The turn of the first sonnet, coming at line nine (as is typical of a Petrarchan sonnet), describes the paranoia of the farmer's actions—of hiding his pints from the pigs, of reading into the "burning puddles"—through a lightness of touch that is borne out by a regular, if playful, rhyme scheme, which concludes with a repeated rhyme:

But sometimes mornings after drinking bouts
(he hid the pints behind a two-by-four),
the sunrise glazed the barnyard mud with red;
the burning puddles seemed to reassure.
And then he thought he almost might endure
his exile yet another year or more. (*Complete Poems* 71)

In both sonnets, Bishop employs six different rhymes, though the rhyme scheme deviates considerably from a "regular" Petrarchan sonnet, which might have a rhyme scheme of abbaabba cdecde;[5] here, the rhyme scheme of Sonnet I is abacdbcedfefff. The near-triple rhyme of "reassure," "endure" and "more" offers a light-hearted tone to the sense of an unending "exile" in the piggery, the prodigal's beer goggles making the scene seem somehow brighter as "the burning puddles seemed to reassure." This (false) sense of reassurance is underscored by the comforting regularity of the iambic pentameter.

In Sonnet II the pattern begins again with different sounds, breaking down into half rhymes towards the end (abacdbecfedf[d][f]), and adding an increasing sense of foreboding. The last two lines rhyme neither with themselves nor fully with other lines in the poem: "But it took him a long time / finally to make his mind up to go home" (71). Each sonnet of "The Prodigal" is divided into two blocks of 14 lines, giving a further sense of complication: it becomes more difficult to scan the rhymes when the sonnets are not set out in an octet and a sestet, typical of a Petrarchan sonnet. In comparison with the relative regularity of Sonnet I, Sonnet II stretches and slackens as the dismal reality of the prodigal's life becomes more apparent, with Bishop offering a convincing portrait of *delirium tremens* in her description of "his shuddering insights, beyond his control / touching him" (71). We see the gradual revelation of the subject's position as the verse also breaks down, rhyme, rhythm and imagery disclosing the purgatorial situation of the prodigal, who has no choice but to "go home."

Beyond her sonnet "Elizabeth Bishop," which might owe something to "The Prodigal" in its focus on alcoholism and in its formal similarities with Flynn's poem (as both are loose Petrarchan sonnets), Flynn's *Drives* makes a more specific reference to Bishop's work. The collection's first encounter with Bishop is an epigraph from her "Arrival at Santos," which negotiates the relationship between home and homelessness against the backdrop of travel. From the beginning of *Drives*, the relationship between travel, tourism and allusion that Flynn investigates is underscored by her use of Bishop's lines:

Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world, and a better life, and complete comprehension of both at last… (*Drives*, Epigraph np)

Although the epigraph is a question, Flynn does not include question marks—as if emphasising its rhetorical nature: the "country" is unlikely to answer back. We may recall the ambivalent opening of the same Bishop poem, "Arrival at Santos," from 1952: "Here is a coast; here is a harbour; / here, after a meagre diet of horizon, is some scenery" (*Complete Poems* 89). Or we might think of the slightly despairing question that haunts Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel:" "Think of the long trip home. / Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?" (93). This particular question falls on lines 13 to 14 of the first stanza of "Questions of Travel," so might have the feel of the ending of a sonnet; however, if it is an ending, it is an indefinite one, as the question rings out and the poem continues. Like Flynn's poems, which often proceed by travelling forward and then coming around again, Bishop's poems of travel often have a questioning, peripatetic nature. By extracting the lines from "Arrival at Santos" for her epigraph, Flynn enables us to catch the empathy in Bishop's address, to and for the tourist whose demands are relatively harmless despite their apparent "immodesty." Of course, both Bishop and Flynn have been tourists themselves—as well as observers of themselves and others behaving according to what Flynn describes as a "tourist mode" ("Washington," *Drives* 29).

Deryn Rees-Jones has noted that earlier titles for the collection that would become Bishop's *Questions of Travel* (using the same title as the poem) included "Nagging Thoughts Travelling" and "Another Country." All three titles, according to Rees-Jones, signal "Bishop's wider attempts in *Questions of Travel* as a whole to locate, explore, hold and transform the inevitable tensions that underline these nagging but not easily identifiable thoughts" (133). Both Bishop and Flynn appear to ask whether the "nagging" thoughts that accompany us when we travel, and when we're in "tourist mode," can become the stuff of poetry; their poems ask how can we make poetry from the "inevitable tensions" that accompany us as we move around, in "another country" where we are essentially a stranger, borrowing a place or an experience for just a short amount of time (Rees-Jones 140, 135).

Ramazani makes such questions even more complex by extending the idea of poet as tourist to *poem* as tourist, tracking its wanderings around the globe through readers, publishers,

scholars and more. Poems can behave *as* tourists while simultaneously critiquing the practice of tourism: we might think of Yeats' opening line to "Sailing to Byzantium," where his speaker envisages sailing away from his home, Ireland—"That is no country for old men"—towards another civilization, Byzantium, that exists only in art (*Major Works* 94). Here the poem is a tourist in a world that exists only as a dream, while the continuous movement implied by "sailing" describes a journey that will never end. Therefore, Ramazani asserts, "[w]e should heed the cross-cultural nuances and self-reflective energies of the simultaneously touristic and post-, meta-, extra-, para-, even anti-touristic poems we read" (100). Even though this list is potentially un-ending, it shows how we have underestimated the different ways in which poems can themselves travel, dependent on a constantly changing relationship between reader, poet, poem, and world. "Questions of travel" apply to poems as much as to people.

The peripatetic poems of Flynn's *Drives*, which travel to, around and beyond the apparent restrictions of title and page, are particularly suited to Ramazani's analogy between poem and tourist. Flynn's sonnet "Elizabeth Bishop" is no exception. I hesitate to describe the poem as a sonnet "to" Bishop as, unlike the shifts between a second- and third- person narrative in "Arrival at Santos," Bishop uses only the third person. Where Flynn employs titles that are just names—as she also does with "Robert Lowell"—the inverted commas offer a sense of performance, or a playful grappling with the idea of a poetic persona. By using inverted commas for the title, giving a name without an accompanying preposition, the title hints that the poet in the poem might be a poetic construction (an "Elizabeth Bishop"). A different title such as "To-" or "For Elizabeth Bishop" would not have had that undertow.

Flynn's poem opens, "Darkness is falling in Worcester, Massachusetts," and then lists Bishop's various ailments ("asthma," "eczema"), her alcoholism, and her sexuality; next, the *volta* or turn of the sonnet, coming in at line nine, comments:

> Losing
> in many attractive locations: Maine,
> New York, and (scene of her near-death
> brush with a cashew) Brazil…
> lost parents, houses: she'll lose exceptionally well,
> lover by lover. She even loses her breath. (*Drives* 34)

These lines tell us that Flynn is clearly an avid reader of Bishop's works and seems to know quite a bit about Bishop's biography: her illnesses, the places she lived, her sexuality, and so

on. In Flynn's role as a teacher of poetry, she has given masterclasses on Bishop's work—and recently at an event at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, in March 2024. This event was described as "a fantastic opportunity to study the work of a great poet [Bishop] with the guidance of a great reader [Flynn]" (Byre Theatre np). Meanwhile, a deep dive into the research archive of Queen's University Belfast, where Flynn teaches, reveals that she has supervised PhDs on Bishop.[6] Therefore, Flynn's roles in relation to her predecessor are manifold—as reader, teacher, poet, critic, woman, and even ambassador.

The poem "Elizabeth Bishop" appears, on first reading, to be rather dismissive of the poet: she is presented as a hypochondriac with "bronchitis / And asthma. And eczema" (*Drives* 34); along with "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition," Flynn seems to be writing pathological parodies of these mid-century women poets. In her sonnet on Plath, Flynn anthropomorphises "Sylvia Plath's infected sinuses" as lying in wait, sending a "mad, infected rush" that leads, eventually, to self-destruction for both poet and poem (*Drives* 46). Although Flynn's sonnet on Bishop is less dramatic, the poet is portrayed initially as self-obsessed and self-pitying, her life a mess. The sonnet has few obvious rhymes, but is moved along by its alliteration—"sun slinks," "depressive, drinker" (34). Meanwhile, the repetition of "and" throughout recalls the monotonous nature of the meta-repetitions of Bishop's "Anaphora" (*Complete Poems* 52), and creates a similar mood to that of "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," one of Bishop's most well-known poems of travel. Here, the list-like qualities of the description are later dismissed as "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and,'" thus offering a sense of anti-climax (*Complete Poems* 58–9). Returning to Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," we can see how, when combined with the build-up of words associated with "losing" ("losing," "lost," "lose," "loses"), the sonnet gives a similar sense of accretion— and of possibly meaningless repetition—while alluding to, and borrowing from, Bishop's own poetic lexicon.

Interestingly, too, In "Elizabeth Bishop" Flynn plays with the formal parameters of the sonnet. Although the line lengths are uneven, ranging from eight syllables to 12, the *volta* in line nine suggests that Flynn is playing with the Petrarchan sonnet, which tends to set up a main idea in the first eight lines, and then offer a twist upon this idea in the final five. We could argue that the first eight lines deal with biographical "fact," but that our sense of familiarity is then dealt a blow by the cruelty of line nine—"soon to be veteran loser" (*Drives* 34). The closing lines then offer an extended contemplation on how loss can be registered. Of course, "veteran loser" recalls the many ways in which Bishop's speaker extolls the need to "practise losing" in one of her most canonical poems, "One Art" (*Complete Poems* 178); in that sense, one might become a "veteran loser" through carrying out the instructions of Bishop's poem.

The metaphor is at once jagged and prosaic. On the other hand, Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" follows its subject around the world—from Massachusetts to Maine, to New York, and thence to Brazil—showing that the narrator is perhaps more of a "tourist" within Bishop's worlds than the dismissive tone elsewhere might suggest. Finally, the use of brackets as an aside, though comic—by linking "Brazil" via nuts to "cashew" in the "(scene of her near-death / brush with a cashew)" (*Drives* 34)—and though highlighting the event's oddness, nevertheless recalls Bishop's use of brackets in "One Art:" "(*Write* it!)" (*Complete Poems* 178).

The last lines of "Elizabeth Bishop" are arguably most evocative of, and embedded in, Bishop's lexicon. Here, Flynn's closing couplet—"lost parents, houses: she'll lose exceptionally well / lover by lover. She even loses her breath" (*Drives* 34)—recalls the last lines of Bishop's villanelle, though Flynn's ending is crueller. Moreover, it does not have the quasi-harmonious ending of "One Art," where Bishop brings the dominant rhyming pattern of the villanelle ("master" / "disaster" / "faster") into a final closing rhyme:

> It's evident
> the art of losing's not too hard to master
> though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster. (*Complete Poems* 178)

The neatness of Bishop's ending belies speaker-scribe's struggles getting the words down on the page; instead, though "disaster" rings out with the possibility of catastrophe, the poem intones the opposite: that is, that no individual loss will "bring disaster." Flynn's ending, in contrast, is verbally bathetic; here, the "breath" of "She even loses her breath" rhymes with "near-death," recalling the earlier half-rhyme between "Brazil," and "well." In comparison with Flynn's conclusion, we might return to the "*Write* it!" of Bishop's and consider different understandings of "losing one's breath;" in a poetic sense it might mean hesitating to write further, and in a broader sense it might allude to running out of drive.

Flynn's conclusion, then, makes us think about different types of breathlessness in Bishop's earlier poem. But it also recalls the almost-sonnet "O Breath," the fourth of Bishop's "Four Poems," which enacts its own type of breathlessness in the spaces left between the words. Bishop's poem seems to lose its own breath as it peters out in its final three lines (lines 13–15):

> something that maybe I could bargain with
> and make a separate peace beneath
> within if never with. (*Complete Poems* 79)

Here the insouciant repetition of "with" and "with" underlines the sleepiness of the conclusion, with its assonance between "something," "bargain," and "within," and between "peace and beneath." Indeed, these lines enact their own inability to "bargain" with the inevitability of the "breath" that is evoked in the first lines of the poem—the "celebrated beast" who is "silent, bored really:" the poem lacks the energy to mount a challenge. Such techniques anticipate Flynn's use of bathetic rhyme in "Elizabeth Bishop." Meanwhile, the inconclusive conclusion of "O Breath," which leaves a question open without a question mark, leaves us in a purgatorial place not dissimilar to where Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" ends up, emphasised by Flynn's use of the present tense in "She even loses her breath" (*Drives* 34).

Flynn's concluding lines from "Elizabeth Bishop"—"lost parents, houses: she'll lose exceptionally well / lover by lover. She even loses her breath"—echo with a further allusion, this time to Sylvia Plath's poem "Lady Lazarus." Offering a gendered alternative to the biblical story of Lazarus, who comes back from the dead, Plath's poem sees a female Lazarus returning again and again from a point of death or near-death. The poem is almost prosaic in style, although it does make use of simple repetitions; meanwhile its three-line stanza shape emphasis its circularity and non-linearity. Around halfway through, we find:

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else.
> I do it exceptionally well. (Plath, *Collected Poems* 244–247 [245])

What is quite wonderful about Flynn's allusion to Plath's poem is that, in its "exceptionally well," it recalls Plath's contemplation on the "art" of dying (and not dying) while adding layers to its own evocation of Bishop's "One Art." The "Lady Lazarus" of Plath's poem represents a character who refuses to die and a poem that refuses to end neatly, while Flynn's "she'll lose exceptionally well" reflects Plath's use of the present tense in her poem: both phrases suggest the possibility of continuation. Therefore, the conclusion of Flynn's poem, "She even loses her breath," might be read as a contemplation on the "art" of poem writing, of losing, and of "dying" all in one; in fact, all three become intertwined.

Considering these poems by Bishop, Plath and Flynn against a wider conceptual framework yields further questions. Why does Flynn use the sonnet form in *Drives* when she discusses famous cultural figures, including Bishop and Plath? In a similar vein, why does "Elizabeth Bishop's" closest forbear, "One Art," contain so many formal differences from the

later poem: why is a sonnet tracked onto a villanelle? Has Flynn deliberately curtailed some of the "vaster" expanses of Bishop's villanelle form to critique the workings of Bishop's poem, with its hesitant and sometimes digressive poetic voice—as if Bishop's exhortation to "practise losing […] faster" is answered in Flynn's shorter piece? Similarly, if Flynn also has in mind Bishop's 15-line poem "O Breath" here, is her tighter, more formal sonnet a comment on Bishop's looser almost-sonnet—a subtle expression of order over disorder, of effort over expiration? Of course, shorter doesn't necessarily mean simpler, and indeed the concision of Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" might speak to a greater poetic dexterity.

Stephanie Burt and David Mikics have pointed out that when a contemporary poet writes a sonnet, they really mean to do it, as "[t]o ask whether a given modern poem counts as sonnet – to ask the question in modern terms – is to ask what we learn by calling it one" (22). Flynn's *Drives* is dominated by the sonnet form, so to some extent it is natural that she might use the same form here; however there is something unusual, provocative even, about adopting a loosely Petrarchan sonnet form to allude to, and even parody, a poem ("One Art") that is known for its studied and dedicated use of the villanelle form. We might recall one of the most facetious examples from twentieth-century poetry of a sonnet challenging or even undermining a longer form—"Epic" by Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh (1938). A loose Petrarchan sonnet like Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," "Epic" sees "Homer's ghost come whispering" to the speaker's "mind" to tell him, in conclusion, that: "I made the *Iliad* from such / A local row. Gods make their own importance" (Kavanagh *Collected Poems* 184). Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" similarly celebrates the self-importance of the sonnet form, and of the sonneteer, in offering a critique of a poet, and a re-reading and re-writing of that poet's work, in just 14 lines.

As suggested above, there may also be a more occluded reference in Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" to Bishop's double sonnet "The Prodigal," whose structure Flynn might be alluding to—and perhaps preferring—as a poem that covers similar subjects to both "Elizabeth Bishop" and "One Art" but does not foreground biography like the latter. "The Prodigal" instead takes a Biblical story and characterises a generic "prodigal" son in the way of a parable. Therefore, despite the possibility of an analogy between the alcoholism of the title character and Bishop's own struggles, they are at least partly hidden behind the familiar tale. Flynn's sonnets in *Drives* are critical of writers or cultural figures whose biographies are too pronounced: for example, in "F. Scott Fitzgerald," Flynn plays with Fitzgerald's idealisation of cars and his coining of the term the "lost generation" (Flynn *Drives* 32); and in "George Orwell's Death," the poem dies along with the author ("And then he dies") (43). Flynn's sonnet on Plath, "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition," is perhaps the most facetious, in how it almost undermines its own success

as a sonnet in its simultaneous parody and critique of the confessional nature of Plath's work. The sonnet peters out graphologically on the page, as Plath's suicidal tendencies are seen as ending the life of both poet and poem:

> as the thought to drive at high speed off the road;
> to tear one's flesh – to push push push
> the self-destruct button … (Flynn, *Drives* 46)

As in the above lines, however, Flynn's own sonnets risk dying out with the poems and poets they critique. In *Drives*, Flynn as poet tends to hide behind the personas of the figures she critiques as well as the poems she plays with, so that the "I" of the poet, if there is one at all, is often far from view; this is far from the confessional, dramatic or biographical tone that her chosen writers might adopt in their work. Of course, this evasion comes with its own risks. Both "Elizabeth Bishop" and Flynn's sonnet on Plath question whether (auto)biographical material contained within poems has an undermining effect on the poems' afterlife. In her double sonnet "Robert Lowell," also from *Drives*, Flynn expounds more fully on this topic, worrying whether Lowell, by "using those letters [to his second wife] in his sonnets," might be "Using and re-using / the fact of pain – as though pain were a poem" (36–37 [37]. If pain *is* a poem, Flynn's double sonnet seems to ask, then is such a poem *only* pain, with "life and art" for Lowell so "minutely clocked" that his poems might die out with him (37)?

From a literary-critical perspective, the performative nature of the sonnet form enables Flynn to explore the confluence between poet and poem that is often central to discussions about Bishop's art and work (as well as to the work of Plath and Lowell). For example, Ellis' *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* (2006) demonstrates how Bishop used personal experiences as a springboard for her poetry, though these experiences were rather refracted through her work than portrayed literally or autobiographically. Is Flynn, as someone who tends to hide her poetic self through performances of allusion and ventriloquism, disappointed in Bishop, as a poet who might be seen as having drawn upon her own life for her poetic subjects; and who, at times in her life, produced the kind of confessional writing that both Plath and Lowell were notorious for writing? Although Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" is more ambivalent in tone than the cruelties and melodramas of "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition," we can nevertheless read Flynn's sonnet on Bishop as a critique not only of the dramas of Bishop's own life but also of what Flynn sees as Bishop's tendency to self-dramatize within

her work, to make things "look like […] disaster" even when they're not. In this way, Flynn's sonnets become an act of literary criticism.

Before leaving these poems behind, I want to think about a possible allusion to Yeats' work contained in Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," and then to consider what this allusion might mean for Bishop's poetry. I wrote above about moments when we ask ourselves, as scholars, if we are taking our readings a little too far. And this might well be a question that Flynn asks of herself and her own poems-as-criticism. In a review of my book, *The Modern Irish Sonnet: Revision and Rebellion*, Ross Moore suggested that I had done just that, by identifying a possible allusion to Yeats' poetry in the closing lines of Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop," where Flynn describes how "she'll lose exceptionally well / lover by lover" (*Drives* 36). Moore notes, "Guissin-Stubbs alights upon the phrase 'lover by lover' in the penultimate line [of 'Elizabeth Bishop'] as an allusion to Yeats's 'The Wild Swans at Coole'" (531). My broader contention, however, was that Flynn derives "lover by lover" both verbally and tonally from Yeats' well-known poem, in its description of the swans' fidelity:

> Unwearied still, lover by lover,
> They paddle in the cold
> Companionable streams or climb the air;
> Their hearts have not grown old;
> Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
> Attend upon them still. (Yeats *Major Works* 60)

Moore claims of my contention that, "[i]f a metaphor is being read into the poem ["Elizabeth Bishop"] it doesn't quite hold; while Yeats's swans are generational, the archetypal swan that mates for life doesn't really capture the nature of Elizabeth Bishop's losses and peregrinations" (Moore 532). But Moore is going straight to the source of the metaphor—Yeats—here, and reading this metaphor through Bishop's own poetry and its themes, rather than considering Flynn's function as a poetic mediator between Yeats and Bishop.

If we return to the specific use Flynn makes of "lover by lover," we might see what I was trying to get at. As we recall, Flynn's lines read, "she'll lose exceptionally well, / lover by lover" (*Drives* 34). I am not suggesting in my identification of Flynn's possible allusion to

Yeats' poem that Flynn is using Yeats' "lover by lover" to claim that Yeats' swans offer us a new way of thinking about Bishop's romantic dramas, even retroactively. But I am suggesting that Yeats' "lover by lover," which initially connotes faithfulness, might have been borrowed by Flynn to expand upon the notion of what that phrase might mean in the context of Bishop's own romantic entanglements—and therefore that it might speak more widely to the question of fidelity in poetry as in life. It might also send us back to Yeats' poem, where the description of the swan's fidelity contrasts unfavorably with a more human meditation on loss and loneliness—and where "lover by lover" for a male speaker might have a completely different meaning to the experiences of the "unwearied" parade of swans, paddling in the "cold / companionable streams." We may also recall that Yeats' poem describes "nine-and fifty swans," suggesting from the beginning that one of the swans is not in a pair; and that "The Wild Swans at Coole" ends on a couplet that describes when the speaker might "awake some day / To find that they have flown away" (*Major Works* 60). Yeats' "archetypal swan that mates for life" offers a less steady metaphor than we might first expect.[7]

To defend my claim a little further I might add that Flynn, who grew up in Northern Ireland, would very likely have encountered Yeats' poems during her education, and that she probably teaches Yeats' poetry at Queen's University Belfast. We know that Flynn has been engaging with Yeats' work for several decades, as her 2003 review of Peter McDonald's *Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* attests.[8] I also think that something else is going on here, which relates to the "ends" of poems. It would be entirely in-keeping with Flynn's practice of allusion and paraphrase that she would introduce echoes into her poetry—and particularly echoes of canonical works by her poetic antecedents. Indeed, we have already seen how, in her responses to Bishop, Flynn's references can be bare-faced (writing a poem entitled "Elizabeth Bishop"), can involve citation (as in her Epigraph from "Arrival at Santos"), and can even be oblique, as in the possible role of Bishop's "The Prodigal" as a formal palimpsest for "Elizabeth Bishop." Moreover, "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "One Art" are both extremely well-known poems, which are widely studied and discussed. As Bishop scholars, we may be disheartened to find such clear, predictable, references to Bishop's villanelle in Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop." We might wonder why the allusions aren't more indirect, or why Flynn doesn't refer, or allude, to less well-known poems. But Flynn probably encountered Bishop as a reader, and even as a student, before she encountered Bishop as a poet herself. And if we dig deeper, we might find further, more subtle allusions to poems like "The Prodigal" or "O Breath." Therefore, Flynn's poetic and readerly encounters with Bishop might move from naïveté to knowingness, and

"Elizabeth Bishop" tracks this; we can probably make a similar claim for Flynn's approaches to Yeats, whom she likely encountered in similar contexts.

So, we might read Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" as enacting several encounters with the poet, with the poet-in-the-poem, and with the poet's work. Flynn is a reader, a student, a woman, a critic, and a poet—and the poet Elizabeth Bishop and her work are likely to engage, enchant, and even disappoint these different selves. Flynn's sonnet therefore enacts its own complicated relationship with the "Elizabeth Bishop" that it both knows and doesn't know. Flynn's encounters with Bishop are always via the medium of the written word: one-sided, sometimes gleeful, and sometimes circumspect. Returning to Muldoon's discussion of endings, and of where we may start and end up when we read a poem, it might be, too, that in Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" lie expectations of how readers might encounter both Flynn's sonnet and Bishop's "One Art." While Bishop's heavily structured, tidied-up villanelle at least intimates that it should be read, line by line, from the beginning, so as to appreciate the patterns and refrains of the form, it may be that it only dawns on us gradually that Flynn's poem is a sonnet. In fact, we might only realise this when we get to the end, or when we count the lines. Our encounter with Flynn's messy, uncertain poem is shakier than our encounter with Bishop's villanelle, in which the "One Art" may refer to the act of losing, but may also demonstrate how art itself can describe and curtail different kinds of loss. In contrast, Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" curtails nothing, both revelling in and critiquing its own inability to fully end.

"Elizabeth Bishop" offers no neat conclusions, ending by losing (its) breath with a whimper. The last sentence, "She even loses her breath," is prosaic both in its literalization of a metaphor—evoking the idea of breathlessness as well as envisaging Bishop taking her final breath—and in its grammatical status as a short sentence beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop (*Drives* 34). To some extent, "Elizabeth Bishop" becomes an exercise in self-sacrifice as Flynn's use of Bishop's lexicon and ideas means that the poem becomes self-parodic. Does Flynn's poem offer an ending for Elizabeth Bishop—the poet and her poetry—or does it send us back to the earlier poet's works, so that we can begin again? Of course, Bishop arguably encourages a similar process in poems such as "The Monument," with its conclusion that ends in starting over: "It is the beginning […] / […]. Watch it closely" (*Complete Poems* 25). Such ideas and assertions might in turn share their own relationship with Yeats' poetry, as I expand upon below.

The identification of a subtle reference to Yeats' "Wild Swans at Coole" within "Elizabeth Bishop" opens a critical can of worms. Discerning such allusions usually reflects one's own scholarly and archival interests: in the example I gave above, I "alighted" on that possible allusion because I am well versed in Yeats' poetry. Similarly, when I was told of—and later had sight of—Bishop's hastily drafted poem "Leda and the/a Duck," dated August 1970, I immediately read it as a possible parody of Yeats' "Leda and the Swan."[9] Yet the draft poem can only be found in Bishop's archive at Vassar, and its scrawl makes it hard to decipher even by dedicated scholars. Some say that it contains words such as "desire," which might be appropriate; however, less apropos would be a transcription that contains the name "DAISY" (for the duck?), or the word "toilets" or possibly even "toilette." It's not even clear whether this is a poem to or about Yeats, or whether its title just recalls Yeats' poem thanks to the latter's notoriety. To what extent should we take this draft seriously, tucked away between the pages of a vast archive? Such questions might lead us to think carefully about a poem's literal, verbal, and spatial endings: whether "end" means a purpose, or a reason, and/or a coming to a close. For example, can Bishop's poem, drafted nearly 50 years after "Leda and the Swan" (1923), be viewed as a bathetic, parodic "ending" to Yeats' violent sonnet, even if very few people will have seen or read it—and moreover when, as far as we know, Bishop never finished the poem, nor fully explained its relation to Yeats' poem?

We do know that Bishop was sceptical about Yeats' interests in spiritualism; in a 1950 letter to Lowell, a decade after Yeats' death, she expressed disbelief at Yeats' experiments, having read his esoteric prose work *A Vision*: "The picture of Yeats going 'Woof! Woof!' in a lower berth, in the dark, in California, in order to wake up his wife who was dreaming she was a cat, is very pleasing, I think" (Travisano and Hamilton 107). It is likely that Bishop was reading the second version of *A Vision* from 1937, which contains "Leda and the Swan" at the beginning of Book V (entitled "Dove or Swan"),[10] so she may have encountered Yeats' poem against a context of spiritualism and esoteric patterning. Considering Bishop's scepticism about Yeats' experiments, it is unsurprising that the animalistic overlaps between "Leda and the/a Duck" and the dogs and cats of her story of Yeats and his wife might undermine his endeavours. But Bishop might have other sources in mind in "Leda and the/a Duck," which complicate the picture even further. For example, she might even have been recalling a painting by the early twentieth-century US painter Percival Leonard Rosseau, who depicted his setter ("Leda") in a series of paintings, one of which is referred to as "Leda and the Duck" (its title a possible commentary on the many depictions of Leda and the Swan in visual art).[11] Bishop's dismissals mean that the gyres of *A Vision* are rendered bathetic by imagining Yeats and his wife turned

into pets; while the violent figure of Zeus as a swan, raping Leda, is possibly replaced by a harmless "duck," and with Rosseau's painting turning the story on its head as "Leda" is now in charge, holding the harmless duck between her teeth.

Such ungenerous, rather derisory, tributes demonstrate how Bishop could be dismissive of Yeats' life and work. Nevertheless, they do paint a picture of Bishop as a reader of Yeats, suggesting that she was engaging with him in that capacity even if her opinions of his work were sometimes suspicious or mocking. Ellis offers some concrete examples of Bishop reading Yeats, while showing how Bishop "had several copies of Yeats' poetry," suggesting that "she must have read them frequently throughout her life;" Bishop, Ellis concludes, read Yeats as "thoroughly" as Heaney would later read Bishop ("Bishop in Ireland" 309). Nevertheless, Bishop's views of Yeats' work and personality were mercurial. In Bishop's own complicated dedication piece to Marianne Moore, "Efforts of Affection," we are given further clues about her readings of Yeats. First published in June 1983 in *Vanity Fair*, the essay-cum-memoir was found amongst Bishop's papers following her death. This piece has its own complicated endings, as the introduction to "Efforts of Affection" in *Vanity Fair* explains:

> [The essay was] *found unfinished among Elizabeth Bishop's papers after her death in* 1979*—unfinished only in the sense that there was no final draft. In another sense it was more than finished, with numerous versions of various passages accompanied by the author's marginal notes. Fortunately, there was also a detailed outline showing her intentions exactly. The memoir has been put into this final form by Bishop's friend, editor, and publisher, Robert Giroux.* (Bishop, "Efforts of Affection" np)

Although this piece has been published widely, and though it is far more well known than "Leda and the/a Duck," it nevertheless asks similar questions about the relationship between private materials and public readers. Even though "there was a detailed outline showing her intentions exactly," the material or thematic "intentions" for "Efforts of Affection" do not tell us how and when Bishop intended to publish it, if at all; or what its "final form" should look like. Although this description of Bishop's drafting process tells us that she was keen to perfect her piece on Moore, it is naïve in its presumption that Giroux can put it into its "final form," and that this form is unlikely to change or shift with subsequent scholarly revelations, or with subsequent readings. As we have seen, no piece of literature has a literal ending, and this is perhaps truer of pieces in draft state than pieces that have been published.

It is worthwhile spending time considering the tone of "Efforts of Affection," as the effortful way that it describes Moore, together with its own intimation that Moore had to make her own efforts to be affectionate, delineates a complicated relationship between Bishop and the older poet. Bishop remarks in the opening paragraph of "Efforts of Affection" that there was a poem by Moore in her *Collected Poems* (1951) called "Efforts and Affection." In a sign of intimacy between the two women poets, Bishop notes, "[i]n my copy of this book, Marianne crossed out the 'and' and wrote 'of' above it" ("Efforts of Affection" np). This slight change alters significantly the implications of the subsequent essay, as "efforts" and "affection" are intertwined in the way the poets interact, and in the ways that Bishop memorialises Moore. This latter has crossovers with Bishop's discussions of Yeats within the essay; both Moore and Yeats have predeceased Bishop, and she takes some care in how she chooses to depict these forebears. Portraying herself and Moore as readers of Yeats, Bishop notes:

> Marianne [Moore] in 1940 gave me a copy of the newly published *Last Poems and Two Plays*, by William Butler Yeats, and though I dislike some of the emphasis on lechery in the poems, and so did she, I wrote her that I admired "The Circus Animals' Desertion" and the now famous lines "I must lie down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart." She replied:
>
> I would be "much disappointed in you" if you *could* feel about Yeats as some of his acolytes seem to feel. An "effect," an exhaustively great sensibility (with insensibility?) and genius for word-sounds and sentences. But after all, what is this enviable apparatus for? if not to change our mortal psycho-structure. ("Efforts of Affection" np)

It is worth considering in some detail how Bishop portrays herself and Moore in relation to Yeats, who had died in January 1939. First, Bishop is quite passive in the story: Moore gave her a copy of Yeats' poems, and her response to Moore was a consequence of this gift. Second, Bishop says very little directly about Yeats, other than that she "admired" his concluding lines from "The Circus Animals' Desertion," and that Moore and she agreed about their dislike of "some of the emphasis on lechery."

With reference to the accusation of "lechery," we might think here of the glib, leering opening to "Politics," one of Yeats' last published poems, which risks undoing the serious work of several decades in its declaration, and gleeful celebration, of senile distraction:

> How can I, that girl standing there,
> My attention fix
> On Roman or on Russian
> Or on Spanish politics [?] (Yeats *Major Works* 181)

Not only the "lecherous" nature of the poem, but also the bald simplicity of its rhymes ("fix" / "politics"), would have been apparent to Bishop and Moore. It is not difficult to see how the beautifully despairing conclusion to another late poem by Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," concerns the poetic process and the consequences of dedicating oneself to a life of poetry and drama, would have resonated more with Bishop. It is unsurprising that she prefers the conclusion of this poem, which envisages the speaker "[lying] down where all the ladders start / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" (*Major Works* 181). This "Yeats" is far less problematic than the lecherous old man of "Politics."

In general, however, Bishop's discussions of Yeats in "Efforts of Affection" reveal more about Moore and her expectations of Bishop as a reader of Yeats, than of Bishop's own views. Using quotation marks to emphasise the archness of her comment, Moore expresses potential "disappointment" in Bishop had she been an "acolyte" of Yeats, particularly regarding "feeling" (Bishop, "Efforts of Affection" np). But almost in the same breath, Moore appears to concede that although she might not be moved by Yeats, his poetry displays an "enviable apparatus," which reflects his "genius for word-sounds and sentences." So, although Moore does not "feel" about Yeats how his admirers feel—and though she hopes that Bishop does not "feel" these things either—she does acknowledge how Yeats, by aiming to "change our mortal psycho-structure," can alter the way in which humans react psychologically to the world.

Though Ellis and others have mentioned some possible uses of Yeats' poetic ideas in Bishop's poetry, the general consensus appears to be that while Bishop reads Yeats' work, she doesn't borrow from it extensively.[12] Nevertheless, scholars have drawn more oblique connections between the two poets. For example, a lecture on "Modern Poetry," given by Langdon Hammer at Yale, compares Bishop and Yeats in terms of their use of questions, rhetorical or otherwise, which are linked to a "romance quest." Because this is a transcript of a lecture, the style is quite circuitous, but still the links Hammer is making are clear:

> You could contrast Bishop's questions with Yeats' great rhetorical questions, a form that we stressed in reading "Leda and the Swan" and other late Yeats poems. In general, thinking about Bishop's relationship to Yeats, you could say that romance quest, which

> is this essential structure that's behind all of Yeats's poetry, […] has come down in Bishop to the act of asking questions, raising questions […] specifically about boundaries, about the way in which we categorize and frame the world, how we draw lines and separate and connect things at the same time. (Hammer np)

For Hammer, Bishop and Yeats are united as "figures who seem to show the limits of poetry precisely in their efforts to expand them;" and one way that they do this is through their use of questions. Though Bishop's poetry is less obvious in its "romance quest," its constant travelling and seeking new horizons, the peripatetic nature of these travels, and the questions that it asks of these journeys, might be seen as a modern configuration of a Holy Grail or an *Odyssey*. The quest is different, but its aims are similar: "Thus should have been our travels: / serious, engravable," Bishop's speaker opens in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" (*Complete Poems* 57). Such travels should have been "serious," or remarkable in some way, with the implication of "engraving" being important here: what makes something significant enough to be engraved? Instead, they were closer to the opposite: unserious, unremarkable.

Though Hammer's choice of "Leda and the Swan" is challenging in this context—its subject far from the stuff of romance—we are reminded of the final couplet of the poem, a rhetorical question, which continues to fox and confound scholars and readers. I have discussed elsewhere how the "confusing and sometimes stumbling syntax" of Yeats' sonnet extends to the final couplet, with its jumbled subject: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" (Guissin-Stubbs 51; Yeats *Major Works* 112). Although the subject of this closing couplet is disturbing, raising the hypothesis that a woman could acquire or try out ("put on") "power" through a violent act of rape, for Hammer both Yeats and Bishop are asking questions about the stability of the present in relation to a world that is constantly changing. Yeats' question is not just about the scene itself—the mythological rape of Leda by Zeus, and its consequences—but about the wider consequences of power relationships, and about what happens when power is passed violently from one world order to another. This is why it is essential that Leda is human, and that the god Zeus appears in the form of a swan. The "swan" this time is far from the "companionable" swans on the lake at Coole, almost taunting humans with their faithfulness. Here, instead, the "swan" symbolises a world before Christianity, when rules were different: a godless world not unlike our own.

For Hammer, both Yeats and Bishop pose different versions of the question, "How do people, how does culture find bearing in a world without divine sanction?" (Hammer np). In so doing, Hammer refers us to the only, but nevertheless significant, question in "Over 2,000

Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," "Why couldn't we have seen / this old Nativity while we were at it?" (*Complete Poems* 58). This is a rhetorical question in the sense that Bishop doesn't give us a direct answer, concluding instead that, "we looked and looked our infant sight away" (59), and overlapping with Yeats' unnerving vision of "twenty centuries of stony sleep," "vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle" in "The Second Coming" (*Major Works* 91–92). Bishop's scene is a disturbing "nativity" from which they shirk, recalling Yeats' nightmarish "cradle" that may have birthed the Anti-Christ. Bishop's group of travellers looks away in preference for retaining some sort of innocence, however illusory. Hammer argues that for Bishop, the question of seeing "this old Nativity" is "played out as an ethical question, a question about how to live and act rightly." Should we face the truth, or look the other way?

Though it might be difficult to argue for Yeats' poetry always having a strict ethical sense, a concern Bishop discussed with Moore about Yeats, nevertheless a kind of spiritual homelessness unites Bishop and Yeats. According to Hammer, therefore:

> "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold," Yeats says in "The Second Coming." Bishop is fundamentally at home in this condition, which is a condition of centrelessness or homelessness. Travel is her metaphor for the mobility of consciousness in a world without a stable centre. Her poetry is written from [a] disturbingly and disorientingly decentred point of view. (Hammer np)

Though Yeats' claim appears at first to be entirely dystopian, the fact that the centre is still holding graphologically – albeit with a semi-colon – suggests that Yeats is to some extent "in control" of the "centre," despite enshrining a "condition of centrelessness or homelessness" in the poem. The centre is still holding, for now. Bishop's poems often evoke a similar mood, with their evocations of place, travel and movement. For instance, "The Monument" tracks a discussion of an unknown monument in an unknown place—"Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor / or in Mongolia?"—to a meandering narrative which seems at first to echo the accusations of imperialistic hubris that resound throughout Shelley's famous sonnet "Ozymandias," and then continues to decentre us. In beginning again right at the end, it creates a mo(nu)ment of continued observation and pregnant possibility:

> It is the beginning of a painting,
> a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument,
> and all of wood. Watch it closely. (Bishop *Complete Poems* 25)

While this might be "disturbing" for readers, her "decentred point of view" is where Bishop ultimately finds her poetic home. Bishop's "The Monument" contains faint echoes of Yeats' late poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion" in its discussion of the titular monument as a possible "stage-set" (24), or a "painting," recalling Yeats' speaker's complaint in "The Circus Animals" that "Players and painted stage took all my love / And not those things that they were emblems of" (*Major Works* 180). In this context, perhaps it is the peripatetic nature of the closing lines of Yeats' poem, which is often overlooked, that appeals to Bishop. In the poem's conclusion Yeats' speaker does indeed "lie down," but he lies down "where all the ladders start," finding a location to begin again even when he appears to be at his most despairing, and despite the "foulness" of the heart, its sense of self-neglect (181). Bishop, like Yeats, knows that an ending is never an end for very long: there are always new beginnings.

Why, then, do poets persist—despite knowing that there will never be satisfactory endings, and that the most they can hope for is to learn to be content with homelessness? Why do they write poems that will continue to travel, to be tourists themselves, long after the ink has dried? In some ways, negotiating the relationship between our literal ends as mortal beings, and the countless endings of other aspects of our lives, is part of the human condition. Rosamond Lehmann's novel *The Echoing Grove* (1953) was published around the same time as Bishop's major poems of travel. The novel defies a linear relationship between beginning and end through its shifts in narrative time and perspective, and through the back-and-forth nature of its storytelling. Here, one of the characters (Rickie) who we already know has died some time between this moment and the "end" of the novel, recalls how:

> [Y]ou just nodded; and then you said, was the human condition always frustration then? And I said yes, but could be […] the kind that starts echoes afterwards, backwards and forwards forever wherever you strike it – one echo picking up another til the whole thing *sounds out* like a fulfilment … (Lehmann 267)

The phrase "*sounds out*" is particularly pertinent to a discussion of the ways in which the poets Flynn, Bishop and Yeats sound out each other in their works. While Flynn's "Elizabeth Bishop" makes both blatant and more oblique references to Bishop through the sounds and patterns of

her poem, and while Bishop "sounds out" Yeats through the language and implications of his poetry, Yeats' poetry and ideas anticipate being sounded out through later poets and later poems. Whether through generous or un-generous tributes, these later women poets negotiate questions of gender and sexuality through their written relationships with an earlier, male poet—while Flynn enacts a similar, though no less fraught, conversation with Bishop, however one-sided this conversation is in essence. Through these un-ending tributes, generous or otherwise, Flynn, Bishop and Yeats' works "start echoes afterwards, backwards and forwards forever," demonstrating that the "life" of a poem is extended and complicated by its constant dialogue with other poems and other pages.

NOTES

1. See Heaney. The final published version had been re-written to reflect Bishop's death; for more on this, see Laverty 130–1.

2. Neither "Elizabeth Bishop" nor "Sylvia Plath's Sinus Condition" contain formal attributions or citations.

3. See Flynn, *Drives*, 32, 31, 46.

4. See Shelley, "Ozymandias," in Wu 1108.

5. For more on the Petrarchan sonnet, see Guissin-Stubbs ix, xv.

6. See for example the following PhD thesis on Bishop: https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/we-play-here-and-strangely-alive.

7. See Moore 532.

8. See Flynn, "Taking Poetry Seriously."

9. See Bishop, Elizabeth Bishop Archive np. With thanks to Jonathan Ellis for first alerting me to the existence of this piece.

10. See Yeats, *Vision* 259.

11. See <https://www.encore-editions.com/leda-and-the-duck-by-percival-leonard-rosseau-fine-art-print/>. For more on the various depictions of "Leda and the Swan" in visual art, and Yeats' possible sources for his poem, see George Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art*, 137–139.

12. See Ellis, "Bishop in Ireland" 309.

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