

The Study of Mourning in Female Elegy

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ÖZET Ağıt, tarihi boyunca erkek şairler tarafından ortaya konulan kuralların etkisi altında kalmış bir türdür. Bu nedenle, benzersizliklerini açığa vurmak isteyen kadın şairler için çok az bir alan bırakılmıştır. Fakat, kadın ağıt yazarlarının bu türe olan katkıları inkar edilemez; çünkü yerleşmiş kurallara karşı gelme çabaları muazzam farklılıklar sunmuştur. Kadın şairler, erkek şairlerin aksine, bir kişi öldüğünde düşüncelerin değil, beden yok olduğuna inandıklarından ölen kişiden ayrılma düşüncesine karşı çıkarlar. Bu nedenle, matemleri sürekli ve bu gerçek, üzüntüden üzüntüye doğru hareket eden dairesel bir yapıyla gösterilir. Öte yandan kadın ağıt yazarlarının ölünün yerini dolduracak bir şey bulamamaları, Freud'un "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) adlı makalesindeki ifadelerinden esinlenen bazı eleştirmenler tarafından melankolinin belirgin bir göstergesi olarak yorumlanır. Bir diğer ayırım da kadın ağıt yazarlarının ağıtı kendilerini ölünün varisi olarak iddia etmek için kullanabilecekleri bir araç olarak görmemeleridir. Bu çalışma, kadın şairler tarafından yazılan ağıtlarda görülen matem bir incelemesidir. Mevcut çalışma, İngiliz yazar Emily Brontë'nin "Remembrance" başlıklı şiiri ile ve Amerikalı yazar Elizabeth Bishop'un "North Haven" başlıklı şiirini inceleyerek Anglo-Amerikan kadın şairlerin şiirlerindeki matem temsilleri hakkındaki tartışmalara katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER Sözcükler: ağıt, Emily Brontë, *Remembrance*, Elizabeth Bishop, *North Haven*, özgülük, melankoli, matem.

ABSTRACT Elegy is a genre which has been under the influence of the rules imposed by male poets throughout its history. Therefore, only a little space is left for the female poets who desire to express their individuality. However, female elegists' contributions to the development of the genre cannot be denied because their struggles to defy the established rules have offered tremendous varieties. Female poets, contrary to traditional male poets, are against the idea of separation from the dead as they believe it is the corpse, not the thoughts, which disappears when a person dies. Therefore, their mourning is continuous, which is demonstrated by a circular structure moving from sorrow to sorrow. On the other hand, the fact that female elegists cannot find a substitute for the deceased is interpreted as a distinct sign of melancholia by some critics inspired by Freud's statements in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). Another distinction is that female elegists do not regard elegy as a tool to claim themselves as the inheritors of the deceased. This study is an examination of mourning in female elegies. In examining "Remembrance" and "North Haven", the present study aims to contribute to the discussions about the representation of female mourning in Anglo-American women's poetry.

KEYWORDS elegy, Emily Brontë, *Remembrance*, Elizabeth Bishop, *North Haven*, individuality, melancholia, mourning.

Elegy is a genre whose conventions have been largely determined by male writers. Although this fact has restricted the artistic sphere of women writers, female elegists have managed to reveal their individuality through writing elegies which deviate from the traditional patterns of the genre, characterised by lamenting the loss of a loved person and

seeking some comfort in the belief regarding the afterlife.¹ The aim of the present study is to examine Emily Brontë's "Remembrance" and Elizabeth Bishop's "North Haven" in order to show that unlike such traditional elegies as Spencer's *Astrophil* (1586), Milton's *Lycidas* (1637) and Shelley's *Adonais* (1821), which associate mourning with a brief feeling of sorrow and draw consolation from the idea that "death is the beginning of life,"² "Remembrance" and "North Haven" display a modern attitude towards the notion of mourning through prolonging the process of mourning by resigning themselves to revealing the moments spent with the lost one.

The first issue to deal with is that a modern female elegy, which refuses a final reconciliation with the idea of death, has a cyclical structure, that is to say, it starts and ends with sorrow. It is well known that the conventions of a traditional elegy "require it to move from grief into consolation, to come out of the darkness and away from the pain."³ The mechanism moving from sorrow to happiness, on the other hand, cannot be detected in an innovative female elegy,⁴ and Brontë's "Remembrance" seems to be the embodiment of this principle as it starts and ends with mourning. The poem opens with the lament of Rosina,⁵ the speaker, for Julius, her lost love: "Cold in the earth – and the deep snow piled above thee / Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!"⁶ The opening lines clearly portray a lamentation scene described in a conventional funeral elegy in that it is bleak ("cold", "the deep snow"), a setting which dramatizes the sense of loss ("far removed", "the dreary grave"). However, the end of the poem breaks with the conventions: "Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish [of death], / How could I seek the empty world again?"⁷ The tragic question asked in the last line shows that the speaker's mourning has not been completed yet because it leaves no space for hope, joy, or consolation. For the female mourner the earth has been emptied by the death of her beloved. Thus, the poem moves in a circle: from desolation to desolation. This "circular structure,"⁸ in turn,

1. J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.254.

2. J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. p.254.

3. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, retrieved from: <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/naal7/contents/B/authors/bryant.asp>. on 15 March, 2012.

4. Celeste M. Schenck, "Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6 (1986), p.20.

5. It should be noted that "Emily Brontë [...] changed its [the poem's] title from *R. Alcona* to *J. Brenzaida* (the initials evidently standing for Rosina and Julius) to *Remembrance*, no doubt in the belief that this would give the poem a more general meaning" (Peeck-O'Toole 1988: 33). Therefore, from now on the speaker will be referred as Rosina and the dead lover as Julius.

6. Emily Brontë, "Remembrance", in Joseph Black *et al* (eds.), *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Edition, Volume B*, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), II. 1-2.

7. Emily Brontë, "Remembrance," II.31-32.

8. Celeste M. Schenck, "Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy," p.19.

points to the fact that the female elegist is in “a continuous mourning,”⁹ that is, she cannot be consoled in any way, and she will continue to mourn for the lost one till her last day.

Another distinctive quality of a modern female elegy is that it refuses separation. Unlike a conventional elegy which “include[s] the separation of lovers and the disintegration of love,”¹⁰ “the female elegy is a poem of connectedness.”¹¹ Female elegists, who refuse to be separated from the deceased, and to move on to new ventures, struggle to keep the lost individual’s memories on earth through writing an elegy which “re-creates, breathes life back into, the dead loved one.”¹² The speaker in Brontë’s “Remembrance” is also involved in such a struggle to keep her lost lover alive. Although fifteen years has passed since her lover’s death, she still thinks about him, thus giving the dead a chance to live in memories:

Cold in the earth – and fifteen wild Decembers,
From there brown hills, have melted into spring;
Faithful, indeed is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!¹³

Drawing upon the above lines, it can be stated that Rosina has been mourning for Julius’s death for fifteen years, and the image of “the brown hills never changing under the melting snow of successive springs points up the endurance of Rosina’s character.”¹⁴ In that sense, she can be regarded as a martyr who dedicates herself to remembering the lost lover so that his memory can linger in the world. Moreover, the fact that she has a “burning wish to hasten/ [d]own to that tomb already more than [hers]”¹⁵ can be read as a sign of her desire to remember the deceased. Hence, Rosina, an unconventional mourner, regards forgetting as a crime since it means separation, and, she pleads with her lost love to forgive her if she gives up remembering him:

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world’s tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!¹⁶

9. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.20.

10. John B. Vickery, *The Modern Elegiac Temper* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p.155.

11. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.15.

12. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.20.

13. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.9-12.

14. Maureen Peeck-O’Toole, *Aspects of Lyric in the Poetry of Emily Brontë* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p.36.

15. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.27-28.

16. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.13-16.

It is clear that Rosina is afraid of being attracted by earthly pleasures, and thus being detached from her lover. However, the following lines show that she does not actually intend to forget Julius since her feelings for him are intense:

No later light has lightened up my haven,
 No second morn has ever shone for me;
 All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
 All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.¹⁷

The above lines suggest that it is as if Rosina has based her happiness upon Julius's existence, and as he is dead now she is also dead: she has lost her "bliss" of life, and she does not see any reason to be happy any longer.

The unwillingness of female mourners, like Rosina, to leave the lost one behind them is recognized as a clear sign of melancholia, a tendency which is considered a mental illness by Freud. In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud makes a distinction between these two terms, stating that in melancholia, the person refuses to forget the loved one and loses his/her happiness in life.¹⁸ Actually, this unhappiness results from "an inward turn that cuts the subject off from the world around her."¹⁹ In this inward turn, the lost object is withdrawn from consciousness and *absorbed into the ego*.²⁰ This act, on the other hand, leads to "a double identification" in which "[t]he ego takes over the qualities of the 'object of desire,'" and the subject claims, "I have not lost the object because I am it."²¹ Thus, "the subject may know well *whom* he or she has lost, but not *what* is lost," because the lost object whose loss is unrecognised "cannot be mourned as gone."²² A further point is that in melancholia the past is not "declared resolved, finished, and dead," but it "remains steadfastly alive in the present."²³ In other words, the moment of the loss of the object remains fixed, and the passing of time makes no sense for the mourner who does not care about the present or the future. Mourning, on the other hand, "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has

17. Emily Brontë, "Remembrance," II.17-20.

18. Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, [translated by Shaun Whiteside] (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp.201-219.

19. Ann Pellegrini, "Staging Sexual Injury: How I Learned to Drive," in Janelle Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), p.424.

20. Ann Pellegrini, "Staging Sexual Injury: How I Learned to Drive," p.423.

21. Martin S. Bergmann, "Introduction", in Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz (eds.), *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia,"* (London: Karnac Books, 2009), p.7.

22. Ann Pellegrini, "Staging Sexual Injury: How I Learned to Drive," p.423.

23. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, "Introduction: Mourning Remains," in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (eds.), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (California: The University of California Press 2003), p.4.

taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."²⁴ The signs of mourning are the same with those of melancholia with the exception of "a lowering of the self-regarding feelings."²⁵ Mourning has "the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world- in so far as it does not recall him- the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love [...] and the same turning away from any activity that is connected with thoughts of him."²⁶ However, once the mourner realizes that "the loved object no longer exists," he/she feels the necessity "that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object."²⁷ The process of breaking with the lost object, however, is not as easy as it may seem at first sight because it is "carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy."²⁸ While this painful process is taking on, "the existence of the lost object is physically prolonged" through bringing up "each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object."²⁹ As a result, "detachment of the libido is accomplished", and "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again."³⁰ The idea that mourning is overcome over the course of time makes Freud believe that it is not a mental disorder.³¹

Inspired by Freud's statements about mourning and melancholia, female elegists' refusal to diverge themselves from the deceased and to resort to various means of consolation are interpreted as the symptoms of melancholia, a mental illness.³² However, this interpretation ignores the fact that mourning is also a process of attachment only followed by detachment. To claim that every kind of attachment to the deceased can be associated with melancholia would be a misinterpretation of this process since an attachment between the mourner and the dead also exists in the process of mourning, which is described by John Bowlby in terms of four phases: "numbness", "yearning", "disorganisation" and "reorganisation." That the mourner in "Remembrance" does not suffer from melancholia, but she is just in the process of mourning can be proved by referring to these four phases enacting the mechanism moving from attachment to detachment.

24. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski and Sergio Lewkowicz (eds.), *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"* (London: Karnac Books, 2009), p.19.

25. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p.20.

26. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p.20.

27. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p.20.

28. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p.21.

29. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp.19-20.

30. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp.19-21.

31. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," pp.19-20.

32. David Kennedy, *Elegy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p.90.

Numbness is “[a] period of shock” and it “often occurs immediately after a loss.”³³ Bowlby claims that numbness is a means of protecting the mourner from overwhelming grief, thus “allowing the truth to sink in slowly.”³⁴ Rosina also goes through the phase of numbness. Before she protests against the reality of death with tears and laments, she thinks about the loss in silence:

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
Resting their wings where heath and fern leaves cover
Thy noble heart forever, ever more?³⁵

Thinking about “the mountains”, “that northern shore” and “heath and fern leaves” covering the dead body of her lover prevents her from focusing on the concrete form of death, and enables her to make an imaginary visit to the grave of the loved one, which prepares her to pay the deceased an actual visit. Therefore, the state of numbness has a vital importance in protecting the mourner against violent mourning and helping her to face harsh reality slowly but safely.

The second phase is *yearning* and “[i]n this phase the reality of the loss is acknowledged, leading to a desperate longing for the deceased.”³⁶ Although the mourner knows that the loved object is lost, he/she desperately searches for it looking everywhere to find something reminding him/her of the lost one. He/she “may call out, begging [the deceased] not to leave, or pleading with them to return.”³⁷ The mourner also tries to deny that the loss is real, and when he/she confronts anyone confirming the reality of death, he/she gets angry.³⁸ Bowlby thinks the cry of protest is a sign of struggle “to recover what has been lost, to be reunited with the deceased.”³⁹ The act of yearning is closely associated with attachment as the mourner does not want to be detached from the lost one. Brontë’s mourner also protests against the idea of detachment by shedding “tears of useless passion” and “yearning after [the soul of Julias].”⁴⁰ Crying and expressing a desire to be reunited with the soul of the lost one indicate that Rosina wants her lover to turn back, and she does not want to believe he is not alive anymore.

33. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.24.

34. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning* p.24.

35. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.5-8.

36. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.24.

37. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

38. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.25.

39. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

40. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.25-26.

When mourners understand that there is no way to bring the deceased back into life, they enter the phase of *disorganisation*.⁴¹ Feeling “devastated and disorientated”, “deep sadness” and “withdrawal into a state of apathy and helplessness” are among the symptoms of disorganisation.⁴² Mourners may feel so desperate that they may not find a reason to live.⁴³ Moreover, “[t]heir sense of who they are and their place in the world may be completely overturned.”⁴⁴ It is also possible for them to “feel they are ‘falling apart’, and that they will never be able to pick up the pieces.”⁴⁵ As Rosina undergoes this phase, she is so overwhelmed with an acute sorrow that she loses her joy of life, condemning herself to death-in-life. Following this, Rosina accepts that her lover is dead, she feels helpless and desolate: “No later light has lightened up my haven, / No second morn has ever shone for me.”⁴⁶ Her blissful life filled with love becomes wretched with the death of the loved one. The loss is so dreadful that she cannot find a reason to be happy: “All my life’s bliss from thy dear life was given, / All my life’s bliss is in the grave with thee.”⁴⁷ She feels too shattered to lead a blissful life without the aid of love. It is important to note that in this phase the mourner devastated by the loss of the lover is more dead than alive as she lets her life energy lie in the cold grave.

The last phase is *reorganisation*, and in this phase the mourner tries to learn how to continue his/her life without the deceased by “developing new skills and taking on new roles.”⁴⁸ The desirable goal is to rebuild “a new ‘secure base’; a new sense of safety from which the mourner can once again go out into the world and engage with the pressures and demands of everyday life.”⁴⁹ The process of detachment may be hard and long, but it is vital to recover the loss.⁵⁰ Rosina enters the phase of reorganisation when she realizes that she cannot live eternally in a dream world full of lovely memories from the past, but she has to survive despite the deprivation of love:

But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy,
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.⁵¹

41. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.25.

42. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

43. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.25.

44. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

45. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

46. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.17-18.

47. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.19-20.

48. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.25.

49. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

50. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

51. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.21-24.

These lines are far from depicting a patient suffering from melancholia whose symptoms contain “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings.”⁵² The lines above portray a strong and realistic woman who has accepted the reality that although her lover is dead, life still goes on, and who has learnt to live without the joy of love. Rosina becomes aware of the fact that she cannot lull her sorrow by diving deep into nostalgic memories, and that she cannot continue with her death-in-life experience as she still has the breath of life. After fifteen years of mourning, she develops the skill of living without love, and takes the role of a survivor who has decided to “cherish” and “strengthen” her existence.

Her decision to build a new life without the deceased, on the other hand, is the very sign of detachment. Therefore, focusing merely on the long process of mourning would undermine Rosina’s struggles to detach herself from the deceased. The fact that Rosina has been mourning for fifteen years cannot be considered as an indicator of an eternal attachment or melancholia because mourning may also last quite a long time. As “[t]here are very significant individual differences in the time it takes for the process of mourning to be completed,” “[f]or some it may take months, others may require several years,” and variations in the duration of the mourning period are considered “normal” since there is not “a fixed timetable, any deviation from which must mean something is wrong, or the person is in some way abnormal.”⁵³ With respect to the differences in the length of mourning, the long process of detachment experienced by Rosina can be considered “normal”.

The fact that female elegists are put in “the inferior melancholic subject position”⁵⁴ by assuming that mourning should be completed once the mourner finds a new channel to which he/she can transfer his/her love results from the misinterpretation of Freud’s statements about mourning and melancholia, because although Freud “privilege[s] mourning over melancholia,” he nonetheless argues that the loved object cannot be really substituted as it is unique, and “[m]ourning can therefore never be completed: it can only subside.”⁵⁵ No matter how passionately the mourner may claim he/she has forgotten the deceased, he/she cannot “return to a position identical to that experienced before the loss” because “[t]he loss is never recovered.”⁵⁶ Yet, the process of mourning can be considered

52. Sigmund, Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” in Pamela Thurschwell, *Sigmund Freud*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p.88.

53. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.31.

54. David Kennedy, *Elegy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p.102.

55. David Kennedy, *Elegy*, pp.99; 102.

56. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*, p.31.

completed if “the person can talk about their loss without tears and without intense pain and grief, and when they can speak of the good and bad times, and can invest emotionally in others.”⁵⁷ In other words, mourning can never be fully completed, but its intensity can be alleviated. This is what happens when Rosina starts to forget her lover after “fifteen wild Decembers.”⁵⁸ However, her mourning is not over since “[n]o later light has lightened up [her] heaven” and “[her] life’s bliss is in the grave with [Julius].”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is essential to note that although her mourning is continuous, it is subsided. When she faces the reality of death, she learns to “check the tears of useless passion”, and to discourage “[her] young soul from yearning after [Julius’s].”⁶⁰ All the same, the dead lover remains unique for Rosina, who questions herself about the possibility that her emotions may have changed over years: “Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee, / Severed at last by Time’s all severing wave?”⁶¹ As her lover is not alive any more, she cannot feel the same intense feelings, but she does not detach herself from him completely either as she has not forgotten him: he is her “only Love.” Thus, it might be argued that Brontë’s writing functions as a “strategy for prolonging attachment”⁶² rather than depicting a never-changing mourning. Brontë is obviously aware that no mourning can last forever in the same intensity as human beings tend to change and move forward all the time without clinging too much to the past.

Another point about a modern female elegy, which refuses to depict a final reconciliation with the loss of the dead, is that it is not a tool used for claiming inheritance. Since ancient times, several male poets (i.e. Edmund Spenser and W.H. Auden) have written elegies to become an heir of their predecessors.⁶³ In so doing, “the elegist often places himself in a superior relation to his subject.”⁶⁴ For instance, W.H. Auden’s “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” emphasizes Yeats’s weakness for Maud Gonne, an Irish nationalist for whom he felt passionate love. In his poem Auden highlights Yeats’s patriotic poems, and indicates that Yeats’s poems did not make any contribution to the emancipation of Ireland, an idea which showcases Auden’s superiority over the subject, whom he considers melancholic and unrealistic.

56. James Moorey, *Living with Grief and Mourning*.

57. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” I.9.

58. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.17; 20.

59. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.25-26.

60. Emily Brontë, “Remembrance,” II.3-4.

61. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.22.

62. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.13.

63. David Kennedy, *Elegy*, p.30.

Another strategy to claim inheritance is “the deification of the dead one in a process that lifts him out of nature, out of the poem, and out of the successor’s way.”⁶⁵ Spenser’s depiction of Sir Philip Sidney as the son of a nymph in his poem “Astrophel”, and his transforming Sidney into a flower subsequently are examples of this convention. Spenser’s intention to transform Sidney from a successful poet into a supernatural creature can be attributed to his desire to make the dead poet a passive figure, lacking the ability of writing, as well as to his desire to take his place. Therefore, it might be assumed that “[t]he masculine elegiac is [...] a gesture of aspiring careerism.”⁶⁶

Different from the male poets’ attitude towards inheritance, Elizabeth Bishop in her poem “North Haven” deals with the issue of inheritance within an unconventional female elegy. The poem is written in memory of Robert Lowell, and it resembles a pastoral elegy in that it laments the loss of a loved one and it has such images of nature as “buttercups”, “red clover”, “purple vetch”, “daisies” and “the white-throated Sparrow.”⁶⁷ However, it is distinguished from a conventional pastoral elegy whose conventions include transformation of the dead into a shepherd, “an invocation to the Muses and refer[ence] to diverse mythological characters”, nature “involv[ing] in mourning the shepherd’s death,” reproaching “the guardians of the dead shepherd” for not protecting him from death, “a procession of mourners,” “reflect[ion] on divine justice and contemporary evils,” “a ‘flower’ passage, describing the decoration of the bier, etc.” and “a renewal of hope and joy, with the idea expressed that death is the beginning of life.”⁶⁸ Bishop challenges these conventions by not transforming Lowell into a paranormal figure protected by angels, but instead she behaves as if Lowell was still alive and she speaks to him about their days spent on North Haven, an island in America:

Years ago, you told me it was here
 (in 1932?) you first “discovered girls”
 and learned to sail, and learned to kiss.
 You had “such fun,” you said, that classic summer.⁶⁹

In the lines above, by imposing her artistic power on her fellow poet, Bishop puts neither herself in a superior position nor Lowell into an inferior one. On the contrary, she

65. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.15.

66. Celeste M. Schenck, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy,” p.14.

67. Elizabeth Bishop, “North Haven,” in Helen Vendler (ed.), *The Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1978), II.12-13; 17.

68. J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.254.

69. Elizabeth Bishop, “North Haven,” II.21-24.

tries to establish a friendly relationship with Lowell through talking about “that classic summer” and how “[he] first ‘discovered girls’ / and learned to sail, and learned to kiss.”⁷⁰ Moreover, she “[refuses] the conventional consolations of elegy, [namely], the renewal of nature and the permanence of art.”⁷¹ In the poem, nature is unresponsive to the death of the poet, that is, it does not go into deep mourning for him or regenerate itself on finding solace in the idea that “death is the beginning of life.”⁷² Indifferent to the loss, nature is still and peaceful, preoccupied with reproduction:

[...] I can count
 the new cones on the spruce. It is so still
 the pale bay wears a milky skin; the sky
 no clouds except for one long, carded horse’s tail.⁷³

Drawing upon the lines above, it can be stated that “the new cones on the spruce” show that nature is alive and fertile, and thus, images such as “the pale bay wear[ing] a milky skin” and “the sky [having] no clouds except for one long, carded horse’s tail” create a peaceful and serene atmosphere not disturbed by grief, pain or destruction. The flowers which display their beauty in summer also do not give a hint about death and sorrow:

This month, our favorite one is full of flowers:
 Buttercups, Red Clover, Purple Vetch,
 Hawkweed still burning, Daisies pied, Eyebright,
 the Fragrant Bedstraw’s incandescent stars,
 and more, returned, to paint the meadows with delight.⁷⁴

The meadows full of “buttercups,” “red clover”, “purple vetch,” “[h]awkweed still burning” and “the [f]ragrant [b]edstraw” are the heralds of joy and renewal because they indicate that with the arrival of summer nature has restored itself and it has been filled with animation.

Indeed, Bishop does not voice a hope for the eternity of art. On the contrary, she expresses her concern about the fact that once poets are dead they cannot have an opportunity to revise their poems, and therein cannot remain fresh forever or avoid such labels as “archaic”, “old-fashioned” and “conventional.” She points to this reality with drawing

70. Elizabeth Bishop, “North Haven,” II.24; 22-23.

71. Bonnie Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.213

72. J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, p.254.

73. Elizabeth Bishop, “North Haven,” II.2-5.

74. Elizabeth Bishop, “North Haven,” II.11-15.

a dramatic contrast between the sparrows which are able to change their tunes and the dead poet who cannot make any change in his poems:

You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,
afloat in mystic blue ... And now—you've left
for good. You can't derange, or rearrange,
your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.)
The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.⁷⁵

The tragic contrast between the sparrows changing their songs and the poet stuck in North Haven by death, a situation which deprives him of the chance to revise his poems, implies that neither Lowell's works nor his body will achieve immortality in a world of flux. As a consequence, at the end of the poem there is no rebirth or consolation drawn from the fact that the poet may live through his works. Thus, Bishop does not declare herself as the heir of the dead poet because she thinks there is no heritage to claim for: the works of Lowell will die with him as they are mortal like their creator. In so doing, Bishop prepares herself for the fate waiting for her: she knows she will also die one day and be forgotten like her fellow poet. Therefore, it might be argued that unlike a male inheritor whose elegy "rehearses an act of identity that depends upon rupture", the female inheritor "seem[s] to achieve poetic identity [...] in connection to the dead."⁷⁶

To conclude, Brontë and Bishop prove their individuality by breaking the conventions of elegy encouraging detachment through creating a gap between the dead and the alive. Unlike traditional love elegists, Brontë depicts a lover who preserves the integrity of her identity by remembering her dead lover. She is well aware of the fact that the deceased cannot offer her his love anymore. Nonetheless, the precious memories from the past help her to cope with the loss of her identity as a lover. While the act of remembering enables her to keep her past self from being shattered, the act of struggling to survive without love strengthens her present self. Bishop, on the other hand, justifies her attachment to the dead poet by pointing to the same tragic end awaiting all poets. Rather than considering Lowell as a spiritual being having achieved immortality or considering him an obstacle in her way to literary success, she focuses on the fact that as works of art are not immune to the passing of time, the fate of every poet, as in the case of Lowell's and hers, is to be forgotten in a constantly changing world. Therefore, both Brontë and Bishop depict a continuous mourning whose process is imitated through a circular structure moving from sorrow to sorrow. Although their mourning is continuous, its intensity is alleviated not by

75. Elizabeth Bishop, "North Haven," II.27-30.

76. Celeste M. Schenck, "Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy," p.15.

the idea of rebirth but by the belief that the lost one will continue to live in their memories. In this way, “Remembrance” and “North Haven”, two female elegies challenging the traditional structure of elegy moving from sorrow to consolation, offer a new insight into the nature of mourning.

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