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The Work of Elegy: Grief, Landscape, Perspective and Poetic Form

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The Work of Elegy: Grief, Landscape, Perspective and Poetic Form

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Abstract

This study re-examines our understanding of twentieth and twenty-first-century British, Irish, and American elegies within the context of contemporary psychological and clinical perspectives on grief. Whilst the elegy has roots as far back as ancient Greece, contemporary criticism often has recourse to Freudian theories of loss and mourning, but these ideas can be reconsidered in the light of current intellectual perspectives on the experience of grief. A critical reconsideration of the elegy through the philosophical ideas of Thomas Attig helps to align traditional readings of the elegy with current thinking about the experience of grief. This study centres on poetic technique and form to re-evaluate our understanding of elegy as a traditional form and show how elegy persists, albeit in imaginatively revised forms, within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Six poets — Amy Clampitt, Ted Hughes, Robert Lowell, Paul Muldoon, Wallace Stevens, and Anne Stevenson — form the backbone of this study, with selected poems from their oeuvres providing a range of poetic expressions of grief over the last century. Alongside these six poets, elegiac works from the twenty-first century by Anne Carson and Natasha Trethewey are also given due consideration. Their inclusion aims to revise and enrich our critical appreciation of the persistence and reinvention of grief, perspective, and landscape in elegies of the twentieth and twenty-first century. A revitalised critical sense of these elegiac concerns sharpens our sense of imaginative continuities and discontinuities between past elegies and their more recent modes of expression.

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ASP — Anne Stevenson, *Poems 1955-2005*. Hexham, Bloodaxe, 2005.

CPAC — Amy Clampitt, *The Collected Poems of Amy Clampitt*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

CPWS — Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens: Corrected Edition*. Eds. John N. Serio and Chris Beyers. New York: Vintage, 2015.

HL — Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes.* London: Faber & Faber, 2007.

Nox — Anne Carson, *Nox.* New York: New Directions, 2010.

NG — Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard.* New York: Mariner Books, 2007.

PMP — Paul Muldoon, *Poems 1968-1998.* London: Faber & Faber, 2001.

RLCP — Robert Lowell, *Robert Lowell Collected Poems*. Eds. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007.

SM — Anne Stevenson, *Stone Milk*. Hexham: Bloodaxe, 2014.

THCP — Ted Hughes, *Ted Hughes Collected Poems*. Ed. Paul Keegan. London: Faber & Faber, 2005.

Introduction

Revisiting elegy and relearning the world

1. Relearning Elegy

Zaffar Kunial's 'Scarborough', published in *England's Green* (2022), mourns his mother through an invocation of travel, place, and landscape, bearing witness to her memory as her story is both retold and relearnt:

> the sea's drum, its unloosable knot, like the mum
>
> cancer took early. The rhythm of memory
>
> puts time ahead of itself and we're pulled to miss
>
> a coast that is not yet home. The tide. It's an
>
> oxygen machine, still going. Its constant hum.[1]

Concerned with the 'rhythm of memory' that moves forward into the unknown space of 'a coast that is not yet home', Kunial's poem exemplifies Thomas Attig's defining sense of his philosophy of grief which necessitates a 'relearning [of] the world'. Attig's philosophy suggests that we relearn the world through grief response and grief reaction as a process which 'provides general understanding of loss and grief experiences that opens the way to dialogue with grieving persons.'[2] For Attig, grief is a transformative process that affects nearly every aspect of life, requiring the bereaved to come to terms with the reality of loss and accept a world changed by loss. Within the relearning of the

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[1] Zaffar Kunial, 'Scarborough', *England's Green*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2022) p. 43.
[2] Thomas Attig, *How We Grieve: Relearning the World*, 2nd ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. xxvi.

world, Attig acknowledges the continual, non-linear, and complex experiences of grief which result in a personal realisation of universal emotions within the mourner. Kunial's poem is hopeful that the shoreline, and its associated grief, will in time become familiar, demonstrating part of the experience of grief without evoking its strong emotions as the poem searches to relearn and accept the world changed after death. Related to Kunial's poetic searching is the presence of time, a complex central aspect of the poem which is put 'ahead of itself' whilst also constantly moving, as shown in the tide and the oxygen machine, and yet also shown to be cumulative in some way through the consecutive repetitions of a single word sentence 'And. And.'[3] Time appears to have been transformed within the poem as a response to loss, with its various temporal instances reconfigured as a means to relearn the world. Dealing with time and grief as multi-dimensional, Kunial's contemporary poem captures a landscape of grief which spans a range of temporal and spatial distances and in a manner seemingly detached from defined formal expectations. It is an elegy which foregrounds personal attachments over idealised traditional elements.

Throughout global history, death has been approached and understood differently, reflected in the mourning rites, funerary traditions and practices, and social expectations of a variety of cultures. Cultures have used art, literature, and specifically elegiac poetry, to help in approaching and understanding the grief experienced after bereavement, as well as comprehending loss and absence through these means of representation, memorialisation and ritual. Whilst coming from across four different countries, all of the poets which will be discussed originate from the Anglosphere and as such are influenced by Western culture and its dominant cultural norms. Whilst there is

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[3] Zaffar Kunial, 'Scarborough', p. 44.

no dogmatic approach to grief in these countries, Christian funerary traditions and beliefs around grief are still dominant, influencing the expectation of mourners and individual reaction and response to grief experience. This also influences the poetic representation of grief.

As noted by Karen Weisman 'there is little scholarly consensus about what constitutes an elegy, or how to distinguish between elegy and the broader category of elegiac literature.'[4] In this respect, elegy has been less a static poetic form and more a taxonomy for the mode of mourning in poetry. The continued creation of elegies and their presence in the cultural consciousness demonstrates both the enduring experience of loss and the need for expression which can be found in and through poetry. Through this thesis we will see a way to align our understanding of the poetic expression of grief with a contemporary psychological conception of grief experience.

As noted earlier, the connection between elegy and contemporary conceptions of grief experience will be made by utilising Attig's broader philosophical approach, introduced in his book *How We Grieve.* Work by Robert Neimeyer, Charles Corr, Mary-Frances O'Connor and Saren H. Seeley, and others support Attig's conception of how we grieve. They all highlight 'meaning reconstruction, adaptive grieving styles, continuing bonds and resilience' through varying scientific approaches, which generally hold with the view of grieving as a form of learning, or in Attig's words, relearning.[5] Attig's interpretation will enable an understanding of bereavement and loss which is aligned and connected to the current psychological and neuroscientific position, but without

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[4] Karen Weisman, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy,* ed. Karen Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 2.
[5] Charles A. Corr, 'The 'Five Stages' in Coping with Dying and Bereavement: Strengths, Weaknesses and Some Alternatives', *Mortality*, 24:4 (2019) p. 413;
Robert A. Neimeyer, Darcy L. Harris, Howard R. Winokuer, and Gordon F. Thornton (eds.) *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society: Bridging Research and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2011);
Mary-Frances O'Connor and Saren H. Seeley, 'Grieving as a Form of Learning: Insights from Neuroscience Applied to Grief and Loss', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43 (2022) pp. 317-22.

overburdening the interpretative process to pathologise the poets through the identification and labelling of specific behaviours. This hermeneutic position not only echoes current scientific discourse on grief, but also provides an opportunity for elegiac criticism to work alongside it and potentially inform further understanding, facilitating us to consider how individual poems and elegy as a mode propagate or challenge these ideas through their poetic particularities. Therefore, by focussing on how the individual grief experience is communicated through the extensive range of expression which can be found within poetry we will productively engage elegy with contemporary psychological and philosophical readings of grief.

Furthermore, as noted by Colin Murray Parkes 'important new understanding has come out of studies of the gradual process by which we rebuild our internal model of the world after bereavement and discover new meanings, a new narrative, and a new assumptive world.'[6] As a creative and expressive reflection of the process mentioned by Parkes, by adopting an aligned approach elegy can aid in developing this understanding, emblematic of the attributes of grief through its structure, formation and expressive capabilities which relearn the world through artistic creation. In relearning our approach to the elegy, we are also repositioning it within wider critical discussions.

2. Current critical approaches to the elegy

The notions of elegy and poetic form already have a well-established, if somewhat nebulous connection, that influences some critical expectations of the mode. Critical work around elegy discusses it as a form due to its origins, with Peter Sacks

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[6] Colin Murray Parkes, 'Introduction', *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society: Bridging Research and Practice*, eds. Robert A. Neimeyer, Darcy L. Harris, Howard R. Winokuer, Gordon F. Thornton, (London: Routledge, 2011) p. 4.

noting that 'the term *elegy* itself derives from the Greek elegiac couplets.'[7] Gregory Nagy identifies the metrical basis of the elegy as fundamental to it as a form, with alternating lines of hexameter and pentameter.[8] Through metrical analysis of the elegiac couplet, he reveals that the hexameter of the elegiac couplet is asymmetrical while the pentameter is symmetrical.[9] Whilst the form was strict, the content of a Greek elegy was not, covering a range of topics, 'including exhortatory martial epigrams, political philosophy, commemorative lines, or amatory complaints.'[10] The use of elegiac couplets was sustained over time as 'Latin adaptations of the elegiac form continued the fairly miscellaneous approach to content.'[11] Whilst the formal structure remained the same, the variation in content was broader than that associated with contemporary elegy.

Dominant critical definitions of an elegy as a poem of 'mortal loss and consolation' is one that 'gradually gathered currency, particularly after the sixteenth century', fixating the mode on death.[12] Mark Sandy identifies specifically that 'Romantic poetry about grief acts as a defence against, and encounter with, the final silence of death that challenges poetry's eloquent capacity for meaning and signifies the end of its own linguistic experience.'[13] As the definition of elegiac content has narrowed over time, its formal constraints have loosened, with elegiac couplets of hexameter and pentameter no longer the norm.

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[7] Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) p. 2.
[8] Gregory Nagy, 'Ancient Greek Elegy', *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy,* ed. Karen Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 15.
[9] Nagy, 'Ancient Greek Elegy', p. 16.
[10] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 2.
[11] Paul Allen Miller, ''What's Love Got to Do with It?': The Peculiar Story of Elegy in Rome', *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 46;
Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 3.
[12] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 3.
[13] Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning,* The Nineteenth Century Studies Series, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013) p. 1.

Evolving over time, elegy is a malleable mode of poetry. Indeed, as Weisman has observed, when 'taken in the more contemporary sense as the framing of loss, elegy can be pulled between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the present life of sorrow and the vanishing past of putative greater joy.'[14] Stemming from these inherent tensions has been a scholarly urge towards a kind of stratification of elegy, aiming to identify and isolate specific grief experiences to explicate experiences which do not align with the norm. These critical taxonomies have atomised as much as they have illuminated, drifting away from some of the emotional origins of elegy: bereavement, loss, and absence. The narrowing of expected content has minimised potential considerations of loss, altering the scope of grief in poetry to fit certain belief systems and value structures rather than reflecting human experience.

For the philosopher Roger Scruton, when it comes to the comprehension of death:

> ritual is not enough. We also need to mourn, and this is the difficult part, for it obliges us to tend the grave within, to revisit what we have lost and to rehearse an attachment rooted in things that cannot be changed.[15]

Whilst there is no formal expectation for the contemporary elegy, there is an expectation of the poetry to in some way encounter loss and mourning, an aspect which supersedes the ritualistic elements as we must perform obligations of mourning such as those presented by Scruton. As such, the rest of this section shall be spent considering directly the current critical responses. Afterwards, the next section will return to

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[14] Weisman, 'Introduction', p. 1.
[15] Roger Scruton, 'The Work of Mourning', *First Things,* (2022) <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2022/10/the-work-of-mourning> [accessed 1 November 2022].

philosophy on death to seek an understanding of grief experience — that of relearning the world in an active response to bereavement — which encompasses the range of elegy.[16]

The continuities discussed by Scruton are timeless, bridging a temporal divide to consider human experiences alongside the social constructs which have directed and altered mourning practices; John Milton's emotional experiences of grief are similar enough to those of Natasha Trethewey, even if framed differently. This is supported by critic Priscilla Uppal, who states that 'while the experience of death is undeniably universal, ways of responding to death are both period and culture-specific.'[17] Uppal goes on to argue that 'the elegy responds to traditional expectation and the needs of the mourning poet and the poet's audience', before asserting that 'in honouring the dead through verse, the poet not only performs a ritualistic act of mourning and memorializing the loved one but also emerges as the rightful heir of poetic tradition.'[18] Here, we see an understanding of elegy which is constructive, linking the formal traditions and social expectations with the innovative expression found in contemporary poetry. In doing so, new rituals and memorials are created as 'the contemporary elegy has changed to represent the concerns and ideologies of its own time and place.'[19] Rather than viewing contemporary shifts as a rejection of elegy, or a destruction of mourning, Uppal urges us to reconsider our understanding of elegy, stating that 'the work of mourning is, instead, performed with the goal of recovering the dead, a ritual enacted to continue dialogue and engagement with the dead loved one.'[20]

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[16] For this discussion of Thomas Attig's philosophy, see pp. 17-21.
[17] Priscilla Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English-Canadian Elegy*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008) p. 3.
[18] Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn*, p. 7.
[19] Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn,* p. 12.
[20] Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn,* p. 13.

The universality of death and the idea of response found in Uppal's understanding of elegy represent a starting point for this thesis; augmenting it through a discussion of grief experience and a rejection of linearity or expected actions will help to foreground this newer reading of elegy, focussing on the individual reaction and response to grief experience and how it aids the poet and/or mourner in relearning the world. This is an alternative to her view of the work of mourning, one which is based in a philosophical approach which aligns with contemporary psychological and physiological work on grief. Whilst primarily focussing on elegies written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the approach taken is thus potentially and specifically 'timeless', building upon a perception of grief experiences which will help us not only to understand the poems themselves, but also help us to include elegies in the wider thanatological discussion on understanding individual grief and mourning by viewing them as expressive and diverse manifestations of a universal experience.

Current literary critical discussion on grief — including that by Uppal mentioned above — is greatly influenced by the work of Jahan Ramazani, Peter Sacks, and Celeste Schenk who all drew upon parts of Freudian psychology and related philosophical texts to build a critical framework through which not only to understand elegy, but also the manner in which it altered after the World Wars and amidst the societal changes of the twentieth century.[21] As a result of their work, the critical-formal classification of elegy has stratified the mode into strands such as the funeral elegy, anti-elegy and pastoral elegy

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[21] See Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994);
Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy;*
Celeste M. Schenck, 'Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5.1 (1986) pp. 13-27.
For the source of these discussions in Freud, see Sigmund Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Michael Hulse, (London: Penguin Classics, 2004).

each of which have their own specific conventions. Demonstrably, criticism of elegy has

changed over time, with increasing attention paid to specifics of grief within certain

group identities and focusing on a theoretical framework which combines popular (and

usually non-scientific) psychological approaches and poetic norms. However, as Scruton

noted, whilst cultural and critical frameworks may alter, grief and bereavement are still

the same for 'loss is fundamental to the human condition', and thus the source of what

might appear as cultural idiosyncrasies holds some consistency over time even if the

affective images change, with civilizations differing in their 'way of accommodating it.'[22]

In this respect, dispersal of critical attention has encouraged consideration of a broad

range of elegies, including those of hitherto overlooked individuals and marginalised

groups; however, it has usually considered these elegiac expressions in relation to a

perceived artistic norm or tradition rather than the root of grief and loss. In turn, this

emphasised the culturally specific aspects of mourning whilst overlooking the

individual expressions of a universal experience.

Sacks' seminal work, *The English Elegy,* builds upon the traditional formal

elements and images of elegy to consider how they 'relate to the experience of loss and

the search for consolation.' In doing so, it explores 'how an elegist's language emerges

from, and reacts upon, an originating sense of loss' from which we can regard each elegy

as a '*work*, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product and in the more

dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience.'[23] Whilst the idea of

consolation is something to which we will return in this introduction, viewing elegy —

and more broadly mourning itself — as part of a 'working through' of grief is a

productively Freudian idea which aids an understanding of the experience. Working

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[22] Scruton, 'The Work of Mourning'. Colin Murray Parkes take a similar line, see his
'Introduction' in *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society*, pp. 1-5.
[23] Sacks, *The English Elegy,* p. 1.

through implies an active process, with both aspects of the idea central to the relearning of the world through response and reaction to grief which will be explored later.

However, Sacks does not focus further on the relationship between work and grief, instead detailing the 'mythopoetic accounts of the origin of certain features of poetry' to uncover conventions which are rooted in 'a dense matrix of rites and ceremonies, in the light of which many elegiac conventions should be recognised.' Through this he details a catalogue of elegiac conventions which are 'not only aesthetically interesting forms but also the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices.'[24] They are as follows:

> a pastoral context, the myth of the vegetation deity (particularly the sexual elements of such myths, and their relation to the sexuality of the mourner), the use of repetition and refrains, the reiterated questions, the outbreak of vengeful anger or cursing, the procession of mourners, the movement from grief to consolation, and the traditional images of resurrection. We also need to interpret the eclogic division within or between mourning voices, the question of contests, rewards, and inheritance, and the unusual degree of self-consciousness regarding the actual performance of the work at hand. One aspect of this last feature is the elegist's need to draw attention, consolingly, to his own surviving powers. More painful and more crucial, however, is the elegist's reluctant submission to language itself. One of the least well observed elements of the genre is this enforced accommodation between the mourning self on the one hand and the very words of grief and fictions of consolation on the other.[25]

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[24] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, pp. 1-2.
[25] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 2.

Sacks' list of conventions has been influential in the critical approach to the elegy, detailing supposed features of elegiac poetry as well as drawing attention to these elements. However, whilst common features of some of the poetry of mourning they are not crucial to the depiction of grief nor — as we will see — are they central to the grief experience. That is not to say that invocation of these traditional aspects is not uncommon as they do provide a connection for both the individual elegies and their poet to the major elegiac canon. The connection is one which can evoke past grief expression, as well as creating an appropriative link between the current poet and those earlier poets already associated with elegy. Whilst this thesis will not ignore these conventions within elegy (particularly with those that support a focus on grief experience over a linear prescriptivist journey), it will also not treat them as necessarily containing affective or emotional significance beyond their role in each individual poem. Instead, instances of these conventions, as with all elements of elegy, are part of the communication of a personal realisation of a universal experience which exist in either an individual poem or span across a range of poems.

Sacks recognises in his epilogue that there has been a shift away from the conventions he identifies in both the British and American elegy. He asserts this is due to a broader and historical change in the attitudes towards death, in which it has 'tended to become obscene, meaningless, impersonal—an event either stupefyingly colossal in cases of large-scale war or genocide, or clinically concealed somewhere behind the technology of the hospital and the techniques of the funeral home.'[26] Ramazani agrees in *Poetry of Mourning*, stating that:

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[26] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 299.

as warfare was industrialized and mass death augmented, as mourning rites were weakened and the "funeral director" professionalized, as the dying were shut away in hospitals and death itself made a taboo subject, poetry increasingly became an important space for mourning the dead.[27]

These new experiences of death on an unprecedented scale produce a social and technological shift in the sites and conditions of bereavement which undermined traditional modes of mourning and ritual. It is the social change which is highlighted within the rejection of elegiac tradition, with modern poets 'violat[ing] its norms and transgress[ing] its limits.'[28] However, through this shift, we cannot say that grief has changed, merely that we are reassessing our approach to it in the light of new experiences of death, new experiences of the eliciting of grief. Viewing elegy only in relation to traditional modes of mourning and ritual rather than as an expression of experience thus creates a warped perspective on grief itself which promotes a self-referential cycle of signalling grief rather than individually communicating experience of it.

For Ramazani, 'the modern elegy at its best is not a timeless sanctuary, immune to historical change; rather its rough and ravaged contours indicate the social realities it must withstand.'[29] However, even though modern poets distance themselves from tradition and ritual, we will see that they do not reject the role of poetry in comprehending and addressing grief experience, but instead reject the formal limitations and expectations which both define and constrict the mode, embracing the expressive qualities of verse and language as they reconfigure a changed world in the

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[27] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 1.
[28] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 1.
[29] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 14.

face of loss and death. Whilst Ramazani sees the modern elegy as 'a compromise-formation in its response to the privatization of grief', we will come to see how it is instead an utterance of individual grief experience which has previously been regimented and controlled by and through traditional mourning practices. This embodies the abundance of individual perspectives on a universal experience, respecting personal differences as each journey through their grief experience. Personalised approaches to mourning presented in modern elegy are inherently diverse, focussing on the grief and loss of the speaker and the particular poetic, emotional and representative ways in which they react and respond to it.

To find a way to approach and read elegy with a less restrictive critical emphasis also benefits our understanding of the categories of elegy which have been critically segregated, including but not limited to the self elegy, funeral elegy, anti-elegy and transgressive family elegy.[30] Critical segregation separates out the experience of grief, reinforcing the idea of a norm by creating a standard which one can follow or from which one can depart. Additionally, separation of grief experience into different categories runs the risk of ignoring the simultaneous individuality and universality of grief, instead viewing grief as a compartmentalised experience which is somehow distinct in each category. This creates a critical disconnection between the grief experiences of mourners, rather than viewing each elegy as an individual utterance of the universal experience. Whilst there are similarities within topics covered in elegy, their emotions are not separate.

The problem with such an atomising approach can be seen by considering the idea of consolation, or lack of it, which underpins the idea of anti-elegy. Anti-elegy is

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[30] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, pp. 119-134; 204-215.
R. Clifton Spargo, 'The Contemporary Anti-Elegy', *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 413-30.

rooted in a poetic devaluing of the original cultural interpretation previously positioned as normative, with anti-elegy's resistance to 'cultural and psychological narratives of resolution' refusing 'the substitutive nexus between grief and representation' and insisting upon the deceased's 'uncancellable and unassimilable value.'[31] This ignores non-traditional perspectives on death and diminishes individual grief expression, assuming without evidence that consolation has a central role in grief and thus must in elegy. Some of the tension between tradition and personal expression is noted by R. Clifton Spargo, who states that though 'anti-elegiac sentiment [...] resists literary and social conventions, it traces implicitly the survival of grief against a social totality that denies the dead.'[32] Spargo even goes on to temper characterisations of anti-elegy as peculiar to modern elegy, as 'we might underestimate the degree to which anti-elegiac protest is inherent in the tradition of elegy' and that its 'interrogation of grief is at least in part continuous with the traditional elegiac task of renewing grief.'[33] Anti-elegy, and its anti-consolatory approach to grief, appears to be an integral part of the elegiac mode, breaking with the poetic tradition whilst conforming to parts of the emotional journey within the poetry. Critical segregation of anti-elegy ignores its continued presence within the tradition of elegy.

Whilst these categories of elegy claim to be poetically different, innovating formally, linguistically, rhythmically, metrically and symbolically, the variations are part of an individual depiction of the universal experience of grief. As they all broadly represent the same experience, they are continually associated even when there appears to be a poetic separation. An appreciation of the connected range of poetic

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[31] R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) p. 13.
[32] Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning*, p. 131.
[33] Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning*, p. 131; 133.

expression in elegy is vital in helping us to understand grief and mourning on both a personal and societal level through its expression of experience. We should map these variations on to an understanding of grief, rather than trying to work out what each depiction means. This is not to say that certain images do not carry specific cultural significance, nor that there are no norms within mourning that can help to provide moments of relief but is instead to emphasise the breadth of grief experience which must be respected and accepted. In doing so, the continuities found in the supposed 'anti-elegy' can, for example, be recognised as part of grief and mourning rather than separate to it.

In this respect there is ground for us to view elegy as a complete mode, one which acknowledges aesthetic individuality, brought out by personal and social conditions, by paradoxically respecting grief as a common experience. Furthermore, as our understanding of what constitutes grief develops, so should our classification of elegy. Already developed throughout history, changing in content, form and significance, we should accept that elegy, as poetry of grief and mourning, is the representation of loss rather than only death: 'we sometimes overlook that it is loss - not death - that arouses grief. We grieve the deaths of people we loved, but we also grieve other losses as well.'[34] Our understanding of elegy should thus not only be striving towards being all-encompassing of the individual experiences of death, but it should also represent the experiences of loss. Doing so will help us to further understand the interconnections between individual expressions of the broader universal experience of loss, without restricting emotional expression within arbitrary criteria of what constitutes grief and elegy.

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[34] Kenneth J. Doka, *Grief is a Journey: Finding your path through loss*, (New York: Atria Books, 2017) p. 24.

3. Loss, relearning, and narrative: approaches to grief and mourning

As well as suffering from taxonomic overdetermination and atomisation discussed above, discussion of elegy is predicated on a limited conceptualisation of grief. Providing a more rigorous and nuanced thanatological understanding of the nature of grief will provide us with a stronger connection between the poetry of grief and the experiences which create it, offering the mode as a grief narrative which is not only a detailing of the events but also an interpretation of the experiences; expanding the voice of bereaved individuals beyond what just happened, detailing the underlying process in their own ideas, words and means of expression.

As we have already noted, Freudian assumptions have long influenced criticism of elegy. Drawn from Freud's essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (and sustained by the presence of psychoanalysis in critical thought), readings of elegy have contended with melancholia and the necessity to avoid this state through a 'detachment of libido from the lost object and its transfer to a new one', as well as the idea of oedipal resolution to placate the family structure, whilst also sustaining beliefs such as consolation.[35] Such critical Freudianism has reinforced the idea of 'correct' mourning, through which an improper process of mourning would lead to incomplete grief, suspending the bereaved in a melancholic state from which they are unable to continue. It also privileged a psychoanalytical explanation, one which is now largely disconnected from current psychological discourse, as 'psychoanalytic ideas are dispersed today across a host of disciplines', mainly in the humanities, and have so 'evolved in these disciplines that clinically oriented analysts may not readily recognize them.'[36] Focus on psychoanalysis

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[35] Melissa F. Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018) p. 4.
Zeiger provides us with a summary of the ideas introduced by Sacks.
[36] Jonathan Redmond and Michael Shulman, 'Access to Psychoanalytic Ideas in American Undergraduate Institutions', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 56.2 (2008) p. 407.

has created additional discussion around its limitations, including how it centres the masculine experience, reinforcing social conditions through the very lens of criticism.[37] However, by drawing on the philosophy of Attig, this thesis respects an underlying Freudian idea, as summarised here by Scruton, a philosopher who was himself cogently critical of Freud's pseudoscientific claims:

> We lose many things in our lives. But some losses are existential losses. They take away some part of what we are. After such a loss we are in a new and unfamiliar world, wherein the support on which we had—perhaps unknowingly—depended is no longer available.[38]

Attig's idea of relearning the world through grief response and reaction enlightens this statement by further considering how grieving individuals approach the new and unfamiliar world they are in after loss. The specifics of the means of understanding presented by Attig is something which we will now further develop and explain.

As considered earlier, applying a strict psychologically derived schema to the reading of poetry would be limiting and require assumptions to be made which detract from the content of the poems. However, it is nevertheless important that we at least broadly understand Attig's arguments about how grief is experienced. Developing on the initial mention of grief reaction and grief response and their relation to a relearning of the world, in Attig's view:

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[37] Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation*, p. 5-6.
The work of Celeste Schenck, 'Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy' (1986) and other feminist critics is centred around dismantling the allegedly misogynistic assumptions brought by a psychoanalytical approach to grief.
[38] Scruton, *The Work of Mourning*.

we relearn the world in grief reactions as we passively take in the realities

of change in our world the bereavement entails, including the loss of

wholeness and sorrow that come over us. And we relearn the world in

grieving response as we actively come to terms with these changes in our

world and re-engage in the fullness of life.[39]

Reaction and response are crucial to Attig's conception of loss and bereavement, and so

they will be considered at times individually as well as together as part of a general

view of relearning the world. However, in doing so we will not go as far as to

pathologise the poets through their work, instead interpreting if a poet appears to be

displaying grief reaction or response. When saying that we relearn the world in grief, it

is important to acknowledge that:

rather than being a matter of *learning that* the world is different in the aftermath

of loss, it is one of *learning how to be and act* in a world transformed by loss.

Relearning the world requires changes in the patterns of needs, wants, emotions,

motivations, interests, behaviours, habits, dispositions, interactions,

expectations, and hopes that shape our caring engagement with the world, not

just our ways of thinking about or narrating it.[40]

Attig's distinction demonstrates that there is a place for both elegy as a mode and

individual elegies to help those grieving process how to be and act in a world

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[39] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. viii.
[40] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. viii.

transformed by loss. Additionally, the idea of grieving as a process of relearning the world is not only focussed around the 'basic aspects of experiences, but also their scope, complexity, multi-dimensionality, richness, and variety.'[41] Not only descriptive, the range of articulation possible within poetry is beneficial in communicating the grief experience and the process of relearning the world, ensuring that the complexity and richness which is noted by Attig is recorded through the multifarious elements which constitute a poem. Through its specific language and formal qualities which interact with not only the concrete, but also the abstract, aiding expression of the nearly incomprehensible, specific instances of elegy (as well as the mode generally) provide an expansive means of learning 'how to be and act' in a world transformed by loss, whilst also creating examples of how others approached the experience.

In utilising Attig's ideas, it is vital to have clarity on the specifics, especially those of grieving reaction and response which both constitute the process of relearning the world. The term grief reaction is used to 'refer to the full range of our experiences of emotional, psychological, physical, behavioral, social, cognitive, and spiritual impacts of bereavement.'[42] Through this, we relearn the world because in the reaction 'we absorb, or take in, the realities of loss for our experience of the world.'[43] The passivity of grief reaction is at odds with the expectation for any progress or change in elegy and poems which appear to centre this experience can seem to be outside the current elegiac canon, disregarding the tropes of mourning which have dominated criticism, refusing to proceed through grief as it internalises the impacts of loss. Whilst it is hard to delineate exactly which poems might fall into only this category, grief reaction is the reason why some poems may seem insincere or detached from grieving expectations because they

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[41] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xxvi.
[42] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xxvii.
[43] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xxvii.

passively capture a changed world, absorbing a new reality which may appear unfamiliar to both poet and reader.

Likewise, Attig expands on grieving response, stating that his use refers to 'how we, again as whole persons, actively engage with bereavement and grief reaction emotionally, psychologically, cognitively, behaviourally, socially and spiritually.'[44] He clarifies that 'grieving response, to bereavement and grief reaction is explained, or motivated by [...] antecedent experiences. But since it is inherently active, the specific course of grieving response is unpredictable to the extent that it is shaped by and colored by the individual grieving person's character and exercise of freedom and choice.'[45] Applying this not only to individual elegies, but also the mode as a whole, we can see that the elegiac tradition, such as those norms presented by Sacks, does not have to be completely rejected. Instead, it forms part of the antecedent experience within the expression of grief through poetry, an element of response which varies in influence but should still be acknowledged.

Importantly, we must focus on the individual experience throughout, noting that 'relearning the world is not merely, or even centrally, addressing and solving problems', but is instead about processing the world in the light of loss, changing our understanding, adjusting emotionally, modifying behaviour and relationships and assessing that singular relationship with the deceased.[46] Rather than a direct schema which elegy can be read against or through, relearning the world through grief reaction and response provides a basis for criticism which respects the formative position of psychological and philosophical thought. It enables readings not only to respect the emotions within each elegy, but also provides a means to understand the multi-

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[44] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xxvii.
[45] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xxix.
[46] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. xliii.

dimensional experience of grief and identify how this operates and is communicated within poetry. Furthermore, its broad ideas could encompass more than the contemporary western grief experience, making no specific assumptions about behaviour or experience and responding to the personal and cultural uniqueness of the individual. This revised conception of grief is beneficial to critical work on the mode of elegy as it reviews the assumptions which have come before, helping to align critics and readers with an understanding of grief which does not make broad claims based on identity, nor privileging a certain tradition, considering grief in a genuinely holistic manner.

As an individual work, each elegy is an example of a grief narrative which, through interpretation and understanding of poetry as well as an understanding of grief, can help further the general conception of the grieving process and experience of loss. This is supported by Attig, who urges 'that reading fictional (or real life) accounts of individual stories would give caregivers invaluable practice in attending carefully to the subtlety and nuance of the particularities of a grieving persons' experiences.'[47] Psychiatrists and psychologists utilise personal narratives, gathered mainly through interviews and questions, as a means of understanding grief experience as it respects the individuality and non-linear aspects. These ranges of data, collected rather than theorised, help to elucidate a rich pattern which recognises 'both the common heritage that we all share, and also the subtle differences.'[48] Utilising elegies as grief narratives is beneficial as they are recollections of personal experience which utilise language to its fullest extent, thinking not only of the meaning of language, but also its sound qualities,

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[47] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxv.
[48] Parkes, 'Introduction', p. 4.

ordering, shape, rhythm, and what they evoke. Lucy Alford states that 'poetic language that seeks (or is called) to attend to past objects or experiences is in some sense bound to break new ground, to break with conventional modes of expression.'[49] Literary criticism can help to elucidate, mainly through mounting the kind of close reading that constitutes the central discussion of this thesis, the grief experiences which are conveyed but not obvious at first glance, unpicking some of the workings which lead to the expression, or just expanding upon the idea of the expression. Not only will reading elegy in line with the overview of current thanatological thought add to the corpus of grief experiences which can be studied, it also offers an insight which goes beyond the usual usage of language.

Additionally, elegy has a place in terms of supporting people through grief as borrowed grief narratives.[50] These works of expression not only provide examples of experiences of others, in which mourners can be assuaged by the shared emotional turmoil and others informed through additional examples of the universal experience of grief, they also help to vocalise the ineffable, aiding the process of understanding through their happening. With the elegy not only a recollection, but a created piece of reaction and response, it is one which has been both a part of and formed through grief experience; 'personal stories of loss and grief are [...] the heart of the matter in developing general understandings of loss and grief.'[51] Therefore, they offer more than emotional familiarity and expression, providing an example of relearning the world through a means which is available to us all: language. Critical work on the elegy can help grievers and observers alike to work through these poems, attuning them to

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[49] Lucy Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021) pp. 99-100.
[50] For more on this, see Harold Ivan Smith's, *Borrowed Narratives: Using Biographical and Historical Grief Narratives with the Bereaving,* (London: Routledge, 2012).
[51] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxv.

elements of the poetry and its expression of grief which they may have overlooked. Whilst it is not a cure or treatment for the experience of loss, elegy has a place in providing examples to individuals to assist them in their own experience, aiding the process of relearning the world through active engagement as it vocalises a multitude of emotions in numerous ways which the grieving individual may be struggling to comprehend.

Alongside Attig's philosophical approach to grief, it is important to briefly consider the current psychological discourse around grief and discuss where elegy may augment it. This is not only to demonstrate where ideas currently reside but also to dismiss some popular erroneous ideas around grief which have entered the public understanding to ensure there is sufficient analytic clarity for our ensuing readings. We must begin by dismissing a potentially damaging misconception.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's model of five stages of grief is almost as pervasive as it is unfounded, having entered public consciousness since the 1970s and been used socially in order to not only define grief but also direct the grief experience of the bereaved.[52] Presented through chapter titles in her book, *On Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross reduces grief experience to five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. As noted by Charles Corr, the word stage 'suggests linearity' without detailing if they were descriptive or prescriptive, nor if an individual 'might, may, will or must move through the five stages.'[53] More importantly, 'since its initial appearance in 1969, there has been no independent confirmation of its validity or reliability, and Kübler-Ross advanced no further evidence on its behalf before her death in August 2004.'[54] Unfounded and

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[52] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, (London: Routledge, 1973).
[53] Corr, 'The "Five Stages"', p. 406.
[54] Corr, 'The "Five Stages"', p. 406.

rejected within both elegiac criticism, where it has rightly not been popularised, and psychological discussion of grief, it is important to avoid using this rampant model in criticism of elegy.

Kenneth Doka's *Grief is a Journey* dispels just such myths related to grief as Kübler-Ross propounded, rejecting the idea of bereavement and grief as a prescriptivist journey which follows certain stages as each individual mourns. Instead, the process of grief is much broader, non-linear, individual and complex; there is no right or wrong, no stages we all pass through: 'while the experience of loss is universal, the reactions to that loss are as distinct and individual as you are.'[55] Therefore, there is no correct reaction we can expect, no 'normal' response which could be present in poetry. Whilst this does not reject the critical categories and conventions highlighted earlier in the introduction, it recasts them as a set of recurring motifs which appear in elegy, each linking to the wider poetic tradition even though they are primarily part of a personal journey; they are not a hidden key to consolation.

Alongside this comes an idea which seemingly contradicts the impulse of elegy, the fact that there can never be closure. Instead, 'grief involves a lifelong journey, and no single act, or even combination of actions, changes that.'[56] The experience is unpredictable and unscheduled, in which we do not detach ourselves from the loss but instead reconfigure our relationship in order to continue living with the deceased in our hearts and minds.[57] Seemingly closely related to Attig's philosophical position, Doka's comments on consolation and grief as a whole compound our approach to the study of elegy, judging not its search for consolation or closure, but instead seeing each poem as part of a wider structure of grief, a personal undertaking for the poet which includes

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[55] Doka, *Grief is a Journey,* p. 1.
[56] Doka, *Grief is a Journey,* p. 17.
[57] Doka, *Grief is a Journey,* p. 10; 12; 15.

each elegiac impulse. The language of closure or completion is thus contentious when discussing the mode as it is not applicable to the expectations of grief and loss even though it is strived for by readers and critics alike through a convention of recompense.[58] Even though, 'from Spenser to Swinburne, as Peter Sacks and other critics have shown, most canonical British elegists had depicted mourning as compensatory,' we must not assume it is necessary within an elegy, nor a natural element of grief.[59]

As Corr and others have noted, there are different schema for understanding grief which could be utilised, including Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut's dual process model.[60] Summarised by Corr, 'the dual process model posits an interaction or interplay between two sets of dynamic and interrelated processes in coping with bereavement. "Working through" one's loss and the grief reactions to the primary loss represents only one side of this duality; addressing the secondary losses and new challenges in moving forward with healthy living is the other side.'[61] Throughout, the model 'emphasises the effort coping requires of bereaved persons, the potentially active nature of mourning, the complexity of the processes involved and an oscillation between those processes.'[62] However, this thesis will not go as far as applying a specific scientific model to reading the elegy, instead utilising Attig's related philosophy. This is because it would require applying certain identification through interpretation of poetry such as those which are 'loss oriented or concerned primarily in coping with loss' or 'restoration oriented or concerned primarily in coping with "restoration".'[63] This would take the focus away

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[58] Eric Falci, *The Value of Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) p. 125.
[59] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 3.
[60] Margaret Stroebe, and Henk Schut, "The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement: Rationale and Description", *Death Studies*, 23.3 (1999) pp. 197 - 224.
[61] Corr, 'The "Five Stages"', p. 413.
[62] Corr, 'The "Five Stages"', p .413.
[63] Corr, 'The "Five Stages"', p. 412-13.

from the poetry itself, limiting interpretation of techniques, formal variations and language whilst leading each reading to make unfounded and unknowable assumptions about the mindset of the writer and speaker.

4. Structure of the thesis

Chapter one focuses on the expansive relationship between landscape and elegy. This does not solely rest on the use of landscape to create a site of mourning which is familiar to both mourner and deceased, but also considers the manners in which landscape is utilised to further the individual expression of grief. Both of these main aspects of landscape interact with the ideas of relearning the world, providing a physical site of supposed familiarity which can, over time, change; requiring the mourner to relearn the world. We will first visit these ideas through a brief reading of Elizabeth Bishop's 'North Haven' in the chapter introduction, before developing our understanding through extended reading of poems by Amy Clampitt, Robert Lowell, Anne Stevenson and Ted Hughes. Through the focus on landscape, we will see the importance of other connected ideas which constitute the expression of grief experience. One such aspect is distance, a fundamental part of both landscape and death.

　　Chapter two then develops this role of distance within elegy. As a relational aspect of space, place and experience, distance is vital to the expression of grief as it reflects the journey of experience one undertakes when mourning as well as the fundamental divide which exists between life and death. The physical separation, touched upon in the first chapter, is emblematic of the vast scale of distance which underlies grief experience. Through discussion of distance, we will see the myriad of ways in which the threshold between life and death is queried, detailing the iterative

process of relearning the world which requires an active engagement in understanding the separation and obtaining knowledge as to how it affects the mourner and their world. For instance, as we will see, Paul Muldoon's extended villanelle, 'Milkweed and Monarch', engenders a continual revision of the poet's relationship with his parents through the repeated lines of the form, reforming separation in different ways to better understand it. Rather than offering a direct restatement of his interpretation of their relationship, however, the poem reinterprets the repeated ideas of his inability to tell apart his mother and father, questioning his own emotions through the poem. A broader appreciation of how an individual grieves enables us to acknowledge the repetition of the poem as part of the grieving process which seeks to understand loss and its relationship to the world rather than isolating the lines as unemotional and unelegiac additions. Distance also uncovers a separation from grief experience, especially when considering contemporary funerary practices which are performed by an unknown outsider. Through the readings on landscape and distance we shall see that the way they are experienced is directly connected to the process related to grief.

Chapter three considers the process of grief experience which will have been uncovered in the previous two chapters and seen to be present throughout elegy. An understanding of the grief process is important to further develop our understanding of the relationship between Attig's philosophy of relearning the world and elegy, considering the ways in which the active engagement as whole beings is communicated. By reading long elegies we will read examples of a more complex grief process which creates expansive connections within grief experience. This includes Muldoon's multiple sestinas in 'Yarrow', joining seemingly unrelated ideas together, Wallace Stevens' individual approach to death in 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' and Anne Carson's use of translation and multimodality in *Nox*. Drawn out through considerations of landscape

and distance, the multifarious role of process is notable. The chapter then turns to consider the compositional process of elegy in a close reading of drafts of Hughes's 'Your Paris', through which we will study the development of a grief expression within an elegy. This provides insight into the working through of emotion which culminates in the final poem, highlighting the extent over time of relearning the world which focus on published work alone can sometimes shroud.

As the consideration of the previous three chapters relied upon the poetic expression of grief to relearn the world, the final chapter turns its attention to the role of poetic forms and structures in elegy. Landscape, distance and process are all engendered and supported by form, which helps to direct the reader, mourner and ideas through grief experience. Looking first at the role of poetic form in elegy, both open and closed, we shall see that there is, as asserted earlier in the introduction, no set elegiac form. Instead, formal elements are used to guide the process individually. This enables a relearning of the world, which is personal, whilst still staying attached to poetic means of expression. We then develop this approach to form to consider its elegiac role in an even broader manner, looking at the role of form in patterning response and reaction to grief through two of Natasha Trethewey's elegies for her mother.

In this respect, rather than representing separate aspects of understanding and learning to be in a new world, the ideas of my four chapters — landscape, distance, process and form — will be shown to simultaneously appear within the poems discussed, each a constituent part of the larger, non-linear process of grief. Interrelated, these four aspects are a starting point for an application of the new critical perspective on elegy which has been presented in this Introduction.

Chapter 1

Landscape of Elegy

1.1. Introduction: From a generic site of death to a personalised site of mourning

Through most of the identifiable elegiac tradition, place and nature have been associated with the pastoral, which has, according to Peter Sacks, provided '[p]robably the greatest influence on the form of the elegy' through 'the rituals associated with the death and rebirth of vegetation gods.'[1] As noted by Stephen Regan, there is an established trend of natural specificity within elegy:

> with a degree of confidence, we can note the growing tendency in post-Romantic English poetry to associate loss and grief with a particularized landscape — an unidealized, demythologized landscape — that contrasts strongly with some of the elaborate, stylized landscapes of earlier elegiac poetry.[2]

Similarly to Regan's comments on the connection between 'particularized landscape' and grief, Jahan Ramazani notes that generally '[f]rom the mid-nineteenth century to the present, the elegy's representations of the dead and mourners have tended to move away from the categorical and universal to the intimate and particular.'[3]

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[1] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 19.

[2] Stephen Regan, 'Landscapes of mourning in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 41.1 (2019) p. 32.

[3] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 18.

Without an understanding of landscape, the process of relearning the world is untethered, with no physical setting in which to learn how to be and act through grief. This can involve construction of new landscapes, changing perspectives or interpretations of place whilst mourning, or a complex amalgamation as the mourner stages their own relearning: 'the landscape that poetry provides, through use of language as a connective medium between the past, present, and future, acts as a site for ritualized mourning and reunion.'[4] Whilst one could read Uppal as metaphorically broadening poetry to be its own landscape of grief, the importance of a physical landscape is also present as it provides a particular site for mourning in which one can make connections between past, present, and future. Failing to provide a suitable landscape in which to grieve inhibits elegy as it creates an extensive separation between the poem and reality; emotion does not have suitable physical details to which it can tether itself to evoke the deceased within the world, nor can it sufficiently relearn the world in response to grief. However, it is important to note that the scope of a landscape is not crucial to our discussion, with a brief existence enough to create the affective connection which aids in a relearning of the world. Considering how elegists work through the representation of landscape is vital to understanding how grief is responded to and represented.

As highlighted by Regan, it would be disingenuous to state that there is a generic elegiac landscape. Instead, poets create specific landscapes based on the details of countries or regions associated with the deceased that have their own specific nature composed of a multitude of elements. This is evident in a wide array of geography and topography, from the coastline, city, graveyards, and farmland, to distances and definite

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[4] Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn,* p. 15.

physical aspects. Furthermore, the living world of flora and fauna, which are reliant on aspects of place and space, help to define the landscape, with the two intricately and complexly intertwined. Whilst detailed taxonomic knowledge and understanding of the natural world is usually not necessary for the general public to seek enjoyment or appreciation of its beauty and wonder, accurate representation of nature and place is vital when mourning an individual due to the intense emotions and complex representative demands which must be balanced in order to ensure that the landscape of death and mourning is familiar to the deceased, imaginatively returning the dead to their home ground. Additionally, as pointed out by Iain Twiddy, 'the psychological processes and social appeals which those figures and locations enabled [...] are still necessary.'[5] Consequently, the poet must appeal both to a generalised understanding of the world and physical specifics of a place, representing the deceased and providing a landscape through which they can relearn parts of the world.

Some elements of landscape are viewed as nationally or regionally specific due to either becoming ingrained in cultural identity or being native species. These elements can sometimes be used to create a landscape which is supposedly generally familiar for the deceased. However, the presumed attachment to these national or regional elements can be in tension with the idea of creating a landscape which is familiar to the deceased. For instance, the Yew tree is present within English elegies due to its physical significance, notably being found in Churchyards, and its prominence in canonical elegies such as Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', and Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*[6] William Wordsworth's 'Yew-trees' also clearly link the

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[5] Iain Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, (New York: Continuum, 2012) p. 1.
[6] Thomas Gray, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 6th ed, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall & Mary Jo Salter, (New York: WW Norton, 2018) p. 707.
Alfred Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A.H.H', *Selected Poems: Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, (London: Penguin Classics, 2007) pp. 96-198.

trees 'of vast circumference and gloom profound' with 'Silence and Foresight—Death the Skeleton | And Time the Shadow,— there to celebrate,' continuing an elegiac association with features of landscape.[7] With the physical world leading to the poetic, there is a clear relationship between the typical aspects of a place and the way it is depicted within poetry. However, whilst this may indicate that the elegiac presence of a Yew tree in a distinctly American environment would be surprising and require further consideration, we must not hasten to dismiss individualised landscapes which contradict the national landscapes. Whilst the presence of a Yew tree, if unfamiliar, may demonstrate a distance from the deceased, through which conventional English elegiac symbols supersede individual experience to represent grief, it may also reflect landscape known by or associated with the deceased. Similarly to how there is no generic landscape of grief, there also appears to be no generic national landscape of death. In order to approach the issues of familiarity of landscape in death, some elegies are clearly situated in specific locations in order to clearly associate the poem with the deceased.

One example is Elizabeth Bishop's 'North Haven', written in memory of Robert Lowell and clearly situated on the island of North Haven, Maine, which emphasises not only the specifics of place but also the revision of a landscape in the light of grief.[8] Bishop's second stanza demonstrates a desire from the speaker for the physical landscape to alter after bereavement, mirroring the unspoken psychological change which has occurred after loss:

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[7] William Wordsworth, 'Yew-trees', *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 334-335.
[8] Elizabeth Bishop, 'North Haven', *Poems: The Centenary Edition*, (Chatto & Windus: London, 2011) pp. 210-211.

> The islands haven't shifted since last summer,
>
> even if I like to pretend they have
>
> —drifting, in a dreamy sort of way,
>
> a little north, a little south or sidewise,
>
> and that they're free within the blue frontiers of bay. [9]

The landscape of North Haven is presented as at once familiar to both the deceased and speaker, and different, changing after the death in the poem. Acknowledging that the physical shift they desire is impossible, the speaker pretends that the landscape is drifting in the way they want to reflect the change within the landscape which they have perceived after loss. Whilst the landscape has not shifted, the natural world is not presented as completely static: 'Nature repeats herself, or almost does: | *repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.*'[10] Whilst repetition may not always be part of relearning the world, possibly demonstrating a refusal to change as it restates the same idea, nature in 'North Haven' is altered as the repetition transitions after the semi-colon into revision. This can imply learning, correction or improvement for nature over time as the mourner reacts and responds to death. Change, which was also sought from the physical islands, is seemingly only possible in the poem's flowers and birds as the song of the latter 'brings tears to the eyes' because of their association with the deceased.[11] Accurately capturing the essence of a place whilst still supporting the reconceptualisation and reconfiguration which the poet and mourner are undergoing is fundamental to the process of elegy. Consequently, as readers and critics we must be

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[9] Bishop, 'North Haven', p. 210.
[10] Bishop, 'North Haven', p. 210.
[11] Bishop, 'North Haven', p. 210.

attuned to the complex balancing act of representing nature in mourning as it constantly changes to reflect each instance of grief.

The first section of this chapter discusses how representations of landscape influence elegies. It looks at Amy Clampitt's 'What the Light was Like' and 'Highgate Cemetery', Robert Lowell's 'Sailing Home from Rapallo' and Anne Stevenson's 'Willow Song', which are set in a variety of known and unknown locations, sometimes traversing these various places, comparing both their presentation of place and the extent to which place and landscape is vital to the mourning process. Through this, we will see how each poem interacts with the process of relearning the world. Consideration will be given to the relationship these locations have with both the poet and the subject, exploring the influences of these perspectives on the overall elegy.

When considering the role of landscape in the second section of this chapter, 'The affective role of landscape', we will pay close attention to two elegies, Ted Hughes' 'The day he died' and Anne Stevenson's 'Orcop', which exemplify the complexities surrounding the relationship between place and mourning in modern society and culture. Hughes' 'The day he died' is an elegy for one individual, his father-in-law Jack Orchard. A farmer, the landscape of the elegy is not only his home, part of him, but it is worked and influenced by him. Consequently, it also mourns his loss. Notably changed by Orchard's death, the landscape is forced to relearn the world, too. Stevenson's 'Orcop' visits the graveside of a friend. Within the landscape of the graveyard, she imagines the deceased, populating the place with a catalogue of memories which aid her process of grief, remembering and reconfiguring her representation of Frances Horovitz.

1.2. 'Among the mourning-cloak' - Representing the deceased in an (un)known landscape

Intimate descriptions of a specific place function within an elegy to both associate the poem with a site in some way related to the deceased and provide the necessary emotional connection with the reader. However, a poet's familiarity, or lack of it, with the landscape influences their depiction. A lack of familiarity with landscapes associated with the deceased may lead a poet to imagine landscape in generic terms, disassociating it from the deceased as it becomes unrepresentative. Additionally, a lack of a common landscape in which to situate grief creates a separation between mourner and deceased. Both a lack of familiarity and a lack of common landscape in some way inhibit a relearning of the world as they imaginatively frame the deceased in a landscape which likely relies on outmoded elegiac tropes and perpetuates the discarded idea of a generic landscape of grief. Similarly, a landscape which is not associated with the deceased may pose a challenge for relearning the world as it is not intimate to them. Whilst there are limitations in a disconnection between landscape, poet and deceased, the separation may be at times unavoidable and thus require the poet to confront them within the elegy. The following section considers the way Clampitt, Lowell, and Stevenson generate a sense of familiarity within landscape in order to both represent grief and the deceased whilst also partaking in a relearning of the world.

1.2.1. Amy Clampitt's landscapes of mourning in 'What the Light was Like' and 'Highgate Cemetery'

Amy Clampitt's elegy 'What the Light was Like', published in her 1985 collection of the same name, mediates between the difficulties of familiarity and unfamiliarity of place

when mourning an individual (*CPAC,* 119-122). The poem's dedication, '*For Louise Dickinson Rich and the family of Ernest Woodward',* establishes it as an elegy by introducing absence, especially in relation to Ernest Woodward who is clearly implied to be dead. The absence of these individuals is clearly foundational to the poem, ensuring that the reader is not only aware of the content and tone but also the poem's relationship to them. In doing so, Clampitt fills the poem with potential emotions, memories, senses, significance and landscapes. Furthermore, the dedication to Louise Dickinson Rich, a writer of both fiction and non-fiction set predominantly in Massachusetts and Maine, brings with the mention of her natural associations. These are rooted in her own published work on nature, including *The Coast of Maine*; the poem's landscape of New England appears inevitable from the dedication. These constraints guide the poem throughout; it remains physically within the bounds of New England, influenced by and for a writer who recorded the landscape. Whilst the location of the poem is not clear in its content, biographical information tells us it is based in Corea, Maine, a coastal village which Clampitt visited 'Every year in June' (*CPAC*, 119).[12] In Corea, Clampitt met Dickinson Rich, and the village was home to Ernest Woodward, clarifying the dedication.[13] Together, these two figures are mourned in a Maine landscape which was intimately familiar to them even though this is not made explicit to the reader.

Rather than explicitly labelling the location, Clampitt instead describes its natural characteristics, listing 'lilacs', 'lobster traps', a 'hummingbird', 'swallowtails', 'woodcock', 'eiders', and 'puffins' to populate the landscape, detailing a place in which the mourning process of the poem can take place (*CPAC,* 119). At first glance, these

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[12] Willard Spiegelman, *Nothing Stays Put: The Life and Poetry of Amy Clampitt,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2023) p. 264.
[13] Spiegelman, *Nothing Stays Put,* p. 270.

natural elements offer an overabundance of seemingly generic occurrences, sitting in a purposeless abstraction of text in which they seem to form an array of natural mourners. As part of the Woodwards' 'front yard', these items exist as both part of the expansive and specific landscapes of the deceased. They belong to both the deceased and the place, a signifier of Ernest Woodward which will endure beyond his death and is already seeming to bloom uncontrollably in his absence. Clampitt does not use one of the characteristics to identify Maine directly, or any other part of New England, in this listing, instead letting them exist freely within the landscape. Without the bounds of geographic or temporal certainty, each physical aspect exists beyond the moments that dominate the poem whilst still having a link to the place, with the opening salvo of images overwhelming the senses with colours, scents, sounds and movement.

Consequently, each natural image is manipulated into seemingly appearing all at once to suddenly set the scene of the elegy before starting the mourning process, reflecting an immediacy of grief when viewing a landscape associated with Woodward's death. Within this, there is also a link to a wider elegiac sense, evoked in the opening image of lilacs:

> with lobster traps stacked out in back, atop the rise
>> that overlooks the inlet
> would be a Himalayan range of peaks of bloom,
>> white or mauve-violet, (*CPAC,* 119)

Abundant, the lilacs represent part of a distinctly American elegiac tradition — that of Walt Whitman's 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd' — which bears witness to the ensuing poem, overwhelming the senses with their expansive 'turbulence of

perfume' (*CPAC,* 119). The metaphorical distance travelled by this description ensures that the reader does not believe there has been movement from the location; the hyperbolic image of the Himalayan mountains is clearly not present in the physical realm, shown using the past tense conditional 'would be', instead representing a possible emotional magnitude within the described landscape. However, the dense landscape is also uncertain, due in part to Clampitt's knowledge of the landscape being based only on the village in June. The descriptions of June are thus incongruous with the October morning of Woodward's death — 'up here, that's the month for lilacs' — with their overwhelming abundance a recollection of hearing of his death (*CPAC* 119). Whilst the opening listing fills nature with in-depth descriptions, feeding its traditional elegiac potential, it also distances the location from the man of the second line, generating a separation between the fecund location and the ensuing death in which the apparently consoling natural elements fill up 'almost his whole front yard' (*CPAC,* 119).

Here, the natural world is continuing without Woodward, growing over him rather than with him. This is emphasised in Clampitt's limited reference to the man within the opening two stanzas, mentioning him only to give ownership of some of the land and rounding off the detailing with a short ominous line: 'He kept an eye out' (*CPAC,* 119). Within this idiom there is a fear of the location which has just been developed; the elegiac potential of landscape has become a site of tension. Not only does this establish a location which is known to both the poet and the deceased during the opening of the poem for the landscape to be utilised later in mourning, it also shows the ways in which a lack of familiarity alters the emotions of the poem as each element of the landscape is descriptive whilst also foreboding death and grief. The world is changed as it is being realised, minimising the presence of Woodward. These elements are a site of tension in which natural beauty battles with its literary and cultural

associations, alongside the necessary changing understanding of the place and its landscape as part of relearning the world in response to loss.

Clampitt's introduction of 'Tit Manan, a lighthouse outpost off the coast of Maine, provides a clear physical identifier. Unlike the prior features of landscape, this is unique; a constructed presence in the landscape from which the reader can accurately situate the elegy. In this respect, the lighthouse provides a place of certainty which can be returned to, a focal point that not only sets the scene but also carries emotional support and significance within the poem, a role which resonates with the archetypal significance of a lighthouse as a beacon of guidance in the dangerous unknown. Through this, the poem enables emotional progress into the ideas of grief because it always has a point of return which is known to the deceased and mourners; it marks the threshold between life and death in the poem. The quotidian world which Clampitt presents is only broken when the fisherman does not pass 'Tit Manan when heading back to the harbour, marking a movement away from the known:

> when all his neighbours'
> boats had chugged back through the inlet, his
> was still out; at evening, (*CPAC,* 121)

The enjambed line break extends the definite moment of death for a moment longer, physically delaying comprehension of Woodward's passing whilst also aligning him with his neighbours one final time. Woodward's absence alters the poem, requiring a change. Clampitt initiates an unseen and unspoken change through the time shift which is shown by the semi-colon. Going through two transitions in these lines, the poem shifts from life to death, signalling a relearning through lineation and punctuation as the

attempted attachment between Woodward and his neighbours from enjambment ensures that his absence is without human determiner.

As a physical anchor to the location, the lighthouse enables Clampitt to imagine an abstracted, unreal landscape which exists in the space beyond. This is evoked before the threshold has been crossed, acknowledging the certainty of Woodward's death:

> straight into the sunrise, a surge of burning turning the
>
> > whole ocean iridescent
>
> fool's-gold over molten emerald, into the core of that
>
> > day-after-day amazement—
>
> a clue, one must suppose, to why lobstermen are often
>
> > naturally gracious: (*CPAC,* 120)

The world of death holds near idealised elements of beauty, a glorious place of continual amazement. Alongside death, the superlative descriptions elevate nature beyond the level of personal experience and into a near spiritual realm. The speaker does include references to the facade, the reality of death which is hidden behind the beauty, with the intensity of the light described as 'fool's-gold'. Ever-present, 'Tit Manan enables these moments of unspecified landscape to exist within Clampitt's elegy as it acts as a landmark between the real and unreal; clear separation enables the imagined world beyond the threshold of death to exist.[14] Due to this, Clampitt can explore both the realm of emotions and the place of death without losing track of the poem's purpose, and likewise can develop familiar elegiac imagery within the natural world without

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[14] For more on chiasmus and the workings of a boundary within Clampit's elegy, see W. David Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) pp. 140-143.

needing them directly to comprehend the moment of death in the poem; that is unknowable.

However, there are also constant references to physical locations such as the lighthouse, overlaying places with emotion to create a complex map which enables a retreat to the real world of the living. This is in part because the poem is not yet ready to confront death, seen through its minimal acknowledgment of the subject earlier in the poem, nor can it sustain its description of the unknown and unknowable. As such, the signalled switch between abstracted mourning and real locations brought on by the lighthouse enables grief to be explored through moments without a location which are always brought back to an identifiable reality, or as W. David Shaw puts it: '[as] we are invited to explore boundary or threshold states, death becomes a worded mystery, an ineffable quantity like love, which the elegist must work at the height of her power to put into words.'[15] In creating a physical identifier of the threshold between the states of life and death, Clampitt is enabling a delicate handling of the transition between the two whilst opening up possibilities of understanding death in a more immediate manner, becoming not only an imagined state but a described location which is out beyond the known.

With the poem's emotional workings of grief existing mainly within the abstracted, light-filled landscape of death, the physical world is bereft of direct outpourings of mourning. The moment of death within the elegy is announced through absence and emphasised by punctuation:

> boats had chugged through the inlet, his

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[15] Shaw, *Elegy and Paradox*, p. 143.

was still out; at evening,

with half the town out looking, and a hard frost

settling in among the alders,

there'd been no sign of him. The next day, and the next, (*CPAC,* 121)

Whilst the semicolon progresses time, the lines do not unleash an emotional reaction, transitioning between states smoothly rather than with a sudden disconnection. However, as the day is ending a destructive frost curtails any possible hope; elements of landscape itself become destructive, freezing the living as it changes in reaction to death. Evidently, there is limited hope for grief in this moment, with no redemptive images to bring relief as the imagined majesty of this place is dismantled by reality, forcing the world to be reconsidered. Whilst physical in description, there is a separation as the frost settles among the alders, existing alongside the branches rather than interfering with them in any way; not all the natural world is affected by the death, nor does it react.

As some of nature is shown to be unaffected by the death, emotion is mainly processed by the individuals who physically search for the deceased. The searching individuals demonstrate an aspect of active participation with the loss, seeking certainty rather than inferring the worst. Here, there is not a direct outpouring of emotion, with grief evoked through the search party's desperate continual attempts at finding the man rather than an expected response. Not only does this reflect the searching, a desire for answers before re-configuring an understanding of the world, it also demonstrates the inaccessibility of the imagined world of death as the planes and helicopters are unable to find his body; travelling there does not give instant access or

knowledge. Consequently, there is a search for understanding from the inhabitants of the poem, which is not aided by the natural world, nor made easily accessible.

Clampitt's division between the physical and metaphysical, and the difficulties of having to relearn the physical world, results in an ending which, like the opening, represents New England generally:

> the fogbound shroud
>
> that can turn anywhere into a nowhere. But it's useless.
> Among the mourning-cloak-
> hovered-over lilac peaks, their whites and purples,
> when we pass his yard,
> poignant to excess with fragrance, this year we haven't
> seen the hummingbird. (*CPAC,* 122)

Whilst the poet attempts to associate the descriptions with a place, '[Woodward's] yard', the cycle is only fleeting as the abstracted images act as reminders of loss rather than emotional support; his presence is part of a lingering sense of absence. Clampitt acknowledges a resistance to change after Woodward's death, 'the fogbound shroud' running on into the stanza and obscuring the Maine town as it starts to encapsulate generalities. Although there is a rejection of mourning and a refusal to accept change, Clampitt's poem slowly proceeds in reconceptualising life after death. The pivotal moment occurs when Woodward's passing is equated with the solitary hummingbird that is no more. The impact of the loss of the bird to the landscape is palpable, providing a poignant close in which the world has changed, even if the speaker remains reluctant

to accept such a change. Rather than insincerely mourning a man she barely knew in a place she only visited, she mourns the absence of a known natural fact, equating the two losses. The elegy is without crescendo, without an angry outburst of grief, without an altering to the separation between physical and metaphysical, and yet it still works to mourn an individual by acknowledging change. However, no matter how Clampitt tries to represent the place, she is unable to do so with intense accuracy and thus returns to a shared familiar scene which generalises the process of mourning whilst also demonstrating a shift in certainty. Consequently, their shared natural knowledge helps to connect Clampitt and Woodward beyond death, by traversing between the physical and metaphysical spheres within the poem in a bid for Clampitt's speaker to relearn the world.

Whilst 'What the Light was Like' relies upon a relationship between the deceased, the poet and a place, it is not the only way in which shared landscapes can be created: recorded knowledge, local myth and a transhistorical conception of the location are just three different ways in which common ground is found and created within poetry. These offer the possibility of a connection between otherwise unrelated figures, albeit one which is assumed or based on generalities. Within such a connection exist shared pieces of knowledge and traditions which can be utilised to produce an elegy, creating an imagined identity for mourning. In 'What the Light was Like', Clampitt makes use of this when she struggles with the representative power of language within the unknown, offering more generalised descriptions of the Maine coast to create an environment within which it is appropriate for her to mourn Louise Dickinson Rich and Ernest Woodward, demonstrating the power of these externally formed images. Doing so also aids in the process of relearning the world, creating unreal generalisations which are

easier to change, or will change naturally, instead of directly confronting the different world.

'Highgate Cemetery', Clampitt's elegy for George Eliot, offers a point of comparison with the discourse on 'What the Light was Like'; how is the scene of mourning altered when the poet and deceased do not share a location? In addressing such a question, the poem helps to expand what an elegiac relearning of the world entails as Clampitt seeks certainty through visiting the grave, attempting to find out what she can for herself after engaging in an act of historical representation. Set in perhaps London's most famous graveyard, Clampitt visits Eliot's resting place in Highgate. Clampitt avoids naming Eliot in the elegy and thus sidesteps the issue of mourning a pseudonym, instead initiating her presence through references to Eliot's life and a reconstructed extract from one of her novels. Again visiting, Clampitt is unfamiliar with the location and is more spatiotemporally separate from the deceased. As such, in these key respects she is more distant from her elegiac subject than before.

Whilst the locale of Highgate Cemetery is introduced in the title and first line, undoubtedly focusing the elegy on the location, the cemetery is not mentioned again in the opening three stanzas, which instead focus on memorialising Eliot as an individual. The landscape of Highgate Cemetery is superseded by personal descriptions as Clampitt tries to establish the identity of Eliot; the opening line — 'Laid in unconsecrated ground, a scandal' — passing comment on her treatment before characterisation (*CPAC,* 229). In these three stanzas, the physical landscape takes a back role because it cannot help Clampitt either to embellish Eliot's life nor, at this moment, connect the two of them. The development is a necessary element of the poem as it establishes the deceased, informing the reader of not only why we should mourn Eliot, but also reinvigorating her

life through the poem's remembrance. Nature plays a dramatic role here: 'the raw east wind, fog, the roar that issues' (*CPAC,* 229). Furthermore, due to the unfamiliarity of Highgate cemetery to Clampitt, she is unable to find any connection within it. The elegy is therefore forced to find other forms of connection, bringing Eliot to the poem through a biographical tracing of Eliot's life and quoting one of Eliot's novels to let her 'speak' within the poem, whilst also familiarising both Clampitt and the reader with her death:

> *Nature* (she'd written, years before) *repairs*
>
> *her ravages, but not all. The hills*
>
> *underneath their green vestures bear*
>
> *the marks of past rending.* [...] (*CPAC*, 229)[16]

Whilst these attempts to introduce Eliot — even bringing her back to a form of textual life for a few moments through her work — are part of an elegiac norm, they are without a clear topographical place and thus remain in an abstract world. Instead, Clampitt is revitalising her by representing elements of her life, creating a version of Eliot.

The physical descriptions of the cemetery, coming at the start of the fourth stanza, are weather-beaten, subjected to an intensity of sleet and snow which broadens the idea of loss through embodiment: the world itself is presented as mourning. In this, we see the creation of a connection between the poet and the deceased which furthers the emotive journey of the poem.

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[16] Clampitt reconstructs the following quote from Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*: 'Nature repairs her ravages — but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again — the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair.' George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. A. S. Byatt, (London: Penguin Classics, 2003) p. 543.

At Highgate, the day she was buried,

a cold rain fell, mixed with snow. Slush

underfoot. Mud tracked inside the chapel. *(CPAC,* 230)

Landscape sets the scene of mourning with the mixed rain and snow, trying to wash

away the ritualistic acts of burial whilst blanketing the scene in a new consistency,

causing a meteorological tension which intensifies within the poem; landscape is not

merely a passive setting in which to mourn. The outcome of the incompatible conditions

is introduced at the end of the line, with mud 'tracked inside the chapel' a consequence

of the weather. This muddying directly tarnishes one of the possible sites of consolation,

corrupting the scene of religious reassurance and undermining her estranged brother

Isaac and the 'hordes' of mourners.

  Within Highgate Cemetery, the site of mourning is an existing place Clampitt can

visit, providing a point of certainty in the reaction and response to death which has so

far not been present. Description of the grave has been so far purposefully avoided, with

the poem focussing on representing Eliot. However, the location of the grave is central

to the reconfiguration of Eliot in the poem, providing as it does a physical setting with

which Clampitt can become familiarised. Until this point, Clampitt's physical and

metaphysical separation from Eliot has limited the elegy as any connection has only

been composed of reported fact which she has then interpreted; there has always been

a conscious separation which by echoing furthers the divide between life and death. As

Clampitt visits a place to mourn Eliot, creating a connection between them, she is also

enabling a contradiction at the heart of elegy: how can Eliot, who has so far been

memorialised abstractly, both live and die at the site of her burial? This further

complicates the overall process of mourning as the contradiction makes the imagined landscape seem artificial, representing both the contemporary moment and the past.

In the depiction of Eliot's funeral, we are presented with 'hordes' of mourners, including her estranged brother, and the flowers sent from 'Edith Simcox, | crazed with devotion to this woman' (*CPAC,* 230). As part of the major redemptive myths within the poem, these moments are found within the past, teasing an emotional connection which is removed from the speaker of the poem. However, the procession of represented mourners also helps to increase the significance of Eliot's grave, enriching its emotive value by associating it with the loving gestures of those who grieved for Eliot when she died. Instead of trying to construct her own emotional intensities, Clampitt is evoking emotions which are likely to have existed, the grief of Eliot's brother and her unrequited lover, through which to mourn; learning their experience as their grief for Eliot was more intense. This aids the development of the poem because it ensures there is less distant ambivalence, reopening past grief to further the mourning process. Clampitt's evocation of the emotions of others demonstrates the role of empathy in understanding and experiencing grief, aiding her eventual personal approach to Eliot's death and assuming a transhistorical cohesion to the emotional experience of grief.

After moving through the graveyard, a connection between the poet and deceased is eventually found at the site of Eliot's grave; a place which is already charged with the emotional intensities of Eliot's mourners and reinforces that sense of somewhere that acts as a topographical locus for the visiting Clampitt:

In rain-wet May, not quite a century later—

cow parsley head-high, the unkempt

walks a blur, faint drip of birdsong,

ivy taking over — the stone is hard to find. (*CPAC,* 230)

The overgrown cow parsley is complemented by the poetic birdsong, presenting a landscape which appears pastoral, whilst its unkempt grass obscures the path to her grave which is covered by an abundance of ivy; nature is obscuring the site of mourning as much as it is supporting the overall processing of emotion. Here, the dual purpose of nature is emblematic of the disconnect between Clampitt and Eliot — including Clampitt mourning a pseudonym rather than Mary Ann Cross — with the natural aspects seemingly overwhelmed by its redemptive purpose, with the grave left wild after years of neglect. Rather than confronting the challenges in personally mourning Eliot, the echoes of others' grief is felt through the stone, which whilst 'hard to find' yet remains the only source and locus of emotional connection (*CPAC* 230).

The headstone's obscurity within the landscape reflects the suppressed and unrecognised emotions which the mourners experienced, reviving those experiences in order not only to mourn Eliot but also help the feelings of others to be processed and revised. In turn, the elegy becomes one for those mourners too, offering permanent remembrance not only to Eliot but also those who grieved for her, revising their grief experience. Throughout the poem this emotion has accumulated, generated in the memories of not only George Eliot but also those who mourned her — they too are now dead — and as such we sense that their grief is a refreshing element that battles against the contradiction at the heart of elegy: for Clampitt to close the elegy for Eliot, she must also accept that the mourners are also now dead and their grief gone. The grave is thus not only a place where Eliot can be mourned, but also a memorial to those who grieved for her. In this respect, the landscape brings together the complex strands of emotion within the poem to mourn everyone involved, memorialising their emotion through its

cyclical bloom whilst also recognising its untamed nature. However, the grave is still only a place which represents Eliot, rather than being from her life; there is a fundamental disconnection between poet and deceased. As such, Clampitt is resigned to the fact that she can visit the place but not know it. This thought does not, however, end the elegy. Instead, the workings of grief are transposed into the figures who mourned Eliot, with their loss being also symbolised within the grave. Whilst it is not a location she had known throughout her life, it becomes a place of interest, situating Eliot near Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx in death. Clampitt is thus relying on the generative power of mourning to find an affective connection between them, herself and Eliot, relearning the world from her assumptions and generating emotional significance in order to help the mourners relearn and appreciate the achievements of Eliot. Without the grave, there would be no understanding of grief and no place for Clampitt to visit, isolating the emotional process. Consequently, there is an emotional link created through the location and its physical elements, even when it is not personal.

Each element of the landscape provides not only an emotive link between mourner and deceased, but also helps to imaginatively create the elements which trigger and/or proceed grief by supporting a relearning of the world. This is especially important within 'Highgate Cemetery' because Clampitt is mourning a pseudonym, imaginatively creating a landscape in which to grieve for a person who did not exist. The affective weather helps to present Eliot in a specific manner, the additional information of nearby graves in Highgate cemetery creates attachments and links to demonstrate Eliot's significance, and the head-high cow parsley and ivy loom over the grave, casting an obscuring shadow. However, as noted, understanding the deceased is aided when they are intimate with the specific place described to represent sufficiently and mourn them in context.

Without knowledge of the place, it is an unknown setting that cannot offer emotional certainty or security; shared details of Eliot's resting place could not be identified by her or presented as familiar to her long after her burial. This again reinforces a separation between the speaker and Eliot at the graveside. Therefore, whilst place is vital to the mode of elegy, a poetic landscape can be generated by the emotional processes found within the act of mourning to create an abstracted scene which resembles reality; a setting for a mood or emotion rather than a physical location. For instance, Clampitt's knowledge of New England enables her to mourn both Louise Dickinson Rich and Ernest Woodward. However, whilst she is unable to create common ground with Eliot herself, she can engage with the place of burial by acknowledging its wider comforting social significance. Therefore, we see that mutual locations or settings can be found through various means: a search which helps to enrich the affective content of elegy as the mourner is actively engaged with the process of understanding their connection to the deceased.

1.2.2. Robert Lowell's movement in landscape in 'Sailing Home from Rapallo'

Robert Lowell's poem for his mother 'Sailing Home from Rapallo', written in February 1954 and published in *Life Studies* (1959), physically and metaphysically travels from the Italian coast of the Gulf of Genoa, the unfamiliar site of death, to the familiar family cemetery in Dunbarton, New Hampshire. Not only does this journey repatriate his mother's body — returning her to a known place of rest — it crosses thresholds, the familiar and unfamiliar as it searches for understanding. In doing so, it creates a notable landscape of mourning, seeking comfort and understanding in both locations. In this respect, 'Sailing Home from Rapallo' not only challenges the purported elegiac tradition,

but it also stands apart from the separate strand of anti-elegy which is proposed by Jahan Ramazani.[17]

Lowell's opening acknowledges the separation between himself and his deceased mother:

> Your nurse could only speak Italian,
>
> but after twenty minutes I could imagine your final week,
>
> and tears ran down my cheeks. . . . (*RLCP,* 179)

The Italian words of Lowell's mother's nurse exist beyond the language of the poem, an unknowable fact which is not translated to the reader nor present for them to translate themselves; and yet the communication is still strong enough to enable Lowell to imagine his mother's last moments. Whilst the specifics of her death are not expanded upon in the poem, they still cause Lowell to cry; the emotional significance of the moment is enough, even without clear communication. The unifying potential of the 'unspoken' language is present aurally in the poem through the half rhyme of 'week' and 'cheeks', creating a moment of poetic connection which aspires towards an unachievable harmony, embodied in the rhyme's near perfection. These three lines construct and resolve a separation of emotions in an unfamiliar place, initiating the possibility for unity between the known and unknown to be achieved later in the elegy.

However, the ellipsis at the end of the verse paragraph shows that there is no completion, that there is something more to come that is not yet being considered, that the emotional process of these lines, whilst moving the speaker, do not wholly approach

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[17] See the discussion on 'Anti-elegy' in Introduction: pp. 13-15.

the reality of death. Rather than being an aspect of Ramazani's anti-consolatory 'family elegy', Lowell still initiates an emotional reaction which is quickly moved on from, as if keeping some of his mourning personal or unspoken due to fear of failure or judgement.[18] The trailing off from the first verse paragraph aids the change of place and tone in the second verse paragraph. The emotional stunting demonstrated by the ellipsis is initiated by the incomprehensible, in which the initiation of understanding and reconceptualising the world in the light of the death is constrained by language barriers. Lowell himself does not bypass this issue in the poem, and thus restarts the mourning in the second verse paragraph in an attempt to approach the death of his mother from a new direction. However, the movement beyond the opening verse paragraph is vital to the rest of the poem as it embodies the necessity for some form of travel to progress the poem emotionally, demonstrating the mourner's need for familiarity. The poem's rejection does not embody the 'denouncing, mocking, ravaging' nor expose his mother in 'stunning poetic acts of confrontation' which Ramazani identifies as present in other parental elegies.[19] Lowell's approach sets up the rest of the poem to work through grief in a communal resting place which is known to both the deceased and mourner. Whilst there is physical and metaphysical distance, each is seen as an obstacle to overcome rather than the start of antagonism or anger, difficulties which can be approached from a different direction. In attempting to encapsulate the situation, Lowell's internal conflict does not take over the poem. Instead, the world is reframed, approached from a different direction within a changing landscape, moving away from the anger expected by Ramazani in his taxonomy of family elegy.

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[18] For more on the family elegy, see Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning,* pp. 216-261; 293-333.
[19] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 222.

The initial rooting of the poem in the unfamiliar landscape of the Gulf of Genoa

relates not only to the location of his mother's death in Rapallo, but it also helps to

embody both a separation between Lowell and his mother and the role of movement in

presenting grief. Rather than showing this distance is traversable through translation,

Lowell has to learn of her death over time, slowly composing a mental image of her final

week. The setting of the poem helps to embody the divide between life and death;

landscape and distance appear to be, in that moment, interlinked. However, within the

quote we can also see the process of grief through the temporal development of the

second line which conveys an accumulation of emotion and the way elements of an

elegy's form can influence the expression of grief as the tercet drifts off through the

ellipsis.

In the next verse paragraph, the poem starts to travel from the Italian coast to

the familiar family cemetery, generating a detailed landscape of the shoreline as it

embarks. This journey is not just one of repatriation or return, it is also a symbolic

crossing from life to afterlife, one which the mourner and deceased are undertaking

physically together and metaphysically apart. As readers, we are abruptly reminded of

this separation through the description of the shoreline which:

> was breaking into fiery flower.
>
> The crazy yellow and azure sea-sleds
>
> blasting like jack-hammers across
>
> the *spumante*-bubbling wake of our liner. (*RLCP,* 179)

The landscape depicted is actively changing after the death of Lowell's mother, 'the

whole shoreline' breaking, blasting, and bubbling (*RLCP*, 179). Here, the threshold

between life and death becomes fully realised through the poetry, with the overwhelming focus on natural beauty seeming almost perverse given the context. Jahan Ramazani detects 'a troubled joy in the violent, even exuberant descriptions of the shoreline', seeming 'more like a celebration than a mourning procession'.[20] The celebrations trivialise the landscape of the poem, with the natural beauty of the Italian coast distracting from the crossing of a clearly significant divide with the speaker's mother's body and diminishing the emotional significance of her death. Without any external mourners, the speaker is empowered to corrupt the landscape, desiring pleasure instead of seeking to understand their loss. The confidence and beauty found in the landscape here is not sustainable, as evidenced by the eventual trailing off of the verse paragraph: breaking down as the jokes and evasions do not minimise the situation, nor does the beauty assuage grief. The speaker's mother is dead and the reality of this has still not been fully realised nor approached. Instead, the flaming flowers and intoxicating wake are overwhelming the sense of grief. Whether this be through fear of accepting and processing the death, or because of 'feelings of satisfaction and even exhilaration', the poem and its grief are impeded, compounded by a beautiful ambivalent landscape which is of pleasure rather than death.[21] Instead of looking to relearn the world, the speaker is distracted by the world around them, focussing on enjoying their experience to avoid recognising the changes. This demonstrates the expansive role of landscape in elegy, disrupting any assumptions around its purely redemptive or emotional potential and instead emphasising its role in individual expression of grief experience.

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[20] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 239.
[21] Allan Hugh Cole Jr, 'A Poetic Path from Melancholy to Mourning: Robert Lowell's Elegies as Case Studies', *Pastoral Psychology,* 54:2 (2005) p. 122.

Like Clampitt in 'Highgate Cemetery', Lowell searches for a shared and accessible resting place to mourn. As the focus of the poem is the transportation of his mother's body to the family cemetery in Dunbarton, New Hampshire, it emotionally and physically connects her to her resting place rather than her place of death. Doing so provides momentum towards her burial within the third verse paragraph, with the perspective of place altering due to the representative demands of the poem. Unlike in Clampitt's elegy for Eliot, Dunbarton is known to be familiar to his mother as it contains the final resting place of other family members, some of whom are referenced in other poems (*RLCP*, 168-69; 23-25; 26-27). Consequently, the graveyard has familial emotional significance which influences the mourning process. The wishful transition from the deck of a boat sailing through the Mediterranean to Dunbarton comes about in a single sentence, quickly crossing the threshold from enjoying life to accepting death, presenting a world devoid of colour and life. Imaginatively, Lowell transports his mother through the uncertainty of the ongoing journey, escaping some of the already discussed complications, and to a place of mourning by equating the situations; the lounging passengers are likened to his deceased family members. As a passive procession of mourners, they support the unreal geographic shift to occur without outwardly rejecting or dismantling the European scene which serves as an idealised physical realm, converse to the cold reality of the North American burial ground. However, the two landscapes are not mutually exclusive.

Within the familiar graveyard, Lowell can imagine conditions in detail:

> The graveyard's soil was changing to stone —
> so many of its deaths had been midwinter.
> Dour and dark against the blinding snowdrifts,

its black brook and fir trunks were as smooth as masts.

A fence of iron spear-hafts

black-bordered its mostly Colonial grave-slates. (*RLCP,* 179)

Dunbarton itself is central to the whole description. The mid-New Hampshire graveyard

is set in a seemingly endless winter, not only casting the scene in a cold aura which

alters the ground itself, but also providing a juxtaposition with the 'fiery flower' of the

Italian coast previously described. The familiar soil acts in part as a metaphorical

headstone, providing a static memorial within nature which exists alongside the mostly

Colonial grave-slates. Emphasised by the dash, 'the graveyard's soil' — the literal

ground of the poem here — is significant, with punctuation causing the poem to pause

for an extra moment in a manner which physically alters the page whilst also

transporting thought from the symbols themselves to what is being remembered — the

dead who are laid to rest in the soil. Consequently, the ground within the cemetery is

elevated in stature and emphasised above other aspects of the scene, celebrating the

deceased it contains; the speaker's mother is seemingly more important now she is

buried alongside their esteemed ancestors. The focus on the ground itself presents a

unique attachment of the Dunbarton graveyard, which is important within the poem,

emphasising the importance of natural physical markers compared to the 'Colonial

grave-slates' and 'unweathered pink-veined slice of marble' which seem passively to

signify resting places (*RLCP,* 179). Unlike any of the previous descriptions within the

poem, the graveyard requires intimate knowledge of the location to access any of its

affective content for Lowell's family. Whilst it seems to be static, unwilling to be broken

or understood, Lowell's visit to the graveyard creates the potential for reconsidering or

relearning the place as his family has done before for other family members. The Italian

coastline he has moved away from is unable to provide any of this; some elements of emotive support are linked to place. Lowell continues the mourning process after transporting it to New England as he re-conceptualises his understanding of family heritage through the communal aspects of mourning which connect himself, his mother and the traditions which he has been told to value.

The poem does not follow traditional British or American elegiac myths, such as those outlined by Sacks and discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, nor does it extend a line of American puritan elegy, instead focusing upon Lowell's own family history.[22] There is not a larger cultural process which helps to progress the mourning. Instead, the poem moves in a personal and subdued manner, rejecting any pomp in favour of ritual in the search for understanding. Lowell is thus unable to do anything but face his lineage, especially in a place which is so intimately associated with his family. It forces him to consider his own mortality as he will one day join these ranks, relearning his own self whilst burying his mother. Each of the deceased becomes just a number, one of 'twenty or thirty Winslows and Starks' who are now lined up in front of Lowell (*RLCP,* 180). However, instead of forming a procession of mourners who welcome in his mother, they are static observers, with their presence highlighted by a 'frost' which underlines their inexact numbers as their judgement is shown to be hard and sharp in its 'diamond edge' (*RLCP,* 180). There is no progress beyond this cursory overview as Lowell moves on from the graveyard through the ellipsis, retreating from a premature visit to the land of the dead. Unlike the other occurrences of the ellipsis, it does come after a moment of actual reassurance, initiated by the location, with Dunbarton

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[22] For more on the Puritan elegy see Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) pp. 33-80; Jeffrey Hammond, 'New World Frontiers: The American Puritan Elegy', *The Oxford Handbook of Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 206-223.

providing certainty in a manner which the rest of the poem has not done. However, this landscape is not consolatory or redemptive. In imaginatively transporting both to his mother's resting place before they physically arrive, the speaker can initiate her into the known list of deceased individuals within their family, imaginatively laying her within their ranks whilst really letting her coffin travel as he enjoys the view. The familiar landscape is required for him to accurately represent her resting place, a place they shared and experienced together, to rectify any separation between them which may have occurred in life.

Furthermore, the importance of this personal transportation is emphasised by the final verse paragraph in which reality does not provide any moments of consolation:

> In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother's coffin,
>
> *Lowell* had been misspelled *LOVEL*.
>
> The corpse
>
> was wrapped like *panettone* in Italian tinfoil. (*RLCP,* 180)

This journey is forever foreign to his mother, with her name misspelt, creating an inaccurate representation of her life because of her death. Whilst the incorrect surname 'LOVEL' contains *love*, the emotion is only present in and due to a mistake; the actual passage can only attempt to force an emotional connection between mother and son as it moves to another place. Furthermore, the error is one of understanding across languages, compounding the opening confusion of the speaker as they struggle to comprehend what happened in Italian. The graveyard in Dunbarton, shrouded in a constant cold which invades every inch of landscape, provides a link for grief, with its specificities familiar to both participants. Whilst none of the graveyard's features are

extremely affectionate to his mother, they are all descriptions of a real place which provide certainty and familiarity, helping the speaker to process the death and reconstitute their world view in respect to it through familial traditions. Dunbarton is, however, a world resistant to relearning, relentless in its fixity, shown to be frozen and bordered.

As part of a larger process, 'Sailing Home from Rapallo' appears to capture Lowell's initial reaction, with the journey being one of him also coming to terms with his mother's death. Whilst the poem progresses emotion, transitioning the focus to attach the emotion to a shared location aids the reaction and response, there is no culmination which settles the feelings and moves beyond them. Instead, the poem ends with emotion in stasis as his mother is still transported; time progressing as the reaction and response are paused. Whilst seemingly paradoxical, it embodies the relentless movement of time which frames the grief experience, with the deceased left behind as the present always moves further from their death. The psychological movement to Dunbarton initiated by Lowell offers a chance at relearning the world after her death, but it does not yet reflect the reality of the body which is still in transit. Therefore, the poem cannot move beyond the moment of death; continuation is currently too far from reality.

With a disconnection between Lowell and his mother, the attempt at keeping his mother and his grief fresh, wrapping her body 'like *panettone* in Italian tinfoil', appears crass, but is an attempt at containing her in order to mourn at a later date in a different place (*RLCP,* 180). Unlike some traditional elegies, which were touched upon in the introduction, the poem does not attempt to be complete, with the ending leaving itself in an uncertain place, waiting to open the coffin when it reaches America and finally

complete the burial process and as a result symbolically end the mourning process. This is notable through the poem's lack of references or associations with traditional mourning practices beyond the grave-slates, subverting expectations about elegy without rejecting the mode itself. Rather than initiating the known elegiac rituals the poem is intensely personal, operating on a continued level of openness which desires to relearn the world but cannot yet do so. Whilst this is usually passed off as part of the beginning of the confessional movement, it is equally a revised element of the search for understanding within elegy. Rather than relying on traditional imagery to reach an accepted moment of success, like the rising sun or pastoral mode, Lowell is acknowledging challenges in the elegiac process and attempting to navigate it in his own manner. This explains the anti-climactic ending which does not settle the state of his emotions, wrapping them to be revisited in other elegies.

In this respect, Lowell's elegiac strategy continues in such later poems as 'Mother, 1972', 'Mother and Father 1', 'Mother and Father 2' and 'To Mother' (*RLCP,* 512; 511; 789-90) which approach the death of his mother from multiple angles and to which we will return later in this thesis.[23] Rather than depicting grief as simple or linear, Lowell extends grief over these several poems, reflecting a complex negotiation in search of meaning rather than a singular experience as he slowly relearns the world. Grieving within multiple elegies interacts with claims of both elegiac failure and the rise of the anti-elegy, each of which ignore the positive attempts at understanding made in these elegies to focus on the individual poem in isolation; notably overlooking the cumulative representation of the deceased and the time needed to process one's emotions. Whilst its positioning is harder to identify alone, being part of a whole

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[23] See pp. 145-152.

movement through mourning, this does not mean we should settle for the easiest explanation; Lowell himself leaves the poem and its content open to further consideration within its final lines. An incomplete insight into relearning the world, the poem depicts elements of grief reaction when trying to understand the experience of his mother as she died, oscillating between the experiences of passengers on the boat and confronting death, and grief response as the speaker engages with their wider familial assumptions about the graveyard.

1.2.3. A changing landscape in Anne Stevenson's 'Willow Song'

As has been demonstrated through 'Sailing Home to Rapallo' and Clampitt's elegies, knowledge of a place is important when relying on it to mourn an individual. Movement in Lowell's poem structures the experience in an unreal manner, enabling him to attempt representation in a controlled environment. This ensures that a future elegy is needed to mourn his mother again; a demand which Lowell meets. Within the mutual experiences there is a connection with the deceased which cannot be imagined; a shared landscape holds emotional significance beyond ideas. However, a more abstract and generic landscape can provide progress to the mourning process, as evident in Anne Stevenson's elegy, 'Willow Song', written in memory of friend and fellow poet Frances Horovitz and published in *The Fiction-Makers* (1985). Stevenson's highly structured ballad relies on the affective capacity of landscape to appreciate the experiences of grief, implicitly approaching the emotional turmoil through absence and negative potential. This does not attempt to move beyond mourning, but instead acknowledges and memorialises the scale of the process. In doing so, Stevenson is approaching the mode of elegy in a novel manner, one which demonstrates its broad scale and the overall importance of understanding in the process of reconceptualising the world due to death.

The poem opens with an absence, one in which a human-altered landscape is presented and then denied: 'I went down to the railway | But the railway wasn't there' (*ASP,* 378). Whilst the lack of industrial manipulation of the landscape appears elegiacally hopeful, hinting towards a pastoral world, it is not what the speaker expects and is thus a disappointment. The absence here is subsequently reiterated at the start of the first stanzas, in which the antithetic parallelism emphasises the opposition of the lines; there is no escape from the emptiness. Tim Kendall identifies that 'absence becomes the structural principle' of the poem, so central that it extends to both form and content.[24] The possibilities created by and within the absence influence the emotive process of the poem by creating two separate worlds, one of the experiences encountered in the poem and the other hoped for in possibility; landscapes of life and death respectively. The landscape of life, whilst spoiled, is filled with nature:

> A hill of slag lay in its course
>
> With pennycress and cocklebur
>
> And thistles bristling with fur.
>
> But ragweed, dock and bitter may
>
> and hawkbit in the hollow
>
> Were as nothing to the rose bay, (*ASP,* 378)

The industrial wasteland has been overgrown, with the speaker listing a litany of flowers in an attempt not only to create a memorial in the landscape, as asserted by Kendall, nor to cover the grave nor conceal the death, but to appreciate the deceased; a

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[24] Tim Kendall, ''Time Will Erase': Anne Stevenson and Elegy', *Critical Essays on Anne Stevenson*, ed. Angela Leighton, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) p. 212.

creation of witnesses which mourn for Horovitz through nature, acknowledging the corrupted landscape whilst still finding moments of beauty.[25] There is no emotional capitulation to grief but a measured steadfastness, found in the strict stanza and metrical form, which appreciates the harshness of death whilst still finding comfort. The landscape is cruelly ambivalent and yet still reassuring in its certainty. This is further emphasised by the flowers of the final stanza which grow out of fire, reborn and yet withered. This is not a triumphant landscape of life, but instead one which appreciates the stubborn resilience of nature, finding comfort in the blooms. They are recognised as not being eternal, not seeking to reject the speaker's own mortality and are thus not idealised. Instead, they are emblematic of a realistic alternative to the tantalising potential offered by the absence, one in which the frailties and destruction of life are respected because they are certain and tangible, can be experienced and can die.

The remembered scenes of the opening lines create a cast of alternate landscapes in which the deceased and poet can be together. However, some create an unreal land of death in which the idealised elements are also those which bring about annihilation: 'A long scar lay across the waste | Bound up with vetch and maidenhair' (*ASP,* 378). Within this, the role of imagined landscapes for elegy is demonstrated, a setting to embody grief, alongside the impenetrability of death which is obscured by nature. The railway of the opening stanza provides the opportunity to escape the place, to travel through and beyond together as a means of escaping the presence of death. Unknowable, specificities of the landscape are not described, ensuring that it is a place of unlimited potential which promises unlimited comfort and support in exchange for embracing its unknowability. This ineffability is furthered in the second and third stanzas in which the

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[25] Kendall, ''Time Will Erase': Anne Stevenson and Elegy', p. 212;
Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 224.

possible place contains both a 'river' and their 'love' (*ASP,* 378). These elements are presented in their unreal world in which absence is both destructive and a site of unlimited potential.

The possibilities are the foundation of idealised realities that can be imagined and desired, an eternal utopia which rejects death. Whilst the yearnings for nature and the pastoral bliss, signified through the river, are not overly destructive — distractions from grief rather than inhibitions of it — the continual seeking of love by the speaker is damaging due to the futility of the desired emotional connection; embracing absence rather than working through grief becomes its solution. This alternative is continually idealised through both the irregular rhyme scheme and para-rhymes for 'willow', 'yarrow', 'hollow', 'yellow' and 'snow' in which the sense of 'sorrow' echoes.[26] The aural and aesthetic imperfections create a familiarity between ideas which could be improved upon in an alternate world, making the empty landscape even more attractive through the very structure of the poem because it offers the possibility of perfection, an idea which is appealing to both reader and poet. A lack of certainty within landscape is also shown to be dangerous, with the remembered hemlock of stanza four being a toxic warning to the potential properties of this idealised place: 'O I remember summer | When the hemlock was in leaf' (*ASP,* 378). Furthermore, repeated absences are not clarified in the poem due to the unquantifiable properties of nothingness; life cannot be re-conceptualised in this absence, only destroyed. As such, there is no affective content beyond the idealised promise which is so tantalising. Whilst this seems to reject a relearning of the world, 'Willow Song' is representing an aspect of grief experience. This is evident in the fact that it is not Stevenson's only poem for Horovitz.

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[26] Angela Leighton, 'Introduction', *Critical Essays on Anne Stevenson*, ed. Angela Leighton, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) p. 13.

The poem, unable to imagine, communicates or translates the unknowable world of death, thus demonstrating the importance of life. Whilst the natural world is ambivalent to the loss, not symbolically reacting to the death, it exists, providing the potential for processing grief rather than annihilating everything. Absence is thus shown to be the worst outcome. Through this, the idealisation of reality is also demonstrated as limited, with the poem embracing the uncomfortable truths of modern life and 'grieving a lost industrial heritage as well as the natural landscape which it scarred.'[27] There is no overwhelming moment of relief in the poem, nor an emotive breakthrough, but instead an acceptance of life and its difficulties because they are tangible. Within this acceptance, though, the possibility of emotive progression is teased, found within the implication of natural cycles: 'And bright weeds blew away | In cloudy wreaths of summer snow' (*ASP,* 379). However, the natural cycles seem to have broken down, with the seasonal weather disrupted and turned into an unfamiliar experience by the landscape; the snow is blossom. Consequently, the failure of nature is imagined, experienced by the mourning poet without being part of a changed reality; the physical known world provides more support than that of absence. As a reader, we are certain of the natural cycles, with the seasonal reference implying them to exist within the poem and thus suggesting an eventual progression; relearning will come. Whilst it may be unusual, uncomfortable or unwelcome, the ambivalent certainty of change is reassuring, especially due to the alternate nothingness of the poem.

With nature blooming at sites of destruction, Stevenson's poem seems more aware of the active relearning which goes on in grief experience. Landscape here is much more

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[27] Leighton, *On Form*, p. 223.

emblematic than literal, the metaphorical associations bringing with them emotions. Named or implied locations help to place the poem, offering physical certainty in the uncertain experience of grief. In this, they also help to represent the deceased, providing images which are familiar to both speaker and subject. These act as an anchor, attaching the deceased to the world after their death and providing a site of mourning which can be visited. Familiarity, however, does not assuage grief. Instead, topographical knowledge helps to create a landscape in which mourning can take place.

1.3. 'With frost on their backs' — The affective role of landscape

As we have seen so far in the chapter, landscape does not only have a role in representing the deceased, but it also has the potential to be used to depict grief and participate in a relearning of the world. The following section will go beyond viewing landscape as merely a setting for elegy, now considering its affective role in the expression of grief reaction and response. We will be focussing on how it can be utilised to evoke emotion and embody grief, and how this subsequently intensifies the particularised role of landscape in elegy.

1.3.1. Ted Hughes's grieving landscape in 'The day he died'

The active role that landscape can play in the grieving process is embodied in 'The day he died', Ted Hughes' elegy for his father-in-law, Jack Orchard, which was written the day after Orchard's death and published initially in *Moortown* (1979) before being worked into the revised sequence of these farming poems, *Moortown Diary* (1989) (*THCP,* 533).[28] In the poem, Orchard, a farmer and thus in part custodian of the land, is

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[28] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, (London: William Collins, 2015) p. 343.

memorialised by Hughes as nature struggles to comprehend his death. Rather than being unfamiliar to Hughes, the location and deceased are both closely related to him as he worked on the farm alongside Orchard, viewing the latter as a mentor. Hughes views Orchard as a farmer first and foremost and as such a man of the land. In his notes to the subsequent poem in *Moortown Diary*, 'A monument', Hughes describes Orchard as belonging to the tradition of farmers 'who seem equal to any job, any crisis, using the most primitive means, adapting and improvising.'[29] After Orchard's death, Hughes realised that, as Jonathan Bate puts it, the 'dream of farmer Ted had come to an abrupt end', producing a personal second loss.[30] This intense familiarity and layered personal loss heightens the emotion of the poem and through its exploration we can consider how relearning the world through landscape is altered by familiarity, alongside performing a wider reading of landscape in elegy.

Throughout the poem, all of nature is personified to mourn actively, with the speaker's voice merging into the landscape as every aspect of the poem is intricately interconnected. The title and opening line of the poem, 'The day he died', is an unfiltered acceptance of Orchard's death. An abrupt introduction which creates clear expectations, the poem continues from the title with the emotive scene set, already accepting death as a fact of the poem and the landscape in which it is set. This establishes a voice within the poem which provides an overview of the day Orchard died, helping to maintain a personal connection throughout the verse paragraphs as the range of mourning expands into the natural world. There is no separation between the title and verse paragraph as the lack of punctuation encourages the reader to flow from the title

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[29] Ted Hughes, *Moortown Diary*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) p. 67. Hughes revised the sequence of *Moortown* (1979) for this later version, moving 'A monument' from two poems before 'The day he died' to locate it immediately after his elegy to Orchard, highlighting the relationship between the two poems.
[30] Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life,* p. 329.

straight into the poem, impatiently progressing the recognition of grief despite the structure. The blunt declarative of the title is both shocking and liberating as it removes the expectation of intense emotion, at least from the voice of the poem, and creates a cold, unemotive atmosphere, against which the personified landscape can be compared. The harsh tone ensures that the poem opens without seeming sentimental, charging the poem with a short snap of resignation which indicates that Hughes himself is not yet able to mourn. This is then contrasted by the subsequent lines, which pass by smoothly whilst demanding new understanding and new confidence. The elegy continues without confronting the declaration of the title because the world itself has changed and must process this change.

Landscape itself is the main entity which mourns Orchard, through which the speaker comes to mourn him too by the changes it undergoes, and the emotional characteristics embodied by the land as it reacts and responds to Orchard's death. Following from the recognition of death, the day 'Was the silkiest day of the young year, | The first reconnaissance of the real spring, | The first confidence of the sun' (*THCP,* 533). The superlative adjective used presents the day as the smoothest of the year, passing easily through fingers as it appears to cover Orchard in a soft and comforting manner, whilst also separating the day into one which is shrouded, unfamiliar and somehow unreal. With silk covering the day, Orchard's body is also covered; the landscape is aware of his death and already adjusting to mourn him from the moment he dies. Additionally, the day is being relearnt, not only due to Orchard's death but also due to seasonal change. Filled with life and potential, the depiction of the day is intensely hopeful, heightening the sense of loss which is subsequently uncovered by processing his death:

That was yesterday. Last night, frost.

And as hard as any of all winter.

Mars and Saturn and the Moon dangling in a bunch

On the hard, littered sky. (*THCP,* 533)

Whilst spring's confident resurgence is fecund and hopeful, relying on positive pastoral images of the spring and sun, the sudden frost replaces the smooth covering and blankets the landscape with a cold shroud. However, rather than resting on the landscape, the frost is part of it, clearly connecting the landscape and death. Iain Twiddy captures the shift between these verse paragraphs, linking the poem to elegiac tradition: 'Hughes reverses the pastoral elegy trope of overcoming grief as the progression from death to rebirth, by beginning with rebirth on the day of death and falling into the absence of life in winter.'[31] By reversing the natural cycle, the poem is playing with the transitional stages of life in which there is no clear definition. This not only emphasises the sudden changes to the capability of the landscape which are caused by Orchard's death — including its failed reconnaissance of spring and seemingly lost confidence — but also to challenge the presentation of consoling tropes; we only find reassurance in the cycle because of the vital stages and thus their presence helps to amplify the death. Loss is shown to be directly related to the land, which has its hope frosted over, harshly killing any shoots, and resetting the natural progress, which is implied in the opening verse paragraph. In the opening we have seen a glimpse of what Orchard gave the land and how it functioned when he was alive and thus the sudden reversal after his death emphasises and enhances the ways in which it has changed the world: a lapse caused by

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[31] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p. 67.

instantaneous reactions. Furthermore, the regression of nature initiates a review of Orchard's influence on the landscape by the land itself as it searches for a way to reach the previous point to revive him. This emphasises Orchard's impact on the land, honouring his actions as custodian and farmer, whilst also demonstrating the fact that it must continue without him, and that even through difficulty it will do: 'From now on the land | Will have to manage without him' (*THCP,* 533).

Before being able to progress, the landscape must consider how it comprehends Orchard's death, re-orientating its position in the world as a result. Hughes, with his lifelong interest in astrology, looks towards the positions of the planets for understanding: 'Mars and Saturn and the Moon dangling in a bunch | On the hard, littered sky' (*THCP* 533). Not only does this enlarge the scale of the impact of Orchard's death, going beyond Earth to influence Mars, Saturn and the Moon, but it also offers up a reading which provides a possible explanation which could create comfort or relief. Furthermore, the day after his death — 'Today is Valentine's day' — is specified to provide a definite point for the poem which links directly to Orchard's death, and an association to the cultural celebration of love with which his passing is complicatedly intertwined; the land finds his death so hard to bear because it not only relied on him but loved him too. Therefore, the cruel irony of celebrating this agrarian relationship after he has died is not lost in the poem as it revels in the connection which has caused the landscape's grief. Love is a cause of pain and Hughes is not afraid of confronting this complexity through the personified land, even if its acknowledgement is fleeting.

By placing the poem in February, the seasonal cycles are also contextualised. We see that the liminal seasons are not only emblematic of grief, but also a natural fact of the changing seasons with moments of crossover which complicate any clear distinctions. It is not as simple as Twiddy's nod towards the pastoral elegiac tradition.

Instead, it is part of the need for an expression of mourning which captures aspects of natural life even if they may not line up with consoling images, recording grief and the landscape as it was. The complicated cycle is therefore a representation of not only the emotive difficulties, but also natural facts which are part of seasonal change. Through this, we see the landscape react in a way which encapsulates the complexities of mourning without confronting the human difficulties of emotion, being natural rather than magical. It does not have clear emotional outbursts as it aligns itself with elegiac myths, the landscape frozen and seemingly stunned whilst trying to comprehend what Orchard's death means for it. As such, the poem reaches out into the landscape to try and say it as it is, with the reader finding support within the natural complexity and a continual mourning process. With reality in the poem shifting, the world needs to be reconceptualised due to the death.

Rather than opposing the natural cycle or breaking the intimate connection with the natural world, we experience the emotional difficulty which occurs as the landscape reacts to Orchard's death:

> Earth toast-crisp. The snowdrops battered.
>
> Thrushes spluttering. Pigeons gingerly
>
> Rubbing their voices together, in stinging cold.
>
> Crows creaking, and clumsily
>
> Cracking loose. (*THCP,* 533)

The beauty of the land has been battered down by his death, with the delicate and innocent snowdrops pushed from their bowed stance into the ground as they are unable to survive in the new landscape. Associated with the British spring, the world in the

aftermath of Orchard's death is not suitable for them, even in fulfilling the elegiac traditional role of flowers. Rather than relying on this image to start the process of reconciliation, Hughes dismisses it as in keeping with the natural setting; the reassuring pastoral elements are unsustainable. This is a clear example of the poem following the rules of landscape rather than following elegiac tropes, rejecting them without commenting on their effectiveness. Even though the poem disregards these aspects, its effect is not to express anger at the process of grief, but instead to represent the world as a harsher and more unforgiving place without the protection of Orchard. There is a conflict within the poem as nature itself battles with the seasonal cycle which is forcing it to progress and move on past its desire to mourn, detaching the emotive processes from the pastoral pattern. As such, the birds are unable to sing, thrushes 'spluttering' and crows 'creaking'. This is emblematic of an inability to articulate grief, even when it is expected, providing no progress in reconstructing the world. As cultural mourning practices and expectations have no influence upon the birds, they do not feel pressured into vocalising their emotions before they have fully processed them. The birds are shown only to sing what they feel capable of, something which nature accepts, demonstrating a difference between humans and nature due to the lack of expectation of behaviour after bereavement. The poem's iterative process of revealing nature's emotion does not provide us with a conclusion, each individual attempt at birdsong an isolated and unknowable expression of grief. Here, Hughes is presenting the landscape accepting the difficulties of mourning without needing a specific instance to progress; the poem looks elsewhere for other parts of the grieving process. It is a subtle way of considering the restraints of grief, especially that which is expected to free flow, without making a bold statement which dismantles any elegiac traditions. As such, the landscape is able to mourn in a way which people cannot, at least not when openly projecting their

grief due to the weighted expectation of a complete process.

Given the context and intense emotional reaction of the land so far, we expect that the landscape is not only familiar for him, but is of his farm, with the mourning natural features all reacting directly to his death rather than reflecting the mood of the poem. This is because, for nature itself to mourn in a manner which seems related to the deceased, it seems as though it must have the personal attachment that we expect with grief. Twiddy states that 'this elegy concerns the movement from intimate involvement with nature to separation from it,' pointing towards an alteration of what we may expect in elegy as the poem generates a separation between Orchard and his farm as a means of accepting his death in order to re-orientate the world.[32] Within the poem there is a sudden level of confusion, with the fields dazed and changed: 'They have been somewhere awful | And come back without him' (*THCP,* 533). Where the fields have been is deliberately vague, only 'somewhere awful' rather than a precise encapsulation of their emotional experience. However, it clearly shows the landscape experiencing the loss. This acknowledges the breadth of grief experience, whilst also metaphorically recognising the change which occurs during loss, having movement represent the emotional reactions and responses of grief. Forever 'dazed' and changed because of loss, the landscape is shown to need to relearn the world alongside other mourners now Orchard is dead.

'The trustful cattle, with frost on their backs, | Waiting for hay, waiting for warmth,' are childlike and innocent, unaware yet of the death and thus have not adapted to his absence (*THCP,* 533). Orchard's role as their carer seems not to have yet been replaced, though there appears to be a natural trust that it will be. As such, we are

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[32] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 176.

confident that the sun will clear the frost off their backs and warm them up, and that someone will come to give them hay as the farm continues to be worked. As part of this wider system, from which Orchard is now separated, we get a sense of comforting normality as his farm carries on, changed but still working. This demonstrates continuity through reconceptualising the world after death as vital responsibilities are shown to need to be replaced. However, amalgamating with the other images of cycles, the poem struggles with the need to accept that Orchard is gone and yet life will continue. As things become new, they move on and as such the specific place does not remain the same.

Within 'the day he died', Hughes anthropomorphises the landscape, creating not only a vessel for his own mourning but conveying intense grief from the land itself due to its bond with Orchard. Focusing on the emotional state of landscape, it becomes imbued with a sense of loss which we believe to be solely human, even though it does not undertake a complete transformation to take a human form. It can mourn and contain the representations of Hughes' grief without becoming a human.

1.3.2. Returning to a site of mourning in Anne Stevenson's 'Orcop'

Within 'Orcop', another of Anne Stevenson's elegies for her friend and fellow poet Frances Horovitz alongside 'Willow Song', the place itself contains images of loss due to the traditional features of both poetry and culture, helping to set the tone of the poem and Stevenson's emotions. Association both initiates the elegy and is used to mourn an individual specifically and familiarly by providing images and ideas that are in some way related to the deceased. Furthermore, the way Stevenson interacts with the public and private space to generate two distinct landscapes which seem to act in layers is an

important consideration as it demonstrates the importance of a familiar and particularised landscape, even within a more generic setting such as the graveyard found in the poem.

The title 'Orcop' is already an identifier of location, but Stevenson ensures that there is no uncertainty by detailing her drive towards the Herefordshire village, moving towards the location of mourning within the poem and as such transporting the reader to a place adjacent to death:

> Driving south from Hereford one day in March
>
> memorable for trickling piles of snow, with sideshows,
>
> drift upon drift of snowdrops lapping the hedgerows,
>
> we sighted the signpost, and on impulse, turned up
>
> the winding, vertical road to Orcop. The church
>
> further away from the village than I remembered, (*SM,* 41)

A scene of English countryside in late winter is peacefully passed through until a sudden urge, buried in an aside in the middle of a line, takes over every aspect of the poem. Ascending to the village is also a movement of the text from life to death, to an upper plane which is usually associated with the afterlife, abstracting the poem from reality. Whilst elegists traditionally have the deceased ascend before they can 'move on', here Stevenson is herself ascending to re-visit the grave of her friend, having to travel further than she remembered needing to before. Therefore, the poem is attempting to re-enter the realm of death through choice, even if it was impulsive, having to move through the landscape to reach it. Clearly, the poem is not brought on by overwhelming grief of a sudden loss, it is caused by an instantaneous desire to revisit Horovitz which creates

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urgency to reach a suitable place to mourn, intensifying the previously serene scene. As such, the church comes directly after the decision to visit Orcop, emphasising the reason for the speaker's visit and putting the elegiac nature of the poem beyond doubt whilst also connecting Stevenson with the shift of Horovitz's grave. However, it is further away than remembered, emphasising an increased separation between mourner and the deceased.

The movement in the landscape breaks the prior descriptive content with not only an aside which subsequently causes another caesura but also the sudden full stop as the need to mourn demands a sudden shift to a place in which it can do so, imposing an elegiac vision upon the piling of snow and copious snowdrops as the poem moves through the English countryside. This is representative of the way in which grief can suddenly overwhelm, even after time has passed, distracting the focus of 'Orcop' from its initial description of a rural spring landscape to the church, leading the poem to seek out an appropriate place in which to mourn. With its traditional religious associations, and the fact that Horovitz is buried at Orcop, the church presents a conspicuous site of mourning, even if visiting it is only initiated by an 'impulse'. Its presence in the poem is therefore crucial to the process of remembering, not only linking the poem to Christian funeral practices and its wider consolatory system, and to the location formally associated with her memory, but also to previous elegies like Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.' The unexpressed importance of the church is therefore why it receives so much focus in the poem, offering as it does a seemingly perfect setting for the elegy due to the religious and personal significance.

Repeating 'than I remembered' on subsequent lines, Stevenson is setting up an elegiac outpouring of emotion by listing not just her memories of Horovitz, but of the place itself, emphasising the importance of memory within the act of elegising someone

who died years ago (*SM,* 41). However, there is doubt inserted into Stevenson's memories through the conjunction 'than', with the physical location correcting parts of her memory of the place which propagates uncertainty within the poem, questioning the affective content and its redemptive potential. Even though this demonstrates a sense of relearning the world, it is not approached positively. Memory is supported by the traditionally elegiac scene of the church 'gracing a slope with yew trees and a painter's view — | ploughed red soil, a pasture, a working barn', with yew trees paired with an idealised pastoral view to further generically the tone of grief due to their connotations (*SM,* 41). This landscape directs Stevenson towards the grave, creating an overwhelming elegiac atmosphere, whilst its unfamiliarity engenders the need for Stevenson to return to her grief for Horovitz. There is a pause within the affective content of the poem as Stevenson searches for a connection to Horovitz in the generic, repeating her distance from the scene: 'that set it apart from the ordinary, just as your field stone, | when we found it, set you apart from the good people' (*SM,* 41). The traditional elegiac background is not enough to mourn completely, or to engender a relearning of the world, because it does not represent Horovitz nor contains a direct personal connection that is sought within an elegy; she is set apart from the landscape. Her separation from the setting is not dismissed as an obstruction to mourning overall but leads to the landscape being presented as limited and unspecific in its description, even though it creates an elegiac tone that conveys known symbols of grief.

As the landscape changes, there is recognition of a need to relearn the world, a need which is ignored by Stevenson in her desire to remember Horovitz and reminisce. Whilst the physical descriptions are reportedly of Orcop churchyard, each element could be found in many English churchyards which helps to subsume the poem into the wider British elegiac tradition and develop the emotional expectation for both the

reader and poet. This scene initiates Stevenson revisiting her grief, enabling the elegy to progress, setting a mournful tone which pervades the poem. Unlike 'The day he died', and challenging an understanding of the role of landscape, the place does not mourn alongside Stevenson. Instead, it provides affective associations which help the reader and speaker align in emotions, the churchyard evoking the feelings of grief. Furthermore, the landscape has transitioned from viewing the larger countryside to experiencing a specific churchyard and subsequently into the mental world, passively aiding the elegy through its movement as it works with Stevenson to help find the right setting for the poem. This ensures that the grief of the poem is both generated and moved through as the landscapes provide structure for remembering the past.

Stevenson remembers Horovitz in a generalised sense, detailing an unspecified scene and listing items she associates with her friend, populating the memory with personal attributes and effects.

> I remembered how, when you quietly entered a room
>
> in one of those woven dresses you used to wear,
>
> heather or lavender, all senseless chattering would cease,
>
> shamed by your dignity. I remembered your beautiful things:
>
> your pots, your books, your cat, silver as your cross,
>
> your delicate drawings. Yes, I remembered you exactly.
>
> And there you were, still — beautiful, exceptional, (*SM,* 41)

The speaker is confident in her recollection, no longer introducing uncertainty through the conjunction 'than' as she remembers exactly, and thus bringing Horovitz to life in a domestic, homely, setting to mourn her in a place of comfort. Whilst not overwhelming,

the imagery still elegises her in a personal manner, with Horovitz entering the scene in her own dress to present herself to the reader, seemingly endorsing the sentimental scene. Stevenson propagates the elegiac tone generated by the physical landscape to aid her own mental setting which celebrates Horovitz and the exactness of her memory, entwining the two to create a scene of happiness which does not belittle the poem but is instead a reconfigured reality. This scene is not diminished by death, nor does it come with an exact turn towards death. Instead, the speaker contends with the emotions associated with Horovitz's passing, continuing to be positive even after listing all the aspects she remembers; Horovitz still dead and remaining beautiful, exceptional.

Stevenson is listing domestic objects which she associates with her friend in an overflow of emotion which is brought on by the chance to remember Horovitz exactly. Unlike earlier in the poem, there is no revision of the list as it is recalling how things were without trying to change it, seeking the memory for nothing more than its own relief. John Lyon comments that, 'in [its] naming and proper naming,' listing in poetry works towards a 'realism of the particular, the immediate, even the individual and unique.'[33] This desire and purpose are clearly evident in regard to Stevenson and Horovitz as the speaker builds up the specific details in order to make the deceased unique, removing her from the centre of elegiac tradition which the poem has so far used to mourn her. Unlike in Michael Longley's elegiac poem, 'The Ice-cream Man', which Lyon is specifically discussing when making his broader comments on listing in poetry, Stevenson's listing is not excessively long to the point of it being uncomfortable, with accuracy and familiarity at the forefront of her detailing. Furthermore, it is not only items which are presented, but also an imagined reaction to them; the objects are

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[33] John Lyon, 'Michael Longley's Lists', *English Journal of the English Association*, 45.183 (1996) p. 235.

initiating life. Parallel to Lyon's characterisation of Longley's use of listing to search for an 'adequate means to *express* grief ' rather than 'to *alleviate* that grief', her listing is an act of remembrance which brings joy in its exactness, seeking comfort within the personal aspects of the memories which not only express Horovitz but also embody her: 'Yes, I remembered you exactly' (*SM*, 41).[34] Stevenson's listing is appreciating past experiences whilst also being aware that they are no longer possible, building to a possible relearning of the world by recognising change. After all, these attributes and associations are being remembered. Additionally, the listing furthers the elegiac tone of the poem as it directly connects with the deceased.

Due to the temporal separation between the point of Horovitz's death and Stevenson mourning her friend again, the freedom offered by listing enables her to accrue images in a bid to reconnect with the essence of Horovitz rather than generating an elegiac atmosphere which helps process grief. Time passing has enabled some emotional processing to take place already, the world has been relearned to some extent, but it is still desirable to remember the past. The generic landscape created by the churchyard is a generic backdrop with elegiac association, which in turn helps the speaker remember personal memories through which to connect with and mourn Horovitz. Consequently, the English churchyard is vital to the elegy's ability to mourn as it provides a structure, not only helping set the tone of the poem and triggering associations within Stevenson but also assimilating the poem with specifically English elegiac traditions. These support Horovitz with the poetic and emotional history of her country.

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[34] Lyon, 'Michael Longley's Lists', p. 243.

As the speaker is removing herself from memories and returning to the world, she creates more affective images: 'in a landscape of lichen I had to read like Braille | to find your name. I heard the first blackbird, then a thrush' (*SM,* 41). Whilst touching upon one of Emily Dickinson's musings on nature, covering up the name on a gravestone which requires a form of investigation to find certainty, Stevenson is echoing Edward Thomas when evoking the blackbird.[35] The association with his depiction of English countryside in 'Adlestrop' therefore reinforces the national elegiac connection within the scene as Stevenson leaves, further attaching the poem's landscape to that of England even though the singing birds have symbolic presence throughout Western literature. As such, whilst the poem goes into the personal and domestic to mourn Horovitz, it relies on the wider landscape to establish an atmosphere of mourning and in doing so creates one which is distinctly English to hold the memories of Stevenson and befit the life of her friend. Both are necessary for the elegy to be complete and thus demonstrate the need for national images as well as distinctly personal ones. Even when considering the links to the wider poetic and elegiac tradition, there is not a universalisation within the poem which removes it from specific place or personal attachment and into a general sense of mourning or global grief.

The struggle of mourning a friend who died years ago is negotiated by Stevenson as she uses natural elements of the elegiac tradition to create an atmosphere which generates the emotions needed to evoke her memories of Horovitz. As such, the poetic mode is not only used to grieve specifically, but also to grieve generally. These two aspects, whilst seemingly distinct when studied separately, are intrinsic to the success

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[35] Emily Dickinson, 'I died for beauty—but was scarce', *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms,* eds. Eavan Boland, and Mark Strand, (New York: WW Norton, 2000) p. 145;
Edward Thomas, 'Adlestrop', *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 6th ed, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall & Mary Jo Salter, (New York: WW Norton, 2018) p. 1317.

of the elegy and demonstrate the need for a wider sense of mourning alongside the individual associations which attach the elegy to the deceased and ensure that they are represented within the grieving process. Whilst Stevenson does not create a traditional elegy, nor does the landscape mourn in a manner of the previous two poems of this section, it is an elegy in which landscape has a notable role which helps to define it in terms of both place and the way we mourn those who died years ago.

1.4. Conclusion: Relearning the landscape

Whilst they may seem like poetic settings, only providing a place for mourning, elegiac landscapes are not only a physical backdrop for grief, or a means of connecting the mourner with the deceased; they also have a role in progressing the elegy and its process of 'relearning the world'. Landscapes interact with the emotional process of poetry through their structure and potential affective symbols, creating a space for the mourner which can be at times personal and limitless, and at others generic and focused. In this respect, the inherent plasticity of landscape furthers the ideas of relearning the world, enabling one to capture the specifics of landscape in the reaction before altering it through the response. As we have seen, most places depicted in these elegies are attached to a definite location and thus carry with them individual qualities which directly, or indirectly, aid the emotional progression of the elegy due to their personal symbolic value such as the Dunbarton graveyard of 'Sailing Home from Rapallo'. However, these definite locations can still be uncertain, depicted in generic rather than personal terms, as is evident in Hughes' 'The day he died'. Generic landscapes with familiar connections also enable a separation of the deceased from the place associated with them. Whilst familiarity of a known landscape is important, the

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dynamism of place and space is vital to elegy as it enables a more complete reflection on uncontrollable change.

Whilst the landscapes of these poems are not all populated with traditional elegiac images, the sheer variety of which undermines any attempt to codify a landscape of grief, they are all intertwined with the emotive movements of the elegies as they attempt to overcome grief whilst accurately portraying the deceased. Without a generic landscape of grief, elegies are influenced by familiarity of a location as the poet attempts to accurately reflect the deceased. Familiarity can, however, be gained through research and visitation. This tethers the elegy, aiding the process of relearning the world as it forces some act of learning or interpretation. Whilst the landscape created may not be extensive and thus only generating a minor connection between mourner and deceased, it provides a level of emotive accuracy within the landscape which is beyond the generic. This could be seen in our discussion of 'Highgate Cemetery', where Clampitt is not overly familiar with Highgate Cemetery, but the invocation of place and the landscape created help to present grief in the poem.

Vital to not only ensuring the accurate depiction of grief but also engendering emotional reconfiguration, landscape can start the process of relearning the world rather than merely facilitating it. One way in which this occurs is through movement or travel within the landscape. This embodies part of the process of relearning the world as it transforms the world in the aftermath of loss. This movement can be either physical or imaginative, searching for a familiar, definite location in which to situate grief. Movement also enables a return to grief, embodying the extended long term grieving process which is argued by Attig. We see this in Stevenson's 'Orcop' in which there is a specific movement to visit the grave, returning the speaker to grief and in doing so restarting a process of relearning the world.

Excellent at depicting or enforcing change within grief experience, landscape in elegy is, however, limited by the threshold between life and death. This instantaneous separation after bereavement ensures that there is always distance between the mourner and deceased. Whilst a shared place may appear to alleviate this divide by encouraging and engaging connections, its links are unsustainable as reality diverges from the conditions associated with the deceased. This appears to temper the possibility of relearning the world, instead emphasising the separation. However, landscape is shown to be malleable within the poetry, changing over time in a manner that is similar to grief experience. This is only impossible through imaginative movements, forcing a change upon the landscape, or having the landscape appear to mourn directly.

Inherent within landscape is the notion of distance. We have seen it in the separation between definite and imagined locations of grief, the necessity for movement across and through landscape in some elegies, and the threshold between life and death. Distance is both broad and specific in elegy, present in crossing a physical space to reunite with the deceased and the specific effects of a distant funeral director on grief. As such, it is also heavily related to a relearning of the world as it forces the mourner to confront a world which has been transformed by loss. In the next chapter we will see how the various forms of distance are confronted in elegy, uncovering the poetic means which work with and against the physical and imagined separation between mourner and deceased, life and death, to further a relearning of the world.

Chapter 2

Elegy and distance

2.1. Introduction: The space between life and death

Progressing from discussion on landscape, this second chapter considers the role of distance within elegy. Corina Stan — drawing on the structuralist thinking of Roland Barthes and others — has asserted that distance is an idea found 'in the interstices of a broader reflection on how to live with other people', an element of relationships and thus part of grief and absence.[1] As we will see in the course of this chapter, it is vital to consider both the physical interpersonal distance between the deceased and mourner, and the metaphysical divide between life and death, which once crossed is a permanent and impenetrable threshold which separates the living and the dead. These two broader manifestations of distance create tension as the poetry tries to minimise their effect, connecting mourner and deceased, whilst also being constantly bound by the separation which necessarily elicits grief. As an intangible relational aspect of space, place, and encounters, the ways in which divisions within locations, experiences and emotions are traversed and worked through to reach a site of mourning, death or burial is an often overlooked aspect of elegy. Due to globalisation and technological advances in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the world is now theoretically always within reasonable reach, be it by physically visiting or digitally gaining knowledge about a place. Subsequently, the understanding of place has altered and become both more

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[1] Corina Stan, *The Art of Distances: Ethical Thinking in Twentieth-Century Literature*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018) p. 4.

specific and more generic, in which the broadly recognised tropes of mourning have been disregarded or subsumed into a personal representation of the landscape. Whilst a reduction in global cultural and physical barriers can help to represent the deceased transnationally, the movement and distances which have been both created and circumnavigated are also a key operation of the elegy itself; the transport methods used, routes taken, and locations visited along the way are vital to the emotional processing of elegy which influences relearning the world. These geographical movements across and through landscapes in the poetry represent a journey alongside and within grief, providing insight into the process as it happens.

However, when considering what we have termed 'relearning' the world through grief reaction and response, it is important to consider the whole grief experience, including the metaphorical and physical distance which is generated, travelled through, and contemplated as part of the grieving process:

> When we are bereaved, *we experience divisions within our selves* as the webs of our lives are torn asunder. We experience ourselves as broken wholes, fragmented or shattered. The desires, motivations, dispositions, habits, behaviours, and day-to-day expectations and hopes once grounded in our relationships with those who have died still operate but now lack their taken-for-granted anchoring in the world.[2]

This chapter will explore how distance and its shattering effects are presented in a range of elegies, discussing the various manifestations of divides and their influence on

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[2] Attig, *How We Grieve,* p. 147.

the poetry. We will not only consider the use of distance to express grief, but also a weaving together of disparate threads of emotion and associations to help an individual grieve. Consequently, we shall see how elegy helps both to embody distance and confront it in the process of relearning the world.

As seen in chapter one, some poets attempt to situate elegy within a specific landscape which is sufficiently related to both deceased and mourner, relying on the familiarity of place to aid the processing of emotions and provide support through the experience of grief. In this respect, elegists must also negotiate distances between these significant locations, especially when they are removed from the speaker.

The distance between the deceased and mourned, be it physical division or the mental separation of life and death is a feature of many canonical elegies, such as; Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Adonais'.[3] From the acceptance in the third stanza that Keats is metaphysically elsewhere — 'For he is gone, where all things wise and fair | Descend:— oh, dream not that the amorous Deep' — to an imagined movement to Rome, 'that high Capital, where kingly Death | Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay', which is Keats' site of death, 'Through wood and stream and field and hill and Ocean', we see distance influence the poem in various ways, creating new perspectives, voices, and experiences which approach the grief experience.[4]

Symbolism, spiritual imagery, and myth helped to reduce both physical and metaphysical distance after death through their cultural familiarity, supporting a relearning of the world through a new interpretation of Grecian and Roman traditional myths and images which were present alongside the certainty of Christian imagery.

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[3] Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Adonais', *Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 6th ed, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall & Mary Jo Salter, (New York: WW Norton, 2018) pp. 937-950.
[4] Shelley, 'Adonais', p. 938; 939; 942.

Through this reliance on metaphysical representation, images and senses assumed to be generic were used in an affective way, responding to death in a culturally known manner which is likely to have had wider associations and some familiarity with readers, speakers and the deceased. For instance, returning to 'Adonais', the descent of stanza three is not only metonymic with burial, but also a connection with that descent and unreality through the reference to dreams:

> For he is gone, where all things wise and fair
>
> Descend;—oh, dream not that the amorous Deep
>
> Will yet restore him to the vital air;[5]

Emphasised through both lineation and the consecutive colon-dash punctuation, which physically and poetically isolates the descent, it is a physical action of separation that takes on metaphysical significance. Oral and syntactic distance furthers a sense of loss and absence through its enforced silence. With the originating images, such as the descent, being related to generic conceptions of grief alongside the divides between Shelley and Keats, the extent to which these images would have been effective in assuaging grief is unknowable, with their significance and potency assumed due to their continuity and cultural dominance. However, as seen in Peter Sacks' *The English Elegy*, there has been a focus on the direct relationship of distance and related images on the process of mourning rather than their part in a more abstract grief experience; how they aid us in relearning the world.[6] Our understanding and appreciation of these generic images must be reconsidered as part of a new approach to elegy, not

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[5] Shelley, 'Adonais', p. 938.
[6] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 19.

disregarding their affective role in mourning but instead considering them within a new framework.

The first section of this chapter will consider primarily the role of physical distances in elegy through three poems. Each approaches the physical divide between mourner and deceased in a different manner, helping us to understand not only the significance of distance in mourning but also its role in reacting and responding to death. Amy Clampitt's journey across America to reach her mother's bedside in 'A Procession at Candlemas' is a poem which never escapes the overbearing realities of distance, providing an example of an elegy which is conscious of its personal and public movement as it attempts to grieve, travelling across America as well as through time and memory. The poem also interacts with the threshold between life and death, postponing inquiry behind the hospital curtain until it is too late. Ted Hughes' 'The Literary Life' moves through multiple places, purportedly in a chronological order, as it remembers Sylvia Plath through their shared friendship with Marianne Moore. Dealing with the evolving and devolving closeness of their relationship, the poem considers the way in which notable events, occurring over the course of knowing an individual, subsequently influence mourning, especially due to the overwhelming influence of memory. This also balances the demands of place in memory and the closeness necessary to make meaningful gestures to acknowledge loss. Re-telling, or remembering, is also dealt with in Paul Muldoon's warped elegiac villanelle for his parents, 'Milkweed and Monarch'. Muldoon is a poet who has transplanted himself from Ireland to America, and 'Milkweed and Monarch' deals with similar separations in the physical and mental divide between child and parent, life and death. The elegy uses shared and specific images to create known places which anchor the poem, alongside

utilising the uncertain to blur places into a generic one of mourning. Like Clampitt's, attempting to cross these distances is a challenge to the poem, creating a new conflict within the grief which is both generative and arresting.

The second section of this chapter then considers the role of distance on the process of elegy, focusing on the metaphysical or abstract divide between life and death which controls affective content due to its impenetrability. Discussing Wallace Stevens' 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream', Paul Muldoon's 'Come Into My Parlour', and Robert Lowell's 'To Mother', I shall consider the metaphysical, or imagined, role of distance in elegy and its influence on relearning the world. Within discussion of an abstract sense of distance, the role of place must not be understated. Western funerary traditions have created locations in which to inter the dead or otherwise symbolise their significance after death. They provide places for the bereaved to return to visit the deceased; a physical resting place which can be used as a passive site of mourning. However, these locations are only a place of death, usually depicted generically and only associated with the individual after they have died rather than through or from any part of their life. As seen in chapter one, for the mourning process to progress in relearning the world we desire a space which is somehow mutual that can be actively engaged with, a place which is associated with shared memories of the deceased and mourner which in some way reflect their relationship and encapsulate how the dead was in life. Even though these places may not have changed, they may for some reason not be accessible or currently familiar either to the mourner or the deceased.

Approaching this change in mourning and the resultant imaginative distance it creates, in some way is a necessary task for elegists. The location referenced must be in some way affective, interacting with the emotions of the mourner and the memory of the deceased. Whilst the mourning processes of the poetry discussed are similar,

following those of Western Christianity and the Anglo-American cultural alterations which have stemmed from it, the sustaining affective images are not enough to assuage in a divided or unfamiliar location which may seem abstract from the individual's loss. Formal procedures cannot make up for this separation, nor can the use of abstraction lead to one not needing to consider it at all. Instead, the elegies must look for personal specificity to mourn, individually relearning the world after bereavement. It is key that the main locations of mourning must be familiar to both parties in order for the elegy to progress in a personal manner, attached to both deceased and bereaved. Physically or imaginatively moving either individual, or both the mourner and deceased, to a new location is not only possible, but a necessary part of some of the poetry in this interconnected world and has become a notable element of elegies as they attempt to understand physical and metaphysical distances which underpin relationships in both life and death.

2.2. 'Slit by a thread of scarlet' - Physical and metaphysical distances in grief

Death separates the mourner and deceased, creating an impassable distance which appears to sever a form of connection between them. Additionally, in the moment of death there may be a physical separation as a loved one lies dying in a distant hospital. These distances can be metaphysical or physical, requiring either imaginative movement to traverse the divide or a journey across space to reunite with the dead or dying. However, in both there is a varying space between life and death which can be approached in numerous ways. In reading these three elegies we will consider how Clampitt, Hughes, and Muldoon approach the nebulous idea of distance. Mainly focusing on how the poets contend with physical separation between life and death, we will see how the physical and metaphysical are related when approaching distance in grief

through elegy. We will see how distance is not only approached in a linear manner, with the poems at times moving sporadically through space as they form disparate connections to approach both the deceased and the threshold between life and death. These varying forms of interacting with distance all influence a relearning of the world as they come to terms with the changed world after loss, with death forcing upon the bereaved a new perspective from which to approach and traverse distance.

2.2.1. Traversing distance in Amy Clampitt's 'A Procession at Candlemas'

Amy Clampitt's elegy for her mother, 'A Procession at Candlemas', from her 1983 collection *The Kingfisher*, reconceptualises the journey of mourning as it returns to her bedside in intensive care, remembering the full extent of her importance to the poet as she responds to the anticipated death before it happens. Alongside this, the poem tracks the forced movements of Native American populations, voicing their grief of the lost world. Travel is central to the poem as the speaker attempts to return to the mother before she dies, remembering their relationship as she moves across America. Within this movement, the scenery is utilised to invoke emotional associations through which one can attempt to mourn. This journey contains both a reaction and response to the threatened bereavement as it attempts to process the impending death whilst also fearing its happening. The reading will discuss not only the physical distance which is covered in the poem and the way it is negotiated, but also the role of their existential separation, of life and death, which is elided in the poem due to the 'pressure of threatened bereavement'.[7]

 Clampitt works through memories as she moves across America, inextricably connecting thinking and motion within the poem. Instigating movement, the poem

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[7] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 321.

opens with a euphemism of death, acknowledging and incorporating separation and the need to traverse distance into the process of mourning: 'Moving on or going back to where you came from, | bad news is what you mainly travel with:' (*CPAC,* 21). Whilst Clampitt has not yet mentioned her mother, there is an urgent presence of negativity, assumed to be death through the euphemistic opening phrase — 'moving on' — with the poem already moving to and from uncertain locations, stuttering over the metaphysical and physical conflict of returning home and accepting that life progresses. In its casual tone, the speaker calmly discusses contemporary conditions of mourning in which an individual must rush home, covering extreme distances because they have moved away due to economic or social demands, as a loved one exists in an indeterminate state. At this point, the reader is uncertain if Clampitt is returning for her mother's last moments or travelling home to find out that she is dead. Too focused and certain to appear ambivalent, the voice is centred on the very act of travelling, demanding a slightly perverse level of attention to that action given the circumstances. An emotional reaction is thus hidden behind the necessary physical movement, evident in the euphemism of 'moving on', in which the affective value of a journey in responding to grief is teased due to its poetic focus. However, there is little certainty in the conclusion of the speaker's comment in the opening two lines due to the colon initiating a listing of ideas which breaks the posed focus on grief.

Subsequently, Clampitt lists possibilities for the causation of such movements:

a breakup or a breakdown, someone running off

or walking out, called up or called home:

death in the family. Nudged from their stanchions

Even though the colon and line break both separate the idea of death from the other occurrences, wanting to put it off as long as possible, it is an inevitability which has been coming in the poem since the opening line, unmentioned until it was unfeasible to avoid any longer. From the moment of death, the poem is nudged into motion, moving both speaker and sense beyond the desires of delayed acceptance. However, there is no immediate emotional reaction because of the promise of the journey; there is still distance between the speaker and the deceased. In these opening two tercets the divide between life and death is acknowledged. Nevertheless, with the final line of the second tercet enjambed, the poem is forced to continue: 'outside the terminal, anonymous of purpose ‖ as a flock of birds, the bison of the highway' (*CPAC*, 21). It is set up to search for a way to process the idea of death whilst moving on through the experience, connecting the journey with the acceptance of the speaker's mother's mortality in response to the news.

As it is undertaken, the journey and the speakers' fellow passengers are metaphorically linked to animals 'as a flock of birds, the bison of the highway' (*CPAC,* 21). Flowing from the forced continuation previously mentioned, these natural acts of migration are part of a recurrent cycle; life moving from place to place. The innate motivations of each of these journeys connects them to the poem's central journey, metonymically adding a sense of natural inevitability to the movement. As such, the contemporary conditions of life which necessitate travel are initiated into part of a natural cycle to react to the possibility of death. Whilst the purpose is different, their collective journeys are a mirror of each other, with Clampitt reflecting on the confusion and uncertainty of her situation:

> funnel westward onto Route 80, mirroring
>
> an entity that cannot look into itself and know
>
>
> what makes it what it is. Sooner or later (*CPAC,* 21)

The entities are each different and subject to an unknown array of forces which are driving their lives, with the specific word-choice ensuring an inability ever to understand why; alluding to a possibility of knowing without providing an answer. Seen to be primal, this incapability of understanding is applied to grief through the larger associations of the poem, demonstrating a subtle acceptance that some of the emotional metaphysical distance will not be resolved even if the final destination is reached and so acknowledging a continuity of grief. The speaker finds unity in the uncertainty, not knowing what makes them what they are, creating a larger community using unspecific determiners with whom to be associated when reacting to the unknowability of death. Becoming one of many, the speaker and poem have not started to process death due to having to realise the reality of it, including its impenetrability and unknowability, embodied by the scale considered in the poem.

Implied in the opening listing, death is voluminous and imprecise, difficult to encapsulate but also difficult to understand. Whilst Ramazani comments that Clampitt's journey 'seems at first directionless', the poem works through thought to create an underlying direction within uncertainty, subtly implicated through the processing and development of the speakers' understanding and experience, embodied through the necessity to query what is 'anonymous of purpose' and in some way understand it

(*CPAC,* 21).[8] In doing so, death is not only approached, the journey now having a multitude of purposes imbued by the natural associations, but it is also accepted as something natural and unknowable, enabling the poem to proceed with an appreciation for the nebulous experience. This echoes the formal or ceremonial 'procession' of the poem's title. Whilst the acceptance of not understanding death seems at odds with elegy, it does not diminish the importance of relearning the world, depicting bereavement as a state which is experienced rather than understood completely. Rather, the imprecision is an acknowledgement of the tumultuous experience of grief, with the poem creating beauty within the complications, seeking natural associations to normalise the experience of travelling to the bedside of a loved one. In accepting the scale, the speaker has escaped the tension of needing to both move on and go back which is present in the first line.

Even though the poem does not set out to provide certainty about death, filled with emotional uncertainties, it is still physically specific. Clampitt utilises known locations to act as certain points of reference whilst also helping to progress the poem, keeping it both emotionally generic at times whilst also detailing her own physical and imaginative journey. However, due to the extent of emotive space necessary, these places are non-linear, appearing at random, creating an unstructured web of distances and the space between them rather than linearly mapping the movement from the opening of the poem to intensive care. From the 'Pyrenees' and 'Stonehenge', past 'Arlington | over the Potomac,' to a gas station named 'Indian Meadows' and Ancient Greece, the speaker moves through space, directed towards the hospital (*CPAC,* 21; 22; 23). The named places provide not only a level of certainty to the poem, enabling the

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[8] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 324.

reader to imagine the location, but also embody the vastness of her grief in which disparate elements are associated with the emotion or in some way offer relief. Consequently, the vastness of the physical distance is representative of the mental experience, helping the reader to understand its sporadic occurrence through the extended spatiotemporal journey. This ensures that the breadth of her emotions is appreciated within the bounds of the physical journey itself, acknowledging a separation between the two.

In representing both the physical and imagined journeys, the speaker is depicting the complexities of grief without simplifying them as linear nor dismissing them as unknowable. Whilst the physical journey in this case does come with a sense of urgency, it only emphasises the importance of the mental world as it is considered equally, running alongside the pressurised movement to reach their mother before she dies. Thus, when utilising known locations to progress the passage to the mother's bedside in intensive care, the speaker is initiating their own personal reaction, one which is measured through place rather than time as it returns to her mother physically whilst separating from her emotionally, accepting her mortality. The poem is approaching both the physical and metaphysical realities of grief experience as it travels, not privileging one over the other, nor utilising one to dispel the complexity of the ordeal.

The pressure of the threshold between life and death is constant in the poem, with, as Peter Sacks observes, the mourner 'unwilling to grant the finality of the journey' as they hope to avoid the inevitability of the mother's death.[9] Providing another understanding

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[9] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 324.

of the stalling of the opening tercets which have already been presented, with the poem

cycling through contradictory propositions as it refuses to proceed, there is an

impossible attempt at control, momentarily suspending progress. This is in part because

of the unspoken one-directional threshold of death which will inevitably, at some

unknown point, be crossed. The constant diversions of the journey, as previously

discussed in the naming of the places on the itinerary, are also present in the content of

the poem, which is filled with asides, moments of seemingly sporadic memory and

thought which delay the poem arriving at its destination and thus attempt to stave off

crossing the threshold of death. These deviations explore the importance of

motherhood and the fundamental connection it creates, the origin of grief in America

and its commodification, and global locations and peoples creating within these a

substantial memory of the speaker's mother.

Change as child-bearing, birth as a kind

of shucking off: out of what began

as a Mosaic insult—such a loathing

of the common origin, even a virgin,

having given birth, needs purifying— (*CPAC,* 21)

[...]

Absently, without inhabitants, this

nowhere oasis wears the place name

of Indian Meadows. The westward-trekking

transhumance, once only, of a people who,

in losing everything they had, lost even

the names they went by, stumbling past (*CPAC,* 22)

Resulting from these two excerpts is a complex texture of grief which captures a multitude of thoughts and emotions associated with the deceased as the poem moves through America, constructing a broad representation which helps to remember, represent, and consider the deceased mother as a complete person. This creates a mosaic of her and in doing so challenges the religious meaning of the word in the poem. Whilst the Christian holiday of Candlemas is ever-present, with the speaker attempting to present herself at the ritualised moment of death, the poem does not privilege a religious perspective. Instead, Christianity is challenged through asides and questions, interrogated to gain some level of understanding rather than blindly followed, 'supposing God might have, | might actually need a mother' (*CPAC,* 21). This prepares the poem for relearning the world whilst still gesturing towards Christianity, seeking some comfort from religion whilst also dismissing its supremacy in processing grief. Through the poem's diversions, the threshold of death is constantly willed into the near distance as the speaker desires for their mother to live for as long as possible, remembering and querying their connection to strengthen it rather than exclusively mourning it. Whilst this could be seen as an act of avoidance, it is instead an attempt at gaining control over an uncertain and unknowable situation, one in which the speaker has no input to their desires. Beyond the text itself, the threshold is passed at an unknown time. With it not being clearly marked in the poem, the instantaneous reality

of death is captured, with the poetry unable to react directly to the change of state and instead attempt to find certainty within the questioning and unclear moment of death.

Clampitt's detailed invocation of memory does give us an insight into the ephemeral and tumultuous nature of the loss of life, with it being possible to understand the experience of grief as:

> that exquisite blunderer, stumbling

> like a migrant bird that finds the flyway
> it hardly knew it knew except by instinct, (*CPAC,* 25)

Here, the inexact realisation reflects the intangibility of the threshold, with the uncontrollable aspect of memory from the poem aligning with that of death as it stumbles into being. The divide between life and death is crossed by accident and the reaction to it is one of instinct which one 'hardly knew [they] knew'. Sacks argues that the encounter with the bird 'resembles a first recognition not only of mortality but of one's own mortal nature,' reconfiguring an outlook of both life and death through its occurrence and responding to grief on a larger scale.[10] By the time Clampitt is willing actually to approach the threshold, physically represented by the curtain in intensive care, it is too late, her mother has already died:

> slit by a thread of scarlet—the untouched

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[10] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 325.

> nucleus of fire, the lost connection
>
> hallowing the wizened effigy, the mother
>
> curtained in Intensive Care: (*CPAC,* 25)

The speaker is powerless, unable physically to touch her mother before she dies, losing a form of connection which has been sought after throughout the poem in the physical images and associations. The negative prefix of 'untouched' teases the impossible connection whilst the stanza break creates a separation between the speaker and deceased within the poem, leaving the absence of touch alone at the end of the line. This in turn alters the dead mother, whose body becomes a shrivelled effigy rather than remaining as herself. Thus, death has altered reality, leaving the speaker in the process of understanding and reacting to the unfamiliarity of her mother as she is experiencing their separation.

Reconceptualising life in the light of death is a vital part of the mourning process, centring around an understanding and acceptance of the impenetrable unidirectional threshold of death as one relearns their assumptions of the world. In the final tercet, the speaker attempts to retrace their steps, returning along Route 80 in a symbolic attempt at crossing the divide of life and death to revive her mother:

> of moving lights along Route 80, at nightfall,
>
> in falling snow, the stillness and the sorrow
>
> of things moving back to where they came from. (*CPAC,* 25)

Whilst physically the speaker can return to the location of the start of the poem, the point of departure, the outcome cannot be reversed. Even when moving back in an echo

to the opening euphemism, time has passed, and things have changed in the stillness and the sorrow moving along Route 80. The irreversibility of the threshold between life and death is thus not completely appreciated by the end of the poem, with the speaker still hoping to reverse it through an impossible return, even attempting somehow to freeze time as they travel. This disjunction ends the poem in a sense of uncertain continuation, the world with its symbolic lights and falling snow participating in a mourning processional as the speaker returns, whilst also naturally welcoming night and then a new day; nothing will be the same again no matter how much it is wanted as the world continues. Unable to understand the new world at this moment, there is no clear resolution, with the reaction and response to the death only just beginning. It is not a failure of elegy, but instead demonstrates the role of the poem in depicting one aspect of the grieving process, helping to depict a reaction to bereavement which does not completely want to engage with death rather than a continued response.

'A Procession at Candlemas' accumulates and catalogues emotions, observations, and memories, as it works through distance and moves towards the moment of death before fleeing from it when it finally arrives. The geographical distance travelled in the poem is necessitated by modern life, emphasised by the way it becomes part of the mourning process itself, metaphorically and physically approaching death in a guided and impersonal manner. However, the poem does not offer completeness, drawing away from certainty in its concluding tercets, seemingly reversing its renunciation of the impossible simultaneous moving on and going back of the opening line. The depiction of a journey is central to the poem, providing a structural cyclicality which offers some continuity against the cold sentimental scene. However, this continuity is unable to counteract death and thus is part of the changed world which must be accepted in reaction to bereavement. Whilst written and refined after her mother's

death, the poem captures a broad reaction, demonstrating the continued realisations and acceptances which form that aspect of relearning the world and challenging the instantaneous associations with death which may alter expectations of mourners.

2.2.2. Ted Hughes's 'The Literary Life' and Interpersonal Insight

Part of a larger response to the death of Sylvia Plath in the collection *Birthday Letters,* Ted Hughes's poem, 'The Literary Life', explores his relationship with her through a tangent: the story of their friendship with Marianne Moore and her literary influence on Plath. The poem provides insight into the continual searching for understanding in grief, especially around the unknowability and uncontrollable interpersonal elements of suicide. In this respect, we will see how the poem's perspective aligns with Attig's ideas of relearning the world through its complex attempts at remembering and analysing moments of their relationship. Within the poem, Hughes does not focus solely on his own grief but rather the grief of Plath's life, intertwining the two to create an elegy that is as multifaceted as grief experience itself; attacking Moore for her dismissal, mourning the turmoil of Plath's life and considering the pressures of influence which seem to control life and yet fade away in death. As a result, the poem deals with a multitude of settings, of which the speaker is at various distances, exploring grief through varied lenses rather than confronting the experience of bereavement directly. In this way, it offers a key insight into a publicly scrutinised extended grief experience.

Interpersonal relationships within 'The Literary Life' are queried through reported perspectives in the poem, a fictionalised 'we', 'I' and 'you' (*THCP,* 1090). Through these perspectives the differences between experiences and their results are considered, with the speaker choosing to mourn the deceased instead of challenging the moments of personal interpretation. Whilst not completely aligning itself with culturally

established symbols of mourning, the poem does not reject some techniques of traditional elegies, instead attempting to incorporate them into the changed sphere of contemporary elegies. The poem responds to grief in a manner which is exclusively linked to Hughes and Plath; presenting a relearning of the world through the two individuals through their lives and its literary facts. As such, the biographical information relating to this relationship is central to the poem as it provides a basis which animates the verse, as Paul Muldoon captures in his reading of the poem:

> it's impossible to read without a sense of the biographies of the main characters, without a regard for information available only well beyond the bailiwick of the poem, including such information about times, dates and places.[11]

The biography is a source of an understanding which provides a structure for the poem, altering the affective content as the emotion is processed by connecting the events of the poem to actual life. Muldoon's observation highlights the emotional assumptions readers bring to the poem, something Hughes is likely to have been aware of due to the continued interest in his and Plath's relationship. The speaker of the poem is thus not only detailing their grief experience, but also responding to the wider questions related to Plath's death. Rather than explicitly setting the poem up as a contemporary dismissal of the elegiac tradition, it is instead so individualised that it moves away from the purported elegiac traditions to communicate Hughes' grief experience to an audience who already knew the narrative and most likely had an opinion on the events.

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[11] Paul Muldoon, 'The Literary Life', *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011) p. 52.

Respecting the individuality of the poem due to its complexities demonstrates a need to do so for all grief experiences.

Distances are ever present within 'The Literary Life' as Hughes seeks to come to terms with it as part of mourning Plath in a manner which fits their 'story', fulfilling the anticipated demands of readers whilst also progressing and processing his own understanding of her passing. In doing so, the physical distance covered in the poem is subsumed into memory, bringing the figures of the poem closer together as they interrogate the abstract separation which occurs to some extent in both life and death. One of the elements of distance which Hughes must contend with is the temporal extent which he is trying to cover as part of the scale of the memories, from the visit and letter in 1958, to the imagined party 'a decade later'.[12] The verse paragraphs consider three different moments of time and place which form both the Hughes and Plath relationship and their interaction with Moore, the poem opening with the couple together ascending her 'narrow stair' to reach her apartment in Brooklyn, before moving to a private domestic scene which seems to centre Plath, then to a party in England where Hughes meets Moore again, before closing at Plath's graveside (*THCP,* 1090). The physical space between each of the verse paragraphs is filled with the additional experiences that they shared together, unspoken and ignored due to their irrelevance to this specific narrative, but still present because of the clear biographical associations presented in the poem and the certainty of the memories which are filled with specific details. This introduces a continued presence of distance within the poem. These unshared details still contribute to the relationship as a whole and are thus ever-present, silently influencing the poem through their happening. Therefore, the weight carried by each

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[12] For the details of this biographical context see Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorized Life,* p. 144.

verse paragraph break is extensive; however, the poem does not falter under the dramatic irony of biographical knowledge. Instead, the sporadic scenes add to the emotional accretion, with each new verse paragraph accruing additional significance as it moves towards Plath's death, providing structure to the unbound memories to create a coherent channel of response which articulates one set of experiences rather than attempting to encapsulate everything at once. In this respect, Hughes's framing of time within the poem, with its title referring to an all-encompassing description of human time — 'life' — relies on both its specific and broad interpretation to place the poem initially beyond an exactness of time whilst still relying on a known chronology (*THCP,* 1090). Consequently, time is established to be in some way both exact and expansive, flitting between the two as and when needed, enabling grief to be approached both specifically and universally. The obvious distance to the past is noted and incorporated into the poem, having it not exist at points to aid the elegy and exist at other moments to demonstrate the difficulty Hughes has with mourning Plath, his grief remaining embedded in the poem like 'a bristle of glass | Snapped off deep in my thumb' (*THCP,* 1091).

As the poem is entirely in the past tense, the language of each verse paragraph manipulates Hughes's temporal distance from the event to emphasise a link between Hughes and Plath, reacting to her loss by remembering moments which influenced her. Doing so remembers Plath's presence in the past, inscribing her absence into the poetry. When the opening section of the poem creates images of the past through its use of language such as 'old wheel', they are applied solely to Marianne Moore. According to the poem she is the 'Daintiest curio relic of Americana', presenting her as old-fashioned and thus continually out of touch with the multiple presents of the poem (*THCP,* 1090). Moore's words are pointed, and actions are dated, weaved in a manner which has

productive associations with traditional elegies and grief 'as an action, a process of work':[13]

> Her talk, a needle
>
> Unresting - darning incessantly
>
> Chain-mail with crewel-work flowers (*THCP*, 1090)

As can be seen, her acts of creation are viewed to be unnecessary and outmoded, emphasising her separation from Hughes and Plath. Additionally, the potential pain caused by her words, which heavily influences the next paragraph of the poem, is being established, a feeling which is also created in the third paragraph through a return to the image of Moore sewing 'With that Missouri needle, drawing each stitch | Tight in my ear', ensuring she is not only outdated but also pointed (*THCP,* 1091). The two younger poets are not described in any level of detail, instead left to be outsiders to this older world and are thus standing within the same distance, relative to Moore's attachment to an earlier literary epoch, as the reader themselves. Hughes's juxtaposition between the couple and the established poet presents himself and his wife as eternally young without specifically detailing it, making the shared experience timeless and reinvigorating the memory of Plath always to seem young within the poem. Consequently, the emotion drawn from it is similarly eternal, with their implied youth ensuring that they are not equated to the dainty curio of Moore, even when the poem moves forward in time. This is compounded by the closing question, 'Why shouldn't we cherish her?', which is not only applied to the archaic Moore, but also the memory of the

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[13] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 19.

day, rhetorically interrogating the uncertain complexities of emotion which influence our understanding of a whole memory as well as individual experiences (*THCP,* 1090).

The question, and its association, pull the scene from the specified time and place, Brooklyn 1958, and into the 'present' of the poem, transplanting the complex, and yet unexplored, emotions which are brought up by the question into the act of responding to Plath's death; it is no longer only looking backwards in time, but also looking inwards to the complexities of their relationship after death. The poem is consequently of a place and no place at once, a seemingly impossible state. As it moves from the exact memory to interrogating multitudes, 'The Literary Life' shifts in the many definitions of place, causing a physical movement in the poem as the verse paragraph ends, an emotive change as the poem bridges the gap between the specific and universal, and a temporal jump which dislodges the elegy to force it to progress in another manner. Time is thus a distance within the poem which must be respected by the speaker due to its complexities, especially in the way it embodies the communicative divide of death.

The transition which occurs between the verse paragraphs distances the second section of the poem from the first by creating a completely new setting, challenging any supposed linearity of grief which has sometimes been assumed.[14] Whilst unrelated in time and place, the poem continues through the characters, who have already been established, and their emotions. However, the movement of time between the verse paragraphs has altered the characters as they develop between each memory, with the communicative divide between Hughes and Plath now impossible to avoid as inaccessible emotions drive the poem forward, demonstrated using 'you' rather than

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[14] For more on the linearity of grief and the current resistance to such a model, see the Introduction above, pp. 9-13.

'we'. This is embodied through the new form of communication, a letter, and the issues its uncertain conveyance of information brings forth. Rather than being able to provide accurate descriptions or reported speech, the letter is the initiator of miscommunication as its distance from the characters of the poem inhibits accuracy. This negative potential of communication is emblematic of the inability to convey a situation without being present, an issue which haunts the elegiac aspects of the poem as the deceased cannot be reached and is thus constantly shrouded in uncertainty. The implications of this disconnection are far reaching, being directly linked to Plath's death through Moore's letter which is only quoted in part:

> (Whoever has her letter has her exact words.)
>
> 'Since these seem to be valuable carbon copies
>
> (Somewhat smudged) I shall not engross them' (*THCP,* 1091)

The poem is unable to be in two emotional places at once nor comprehend the range of perspectives which create the scene, evoking a disrupted recollection which challenges the emotions of the verse paragraph. Its asides take us out of the moment, but do not change location, instead staying with the Hugheses as we are given specific details which demonstrate the inexactness of the recollection, with the speaker unable or unwilling to provide exactly what was contained within the letter. We do not get access to Moore's perspective due to the insurmountable physical and metaphysical distance, reading reported words which are possibly inaccurate, smudged in both moment and memory; there is a continuing communicative distance between Moore and the Hugheses. This uncertainty is tragic when considered alongside Vivian R. Pollak's reading of Moore's letter to Plath, stating that: '[it] conveys a much more mixed

message. For example, Moore softens the tone of her typed commentary with more intimate, handwritten additions and interpolations which personalise the aesthetic judgements'.[15] Resulting from the letter, Plath breaks down, falling through a change of scene, reaching back into the literary tradition to create a Dantean otherworld:

> And hurled yourself down a floor or two
>
> Further from the Empyrean.
>
> I carried you back up. (*THCP*, 1091)

The destructive lines, read by Pollak not to be as negative as perceived by the couple, distance them further from each other. Whilst the speaker can recollect their reaction, carrying her back up, Plath is not shown to return, assuming a new distance in the poem which is emblematic of death. The short lines used to convey this are direct, striving to give certainty after the unspecific letter and unable to provide superfluous detail, such as those given in the first verse paragraph. Even though the experience is intimately drawn from reality it has been warped due to the abstract experience which can only be remembered as an outsider, further distancing Hughes from Plath. The divide of death is an overwhelming cause of this, with the poem's response given from only one voice, even though it attempts to incorporate others. Inexact, the words from Moore are still damaging, pointed whilst remembering the event many years in the future. Demonstrating a limitation of recollection in helping one to react and respond to bereavement, the poem's lack of accuracy inhibits the grieving process as there is always an element of uncertainty which undermines what is being recalled.

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[15] Vivian R. Pollak, *Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) p. 163.

After the metaphoric fall, the poem moves to England, forcing Moore to confront the result of her actions through an imagined interaction. The opening of the verse paragraph is direct in setting the scene: 'A decade later, on her last visit to England' (*THCP*, 1091). Clearly, it is important to Hughes to appear to cement the rest of the poem in both time and place after the uncertainty of the previous verse paragraph and the damage it caused, with clear communication important to the scene. Hughes's movement in the poem shifts the focus from Plath's suicide to the act of remembrance, bringing Moore along to witness and participate, reducing her distance from the death in the poem. Whilst the discussion between Hughes and Moore is a negotiation of the power relationship between artists, and the wider implications of the concept of succession, it is also a slow build up towards the close of the poem.[16] This closes the physical distance between the three figures in the final three lines of the poem in which Hughes listens to Moore placing a wreath on Plath's grave:

> And I listened, heavy as a graveyard
>
> While she searched for the grave
>
> Where she could lay down her little wreath. (*THCP,* 1091)

The enjambed lines and lack of punctuation present an uninterrupted passage of thought in which Moore's ventriloquised response, unlikely to have happened given biographical elements, is immediate to the speaker. There is little distance between mourners at this time, especially as the adverbs focus the perspective onto the laying of the wreath. The symbolic act of mourning from a notable figure is a sign of posthumous poetic acceptance for Plath, significant after the anxieties which plagued her career,

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[16] This is explored more by Pollak, see *Our Emily Dickinsons*, pp. 153-172, especially p. 163.

which offers some comfort as it elevates her memory. Moore's act is also a realistic reflection of Plath's literary standing, entwining the emotional turmoil of the previous verse paragraph with her contemporary fame.

'The Literary Life' demonstrates the difficulties of processing grief and relearning the world, especially due to the fallibility of memory as time passes from the events, whilst also expressing the limitations of mourning within specific circumstances. Distance in its various forms has a continued effect on the poem, emphasising the separation between past and present, the confusion of miscommunication and the act of separation and reunion. Taken in isolation, the poem may not be viewed as an elegy by those who rely on existing critical definitions, such as those presented in the introduction. However, alongside the whole collection of *Birthday Letters* we can see the poem is emblematic of an iterative process of relearning the world, in which assumptions and perspectives are challenged and memories re-interpreted after death. Whilst trying to blame Moore for some aspect of Plath's mental suffering before her suicide, the speaker moves beyond biography in the final section, presenting an act of memorial to assuage the negative association between Moore and Plath. Rather than attempting to provide consolation, the poem consolidates the various distances within the relationship between the two women for Hughes to reconsider.

2.2.3. Distance and uncertainty in Paul Muldoon's 'Milkweed and Monarch'

Whilst Ted Hughes in 'The Literary Life' acknowledges and attempts to work through the tumults and unknowable aspects of grief, Paul Muldoon's 'Milkweed and Monarch' appears to embrace the uncertainty and confusion of loss whilst also grieving. From his 1994 collection *The Annals of Chile*, the poem is an extended villanelle which utilises the refrain, as well as the tension between opposites, which both characterise this

particular form, to create a wider sense of both familiarity and distance within the mourning which demonstrate a confused processing of grief. Muldoon's utilisation of the villanelle exemplifies a form which is built around repetition, recontextualising lines in order to alter their content. As highlighted by Michael D. Hurley and Michael O'Neill, the villanelle form is 'often thought of as incompatible with deeply felt emotion, merely a means of demonstrating technical skill', yet despite this, its constructive cycling, enforced by formal expectations, 'shows that discipline can serve ends that go beyond restraint.'[17] The rigid structure of repetition within villanelles provides a chance to recontextualise and re-examine the same emotions, meditating on incomprehensible or difficult ideas such as distance and separation from which progressing would be inconclusive. As an Irish poet who has spent most of his life in America, Muldoon understands distance and place, negotiating it throughout his whole life as he moved between continents and across countries, needing to in some way relearn the world across these distances.[18]

The title introduces the notion of a kind of symbiotic relationship which seems to be bolstered by the well-wrought form, a pairing which helps the other thrive through alliteration and symbiosis. Muldoon presents a constructive partnership; the Milkweed plant being directly associated with the Monarch butterfly. The butterfly requires the plant to breed, with the larvae feeding on its leaves. Therefore, their relationship is one of necessity for the butterfly, like that of a parent and child. Furthermore, the butterfly then helps to pollinate the plant, helping to keep it thriving. It is a constructive symbiotic relationship filled with hope and beauty, providing the poem with an image

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[17] Michael D. Hurley & Michael O'Neill, *Poetic Form: An Introduction,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p. 61.
[18] See Alex Alonso, *Paul Muldoon in America: Transatlantic Formations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) for more on Muldoon and his separation between Irish poet and American poet.

which lasts throughout. As Ruben Moi has noted 'flower and butterfly in milkweed and monarch unite the subjects of the title with mellifluous melody and natural harmony.'[19] Distance is thus both physical and abstract in the poem, approaching the complex relationship between similar objects as Muldoon responds to the memory of his parents. In this respect, we will need to consider the role of the villanelle in reacting and responding to grief, addressing the importance of emotional pairings created through repetition and rhyme and how they influence the affective content of the poem by initiating new idea pairings which help to relearn the world through unfamiliar associations.

'Milkweed and Monarch' elongates the villanelle form through additional tercets, introducing a distance within the form itself. Additionally, the form extends the use of near rhyme through the refrains, an innovation which serves to emphasise the ritualistic qualities of the poem whilst also experimenting with the expected rigidity of refrains to process grief and relearn the world through its manipulation of sense and perspective. As the villanelle form is familiar to readers, who are likely to pick up on the distinct patterning, the additional tercets rely on the repetition of themes and rhyme to encapsulate the breadth of the poem which meanders as it remembers not only his parents, but also seemingly random memories which are created through uncertainty. Additionally, the form is associated with the elegiac mode through Dylan Thomas' famous villanelle 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night', initiating elegiac connections which may otherwise evade the reader. The intricacies of form are necessary due to the distance Muldoon covers in the poem, with the additional moments of return needed to consider lines in different manners and progress through the closely related, yet

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[19] Ruben Moi, *Paul Muldoon and the Language of Poetry*, (Leiden: Brill, 2020) p. 206.

confused, content. The innovation alters the form in a physical way, extending it beyond

its expected bounds; a clear violation of formal rules prompted by the need to include

far more than usual in a villanelle. Closely related ideas are forced into repeated

conversation for longer than formally typical, furthering the revision of ideas which

comes about through reiteration and extending the opportunity to relearn parts of the

world through new associations.

However, the usually rigid formal structure of a villanelle is still utilised by

Muldoon, shaping the direction of the poem and offering a certainty which aids the

processing of the complex relationships and oppositions of the poem. The formal

limitations force each line to be carefully constructed as it must either fit into the rhyme

scheme or situate itself near enough to be accepted by the reader, determining the

possibilities of what can come next:

> As he knelt by the grave of his mother and father
>
> the taste of dill, or tarragon—
>
> he could barely tell one from the other— (*PMP*, 329)

Building upon the thoughts of Fran Brearton on Muldoon and binaries, we can see

Muldoon's teased perfection within the rhyme, with a deliberate choice of word order,

putting 'mother' before 'father', breaking any semblance of completion through the

broken rhyme, whilst teasing at a unity between 'other' and 'mother' which is not

realised.[20] Notable in the diminutive adverb 'barely', distance here is minimised by the

speaker's language as it crosses continents; however, it is still implied through the

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[20] Fran Brearton, 'For Father read Mother: Muldoon's Antecedents', *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) p. 59.

formal expectations and aural qualities, especially as the focus on the rhyme is minimised in order to show incompleteness, rejecting a unity of sound which rhyme provides. The villanelle form provides a tension which challenges the ease of language.

As noted by Iain Twiddy, 'since the villanelle derives from a peasant dance, it also replays the dancing motion of a butterfly in flight, and the European form is thus a vagrant form in America.'[21] Whilst villanelles such as Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art' have arguably naturalised the form in America, it still has European associations.[22] Movement within the poem, dictated by the musicality of the form, is both natural and foreign, a reminder of the ever-present continental divide that is between the parents and mourner which the speaker is attempting to minimise. The predetermined poetic 'destinations' of the dance are known from the opening tercet, setting the tone for the rest of the poem and providing points of return on which the lines focus, creating certainty to anchor the response and seemingly cementing the distance between mourner and deceased into the poem. Whilst it is impossible to say that it makes the process of mourning easier through the poem, it does aid the direction and enforces a set of constructive limitations which push it through the cycling of thought and emotion. These new connections, formed through an investigation of grief, are part of relearning the world.

Evident in 'Milkweed and Monarch' is also the resistance to those formal rules, pushing back against the certainty of repetition and rhyme to provide an alternative perspective, such as the 'reductive patterning heavily dependent on same-word rhyme' which puts an idea in connection with itself in order to consider it from multiple

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[21] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 217.
[22] Bishop, 'One Art', p. 198.

perspectives at once; relearning the refrain as it is revised and recontextualised.[23] In putting ideas of the deceased in opposition with themselves they are being queried at an intensely personal level, challenging their identity and role in the world now they are deceased: the rhyme of 'mother' and 'other' both denied by word placement in the line and repeated over the first three verse paragraphs (*PMP*, 329). This is also, whilst seemingly minor, a practical way of expressing the range of emotions experienced in grief, including anger and frustration, creating additional means of managing and processing the feelings which continually work against each other as one experiences grief. For example, the second line rhyme of the first four tercets alternates, 'tarragon' from tercet one rhyming with 'Oregon' from tercet three whilst 'stricken' from the second tercet finds connection in 'gherkin' from tercet four, violating the expected consistent second line rhyme and forming deliberate individual connections between tercets which seem to emphasise a varied sense of distance (*PMP*, 329). Whilst there is some unity in these rhymes, the subsequent middle line rhyme word of the next three tercets, 'darken', 'reckon' and 'hurricane', only have a loose sonic connection to both each other and the previous rhymes, even though both darken and reckon appear, at least visually, to fit the rhyme scheme (*PMP*, 330). The final word which formally should be a part of these rhyme words is 'Anger' from the closing verse paragraph. Sonically distinct from the set of possible rhyme words, anger is isolated, a result of a mistake which is noted in the poem: 'He'd mistaken his mother's name, 'Regan', for 'Anger'' (*PMP*, 330). Rather than providing a sense of unity, the final expected rhyme word is instead an emotional reaction which is sonically similar to the other set of rhyme words which are repeated throughout the poem. As a means of expressing negative emotion,

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[23] Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon', *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) p. 83.

the form is therefore constructive, providing an established form within which to creatively oppose and innovate, with the poem developing through from the constant friction. Even though Muldoon is likely aware of the form's cultural origins and standing in the poetic canon, he chooses to overlook them to utilise it for his own means, altering the villanelle to be a restrictive object for the poem to struggle against, releasing built up tension through this tussle between verse paragraphs rather than erupting in anger at one moment in the poem. Consequently, the use of form is additive to the elegy, enriching the depth of Muldoon's emotional range in a guided manner as it negotiates physical and metaphysical distance; moving beyond the formal rules and tradition to serve the needs of an elegy.

The poem is constructed with numerous and pervasive idea pairings, offering up concepts which appear to be opposites, to come to terms with the overwhelming coincidence of life and death which lingers over the poem, creating and emphasising permanent divides within language which is antecedent to the physical distance. As already established, the title presents a symbiotic relationship which helps lead the poem. However, it is a decidedly American image, with both Milkweed plant and Monarch butterfly native to that continent and so in this respect there is a disconnection between Muldoon, the poet who is living in America, and his deceased parents in Ireland, a separation which persists even though the poem's protagonist is physically present at their graveside. Even though the titular image appears to neatly partition an aspect of nature, it is specific, born out of a distinct landscape which is inhabited by the speaker but not the deceased; the dramatic irony of physical distance augments the mourning as it makes the scene insubstantial.

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Introducing the idea of separation and alignment in the title ensures these ideas are prevalent within the whole poem, signalling both to the reader and poet one of the main ways the speaker is struggling to respond to grief, whilst offering possible reconciliation through the connections made in the form. This is the way he presents his deceased parents as 'mother and father', initiating them into the atmosphere of natural pairings. Even though they are dead, they are compared to the symbiotic relationship of the flowering plant and butterfly of the title, associating the co-dependence, beauty and natural imagery with them in death. However, it is a connection which is out of place when studied further; nature and place are unrealistically linked. Due to this, the abrupt opening seems insincere, a forced unity which attempts to limit distance between deceased and mourner. Muldoon is aware of this and leans into the absurdity with an inane image: 'the taste of dill, or tarragon— | he could barely tell one from the other—' (*PMP,* 329). The jump from his parent's grave to the seemingly unrelated herbal tastes is unsettling, linking the incongruous thoughts of death with luxurious flavours from around the world. Furthermore, Ruben Moi argues that 'tarragon' contains 'an assonantal echo with terra gone and sings in itself a lament to the many soils, territories and terrains that are gone, and the terra incognita to come.'[24] Distance is thus both mourned and feared for its expansive potential, possessing two characteristics which are influential that create alternate meanings. The symbiotic relationship of the title is therefore a guiding light, providing an example for the others to aspire to, with each connection carrying the potential to be consoling and constructive as they are forced together through the villanelle form to reconsider their place in the world.

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[24] Moi, *Paul Muldoon and the Language of Poetry,* p. 207.

The relationship of and distance between ideas and emotion is vital to the poem, coming to terms with life and death by forming new connections which reinterpret the world. With form providing a strict rhyme scheme to pair ideas together, which is not completely fulfilled by the poem, there is a tension that comes from the disharmony as distance is present in the poem where it is not expected to be, separating commonly attached ideas and forcing them to be considered in new ways. However, ideas are not only coupled together through the expected formal elements, but also the syntax of the poem. As every instance of rhyme is an act of association or pairing, finding shared sound qualities which transcend meaning to partner ideas together, Muldoon is utilising the poetic element to emphasise the role of potential combinations within the poem, even if they have been undermined in other areas through different techniques, creating a contentious poem which embodies the tumults of relearning through grief. Where we expect to find unity within language, there is at times separation. Each instance of this innovative rhyme is a repeated moment of connection which reinforces the key tenets of the ideas, coming to terms with the death of his parents and connecting his life to them; experiencing each word in a new context or position. The use of unexpected rhymes helps to normalise incongruous ideas and connections, such as the already mentioned rhyming of 'mother', 'father' and 'other' during the opening tercet (*PMP*, 329). The selection of a word which must fit with each noun results in the distancing from and between both of his parents, a declarative act which separates and isolates each of them. Rather than seeking emotive unity, the speaker appears separate from their family, presenting them as an exterior 'other'. This does not diminish the emotional attachment of the poem, grief is still present, but it forces the reader to constantly associate the mother and father with exterior, or other, possibilities. Furthermore, due to the form these words set out the dominant soundscape of the

poem, ensuring that the idea is constantly returned to whilst being viewed from multiple perspectives. Whilst this does not clearly show a relearning, the separation between them demonstrates the way the poem presents the possibility of relearning by first detaching the speaker from their deceased parents before considering their connection now.

Like the constructive pairings which have already been discussed, the act of distancing found in the description of their parents as 'other' carries on supporting a relearning of the world, having the speaker re-fashion ideas continually as they keep up with the villanelle's rhyme scheme. In doing so there is an emphasis on the metaphysical separation between himself and his parents; the distance between life and death. The partnership they initiate is not reassuring or additive, but instead one of distance and unknowing, converse to the poem's titular relationship. It is subtly present inside the atmosphere of positive or distracting pairings, with the reader wondering about the relationship between tastes or the confusion over locations on opposite sides of America: 'in Portland, Maine, or, yes, Portland, Oregon—' (*PMP,* 329). This line is an example of the complex poetic reconfiguring which is created as the poem attempts to find clarity, with the caesura elongating the line to ensure the newfound certainty is emphasised. However, the questioning is notably removed from the main subject of the poem, emblematically finding unity in a poem which continually emphasises the separation between the speaker and their deceased parents. Aided by the form, the continual revision of ideas is not only iterative, developing the poem through asides and diversions, it is also emblematic of the grieving process presented by Attig.

As the poem does not create a continually identifiable landscape in which mourning can take place, Muldoon uses personal memories of his mother to create a shrouded landscape, casting shade over the scene:

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He looked about. He remembered her palaver

on how both earth and sky would darken—

'You could barely tell one from the other—' (*PMP*, 330)

This initiates an emotional turn in the poem as it finally investigates the deceased, hearing from an outside voice in the refrain as a means of remembering, with the voice altering perspective in an attempt to revise the emotional experience of the poem to be inclusive of the deceased rather than excluding them. The covered world is not only foreshadowing the clouded and uncertain ending of the poem, but it is also the opposite of what could have been, presumably before the sky was darkened by the unseen presence of death; a world with a clear bright horizon. However, as the separation between the figures in the response is extreme, leaving a gulf of uncertain space which is both emotionally tantalising and destructively unknowable, the reality the speaker is faced by is one of their separation, starting a storm over a signifier of Ireland and Irish identity: 'may trigger off the mother and father || of all storms, striking your Irish Cliffs of Moher' (*PMP*, 330). The speaker's parents are associated with the raging storm, presenting Ireland and home as an unsafe place that is not welcoming to them, with the imposing cliffs directly linked to the idea of the speaker's place of birth rather than their parents, with the rhyme showing a discordant natural reaction in which physical closeness does not relieve the threshold of death. With the association to Ireland being shown as unfamiliar, the distance between the poet and the site they are attempting to mourn in seems insurmountable; they must present a famous Irish landmark which has no other connection to their parents or their deaths as a way of reaching across the Atlantic. The poem seeks access to the emotional world of the speaker's parents, linking

them together in a suitable place in order to contain the grief and better respond to it. As the poem goes on, the act of pairing only makes connections rather than forming relationships, attaching ideas together rather than bringing forth natural partners. Relearning the world is thus not a concrete process with clear attachments made to be progressed from, but instead is an iterative system of trial and error. The limitations of the connections made are part of the complexity of grief.

As we have seen, the speaker attempts to create an imagined scene which is of himself and his parents, whilst also processing the complexity of emotions involved in grief. However, this attempt ends in failure, with the speaker unable to proceed from the ending of the poem, stuck in the cycles which have aided the journey through grief. The final verse-paragraph still opens with a concise survey of the scene: 'He looked about' (*PMP*, 330). This stunted sentence contains an attempted bringing together of what came before in the poem, encapsulating the range of place and emotion through a surveyable landscape. However, there is no extended description, no continuation of place or feeling which responds to the complications of the poem so far. Instead, the sudden stop of the sentence ends the potential of idealised closures and completion. However, this is not the end of the poem; the speaker's parents are still dead, and he is still at their graveside. Whilst the build-up to this moment has not eased the emotional pressures of grief, the assuaging role of elegy is not rejected with the speaker still reacting and responding to death. The idea of consolation is subverted in a manner which progresses the poem and fits with the form, with a confusing domestic aside added to obscure the supposed failure, leaving the reader to question how a cow-parsley filled samovar fits into the elegiac scene:

He looked about. Cow's-parsley in a samovar.

He'd mistaken his mother's name, 'Regan', for 'Anger':

as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father

he could barely tell one from the other. (*PMP*, 330)

The common flower has the potential to adorn the graves, naturally decorating a graveyard rather than originating from the tributes of mourners, and the unusual samovar provides a rhyming partner for both father and mother, ensuring that they are still connected through the confusion. However, the samovar domesticates the mother's death into a serving of tea. It is a precursor to anger, through which the complexities of grief are considered through absurdity. The speaker only comes face to face with his anger at the very end when all other attempts at mourning have failed. Furthermore, the cycling of the villanelle form ensures that his parents are again considered. Instead of being able to avoid confronting their graves directly or ending the poem before considering the result of his inability to mourn completely, the poem must approach them through the form and pronounce the continued emotional failure; his poetic endeavours across many landscapes and moments of the past have not altered the formal inevitability which comes in the refrains: 'he could barely tell one from the other.' This closing line is not angry, but is defeatist, directly demonstrating an incomplete mourning process, with the figure unable to distinguish his parents from each other, the past and all other associations. They seem to hold no individual abstract value but are instead lost in the whole of the speaker. Whilst the poem crosses continents, establishes itself in specific memories and potential shared metaphysical ground, and extends a historic form, it does not assuage the complexities of grief. There is something physical which is lacking, an element which would have stopped his angry confusion. They are always similar but distant, flower and butterfly, rather than the

same, even when language teases the possibility. The poem demonstrates the complexities which distance brings to mourning, and even in the symbiotic relationship of parent and child there can still be something which requires more when attempting to mourn successfully.

2.3. 'Let the lamp affix its beam' - The emotional distance in grief

Whilst public displays of grief are usually ritualistic, in which observers and mourners alike are able to follow the process and attend the funeral procession, private funerals have slowly become more impersonal as the structure has been altered by a gradual repudiation of religion and acceptance of outsourcing to unfamiliar professionals who offer a formalised refinement of the funerary process, even if they approach it in a sensitive manner. Individual mourners have relinquished control over part of the burial, yielding the planning and organisation of the funeral to a professional who can alleviate them of some stress during their time of grief. However, this also removes the individual from parts of the funeral process, limiting their involvement in the preparation of the body, physical burial and some aspects of the occasion, which removes them from parts of the memorial process. As such, mourners have become more distant from the act of burial, relying on others to construct a generic ritual framework which seeks to offer emotional support through symbolic meaning. Elegies have been altered to reflect this change in the mourning process, dealing with the lack of intimate connection with the public display of grief. Consequently, mourners internalise more of the emotional working as they experience the planned ceremony rather than planning and enacting it themselves, becoming observers rather than active participants.

In this respect, we might expect to find that elegiac poetry in this time of customary change would demonstrate a layer, or indeed multiple layers, of emotional

and physical distance which separates the poet from the deceased in order to represent reality, whilst also breaking this distance in order to reach moments of closeness and familiarity which are still desired by the mourners, especially as they are reconstructing their worldview after death. The tension between these two demands is productive to the elegy as it enables the poet to abstract themselves until they feel ready to enter the emotional scene, whilst also limiting the impulse to search for consolation. However, the lack of input into the funeral can also influence the poetry in a variety of ways as it both registers the lack of connection and is subject to the way a lack of connection influences mourning. This can cause the poetry to seem at times arbitrary and contrived as the most notable shared event of the grieving process is beyond the control of the mourners. Rifts between the personal impulses of grief, our need to relearn the world, and the reality of an impersonal funeral are thus evident and alter the way in which we mourn, influencing elegiac output. And so, to continue to investigate the layering of distance within the elegies of our poets, we need to focus now upon the culturally imposed distance which positions the individual apart from a key process of mourning, considering how this influences poetic output and the experience of relearning the world through grief response and reaction. Alongside the physical distancing, the three elegies considered by Stevens, Muldoon and Lowell are removed in some way from death, suppressing both the mourning process and the outpouring of emotion as the elegy looks upon rather than participates in the scene of mourning. The three poems provide a starting point for considering a changing poetic depiction of mourning as they exemplify a personal process which has been taken over by a distancing, causing various forms of separation to overshadow the act of remembrance.

2.3.1. Controlling grief in Wallace Stevens' 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream'

Whilst we might reasonably expect that when an elegy is emotional it is usually tender or aggressive, within 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream', from his 1923 collection *Harmonium*, Wallace Stevens is neither — it is a poem engendered by and about mourning rather than expressing mourning. The poem does not dismiss either state but instead offers an impersonal approach to grief which considers the experience in a practical manner, reflecting a commodified and somewhat homogenised funeral process. Through the poem, a reader can consider how the funeral system alters the poetry itself through its very approach to the event, noting whether there are still traditional poetic techniques, emotional outbursts, a reconstitution of the world or a notable manner of response regarding death and loss. However, Stevens' emotive distance is not reflected in the physical reality found within the poem, with the site of mourning being within the private home. The funerary process which dominates the occasion is impersonal, directed from the outside by an omniscient figure who does not interfere with the emotions of the poem. A universal experience, loss is dealt with in a blanket manner within the poem, diverging from some of the personal approaches which have appeared in the thesis so far, considering death and loss themselves rather than focussing on the deceased. Due to this, it offers a previously unacknowledged view of death and grief in which the emotional process progresses routinely, dictated by others, as individuals look outwards for both support and certainty.

From its opening, the poem obtains a commanding tone which controls the actions and emotions of both the characters and reader to ensure the poem progresses at a disciplined rate to respond to grief, part of a wider process of reconstituting the world:

Call the roller of big cigars,

The muscular one, and bid him whip

In kitchen cups concupiscent curds. (*CPWS,* 68)

Originating from an unexplained figure, the action requires no thought from the mourner giving them the opportunity to focus fully on processing their own emotions rather than controlling the funeral. This appears to offer the mourner a structured normative experience. The structure initiates a controlled flow of events in which a pause for contemplation is impossible as there is always another task to be done, watched over and ordered by an impersonal unknown figure, rejecting personal emotional impulses in favour of a distant formality. Furthermore, the poem starts *in medias res*, with the reason for the domestic scene not explained to the reader until the second stanza, nor is there an explanation for the command. As such, the reader and mourner are powerless participants in an unclear situation, suppressing the emotional associations which come with traditional elegies as individuality and personal expression of and for the deceased or mourners is limited. This establishes a tone of domesticity and hierarchy, with the powerful figure disregarding names in favour of physical descriptions and the action of whipping appearing ominous at the end of the second line. Doing so instils within the text a sense of control, providing a domineering certainty in the uncertain experience of grief.

Stevens' poem provides an overview of the workings of mourning through the depersonalised wake, presenting a removed consideration on the experience of grief. An altered version of the emotional expectation of elegy is present through the uncommon adjective 'concupiscent', filling the funeral desserts with an intense lust or desire which will be consumed and internalised by the mourners before they depart. The voice wants

to offer momentary solace to convince those in attendance that they are now comfortable with death. Here, the poem inserts the unusual, yet hopeful, potential for a sudden charge of emotion which will advance the mourner, reaching for the presence of prospective consolation and attempting to bypass any necessary reaction or response to death; the mourners are offered an appealing distraction. Key in altering the elegiac process by introducing the false hope of consolation before addressing death, the distant observer also removes the personal immediacy which is common within such an emotional mode. The ability to relearn the world is thus controlled by the funeral director, distancing the mourner from their grief and depersonalising the experience.

Stevens' outside perspective disturbs the reader without destabilising the poem, intertwining the elegy with an outside director who ambivalently organises the day. They are the initiator and controller of the scene akin to a funeral director, connecting the emotional process of mourning with the realities of funerals and wakes in the twentieth century. Helen Vendler has commented on the link between ice-cream and Cuban funeral traditions as a specific cultural act which is present within the poem without being referred to or explained in any way; the cultural heritage of the deceased is merely implied in the scene.[25] In this respect, there is no clarity as to whether the funeral director has picked the dessert or if the mourners have, bringing into question who wanted the ice-cream and thus if it is a consequence of the depersonalised commodification of death and mourning in which cultures are homogenised, or is part of the personal representations which connect the events to the deceased in order to respond to their death specifically. Whilst there is uncertainty as to whether the details of the funeral authentically represent the deceased, the process of mourning is not

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[25] Helen Vendler, 'Wallace Stevens', *The Columbia History of American Poetry*, eds. Jay Parini and Brett Candlish Millier, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 370-94.

hampered; does the source of the ice-cream matter if it comforts those in attendance? Instead, the opening of the poem demonstrates a separation between the emotional display which can be worked through by the mourners and the deceased themselves, with the cold apathy of reality superseding emotional outbursts: 'Let be be finale of seem' (*CPWS*, 68).

Stevens' poem plays with the divergence between the mourner and deceased by removing the voice of the individual mourner and inserting an outside voice. As such, the opening three lines demonstrate the formal process of mourning in an emotionless manner. Their unemotional content ensures that the rest of the affective imagery and language within the poem is hollow to the reader as they have seen the reality of the funeral organisers behind closed doors and can thus question the sentiment of the event as the responses are obviously staged. Not only is the impersonal reality of an externally organised funeral emphasised, but its role in the mourning process is challenged as it disrupts the possibility of relearning the world within the opening three lines through the commanding voice. The mourner and deceased are relegated to the background, silent, passive and unengaged with the process of relearning the world, as an unknown emperor of ice-cream takes centre stage to direct the proceedings, taking control of the process during an event which is associated with an individual coming to terms with the death and dictating their experience.

Notable in its emotional distance, in which both the mourners and deceased are directed by an outside force, 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' still conforms to some elegiac traditions as it responds to death. Whilst the supervising voice focuses on the funeral as an event, those working and attending are passive participants who stand around or perform directed actions, becoming over three lines an unwelcomed congregation of mourners:

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Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

As they are used to wear, and let the boys

Bring flowers in last month's newspapers. (*CPWS,* 68)

Whilst the depiction is not at all sympathetic, referring to the women with a derogatory

gendered term and diminishing the men to boys, they are still present and provide a

direct connection to canonical elegies. Their presence is necessary for the poem to

respond to grief in a generic manner as they are a substitute for an organised

procession, causing tension as they disturb the funeral director with their presence.

Even though their presence is an important part of the elegy as they signify the

unspoken grief experience, the repeated verb 'let' ascribes an impossible amount of

power to the director. They are now in control of common acts of mourning, furthering

the poem's posed tone. Grieving, even in an expected traditional manner, is seemingly

no longer a personal act but is instead directed by an outsider who is unemotional in

their decision making. However, as it relates to an essential part of the poem, the

strength of the verb is suspect, especially as the procession of mourners have assembled

outside of view; a seemingly inevitable expression of grief at a funeral which cannot be

controlled by the emperor. It is as if the emotional drive of the mourners is stronger

than the structured organisation which is attempting to control their expression of grief,

challenging the very reality it is reflecting as the commanding voice is really at the

behest of the emotional impulses which drive the mourning process, responding beyond

the voice. As an outpouring of emotion, the procession is seen to be necessary, even if

the poem dismisses it through language as it interrupts the planned events. This

strengthens the emotional elements of the act as the mourners themselves are driven to

form the procession even though it is not encouraged, imposing their own redemptive acts on the scene rather than merely accepting those which are offered to them. As an action generated from beyond the directorial voice, it is a direct challenge to the dominant perspective of the poem, with its emotional framework being exposed as unsentimental and unconsolatory even when it contains references to funeral sweets and formidable lines on the finality of death.

Without the chance to try and offer consolation or aid a relearning of the world, the depicted funeral is a charade. In this respect the poem challenges the power of economic actors in aiding the grieving process as they lack the personalisation and disregard the redemptive role of friends and family in the planning and hosting of such an event, especially when religious rituals have been superseded by personalised symbols which have been subsequently commodified; responses to death are now controlled and prescribed. The poem's second stanza is less emotionally distant than the first, with the directing voice now intertwining personalised aspects of elegiac tradition into their management of the scene:

> Take from the dresser of deal,
>
> Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
>
> On which she embroidered fantails once
>
> And spread it so as to cover her face. (*CPWS,* 68)

The second stanza does not waver from the imperative opening of the stanzas, there is still a domineering tone, reinforcing the role of the emperor as controller. However, the deceased is now at the centre of the commands, altering the perspective of the poem by directly considering the death of an individual rather than generally situating the

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moment within an unspecified funeral process. This is a shift from the apathetic stance of the first stanza and brings with it even more traditionally elegiac elements, this time associated with the deceased rather than brought about by the dawdling mourners demanding a presence. The body is now gendered, her room populated with detailed personal objects that reflect both her life and the idea of death and she is notably covered with a sheet which she once embroidered; the response to grief is personal.

This final covering is notable, not only because it is associated with a personal act of weaving in the past but also due to the poetic relations it brings. The structure of the poem also has a connection to the elegiac tradition presented by Peter Sacks, and established in the introduction, using the refrain, 'The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream', calling back to the dominant figure of mourning within the poem to close off each stanza (*CPWS*, 68). An extension and explanation of the title, the refrain provides additional emphasis on the emperor of ice-cream, questioning their identity, role and overall position within the poem. Furthermore, the refrain provides a point of comparison for the free verse of the other lines, with the repeated lines offering a familiar, yet confusing, reprieve after the emotional force of the poem, inserting consistency into the response. Rather than creating a ritual chant or prayer which reassures the mourner, the repeated line instead distracts the reader and makes them question its meaning, providing a break from grief in an unconventional manner. Additionally, its confusing content encourages the reader to revisit the lines, seeking a greater understanding of them through continual rethinking akin to the ideas of relearning the world through grief reaction and response.

Focusing on covering her face, the emperor is ensuring that one of the most visual individual identifiers is symbolically covered to emphasise the finality of death and depersonalise the deceased:

> And spread it so as to cover her face.
>
> If her horny feet protrude, they come
>
> To show how cold she is, and dumb. (*CPWS,* 68)

Whilst the sheet is personal to the deceased, covering her face is not portrayed as a tender or affectionate act, instead part of the ambivalent funeral process as the poem rejects the opportunity to pause on her face and remember her individuality as her body is prepared. The incomplete deal dresser is eventually seen to have been given more detail than any other part of her life, with the antiquated wooden description having a dual meaning which brings with it economic associations that seem crass within the poem yet echo the formalised role of funeral director. Hidden within the physical facts of the room, the reality of financial considerations which come with organised funeral processes are unspoken within the poem, even though they are part of the cold commanding tone of the director who is there to conduct business rather than mourn. Destitute of any human faculties, the deceased is labelled as not only 'cold' but also 'dumb.' The unnerving rhyme between 'come' and 'dumb' creates a joyous soundscape within the poem, trivialising the fact that she is dead. Furthermore, the rhyme comes from an additional clause at the end of the sentence, seemingly emphasising her state for no reason other than the solitary rhyme. She is, in that moment, depersonalised and dehumanised because she is dead, with no sentimental pause or glorious imagery which avoids the reality of death, showing an indifferent response. This emphasises the separation between deceased and funeral director, with the formalised covering dictated without emotion. Rather than seeing any active

participation in relearning the world, the reader is being forced through a distant funerary process.

The sense of separation from the deceased is furthered by the subsequent line: 'Let the lamp affix its beam' (*CPWS,* 68). Here, the redemptive power of light is manufactured and manipulated to such an extent that it becomes a gross representation of what was once an important image of emotional relief due to its religious connotations. Whilst the commanding voice is present in this image, it does not control the lamp but instead lets it act however it is already positioned, emphasising a lack of complete control. This alters the line as it empowers the qualities of light, removing them from the funeral director or mourners and giving them to an unknown figure of redemption in the hopes of finding consolation. However, without personal input, the light is merely a blinding beam which is shining without meaning. Presented as such, the vital role of mourners is clear as they provide contextual information which works with the traditional images to bring personalised consolation which links to previous acts of mourning to create a lineage; history itself does not limit grief.

Without the personal attachments of the elegy, there is much less direct emotional relief. Stevens' director ensures that the work proceeds through grief, but the act of mourning itself is limited as there is nothing specific which acknowledges or challenges the distance between the reader, funeral director, and the deceased. Instead, the poem is tense, with a clear power dynamic which stems from an unknown figure, an apathetic controller dealing with elegiac traditions and a constant language of cold certainty which offers no sentimental care or understanding, conflating the process of grief with negativity which demeans the response. The directed and controlled funeral is both a critique of the economic process which has taken over the way in which we mourn publicly and a constantly realistic view of death. Its focus on the harsh reality is

shocking, but not untruthful, rejecting the emotive needs of the mourners to present the situation in a matter-of-fact manner through which response is de-personalised, with actions undertaken without clear purpose and no thought given as to how to support the bereaved. Reconsidering who the poem is for, we can see that both the deceased and mourner is necessary, with personalised aspects of both being vital to the emotional process. This emphasises the difficulties of an outsider controlling the funeral because they are unemotional in the situation, caring more about progressing the event than if those present can progress emotionally, or what they want to at that moment. Whilst most elegies do have conflict, with uncertainty, confusion and a reluctance to move on, 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' is unwilling to confront any of these, with the mourner passive rather than active in the funeral and thus unable to individually relearn the world. As such, the procession of mourners, which carry elegiac significance as highlighted by Sacks in the introduction, are degraded and rejected because they may delay or distract from the funeral process. There are tokenised aspects of mourning which are drawn from the elegiac tradition and some cultural traditions, with no explanation or description apart from the mere acts themselves.

2.3.2. Familiarity, distance, and grief in Paul Muldoon's 'Come Into My Parlour'

Stevens' poem depicts the commodified nature of funerals and the way in which they move on through any ritualistic elements without considering the deceased or the mourners, promoting a scene of controlled passive mourning over active participation. Offering a contrasting viewpoint, Paul Muldoon's elegy 'Come Into My Parlour', from his 1980 collection *Why Brownlee Left*, is a personalised, specific, presentation of a part of the funeral process. Set near his birthplace in rural Northern Ireland, the poem relies upon the depiction of a close community and familiar landscape to create an area of

communal mourning which is both personalised and is yet still organised and dominated by an unrelated figure, establishing a funeral process which seems to enable the mourner to be at times passive and at others require active engagement with some aspects of life and death. This offers a point of comparison to Stevens' apathetic director who focuses on coldly proceeding through the funeral, and in this respect in reading Muldoon's poem we will consider how familiarity can alter the elegiac process and relearning the world.

Muldoon does not hold off confronting death within the poem, instead accepting it as a certainty of 'when' not 'if':

> When someone died, for miles around
>
> You were sure to find Coulter
>
> In the graveyard at Collegelands
>
> With his spade and navvy's shovel. (*PMP,* 92)

The emphasis, in this moment, is less on death and more on the associations surrounding it in which the close-knit community has the same conduit of mourning. The certainty of 'sure to find' is so strong that it extends for miles, spreading like death until the figure of Coulter is intertwined with the very idea of it, becoming central to the local understandings of loss. Rather than exterior to the emotional turmoil in the manner of Stevens' unnamed director, the gravedigger Coulter is thus interior, familiar in name, yet also cast as the lone gravedigger. This is not only interior to one instance of death, but to the process of death and mourning within the whole area. Understanding that the process of death and mourning is reflected in the whole area, the landscape of

death is no longer just a metaphysical abstract. Within it we see an established process of mourning, which is supposed to bring support through their generalities. In and of itself this is not uncommon in elegy, with familiar landscapes beneficial to mourning as discussed in the previous chapter.

Coulter, the familiar gravedigger equipped with 'his spade and navvy's shovel', is both a symbolic source of closure and pain as his presence signifies death and yet his actions help to inter the deceased into part of the community (*PMP*, 92). His emotional and representative limitations are demonstrated through the distant way the unfamiliar personal belongings of deceased individuals, left scattered after a plane broke up in mid-air, are collected:

> As if all should come as second nature
>
> To one who has strayed no farther
>
> Than a ripple from a stone. (*PMP,* 92)

There is an awareness in the poem as to the limitations of such a specific figure of mourning, especially within the sometimes contradictory general and individual demands of grief. However, there is still an attempt at mourning in the collection of personal belongings, an act which symbolically represents acts of grieving. Without acknowledging these limitations, it would have been hard to accept Coulter as a genuine figure, especially if readers were supposed to find emotional support within him on a more general level. As such, Coulter is a conduit of mourning and part of the process of grief, but he is also not an arbiter of wider universal truth or practitioner of generic funerary practices as his relationship to the community is vital to the elegy.

Here, Muldoon touches upon an emotionally generative idea, relating the affective content to a personal version of the mourning process. Poetry is enlivened by the convergence: 'What Coulter took as his text | Was this bumpy half-acre of common' (*PMP*, 92). Coulter's guiding text echoes John Donne's 'half-acre tombs', associating the place itself with not only the site of burial but also the emotive significance of a lasting memorial found in objects such as tombs.[26] Viewed alongside the religious connotations of 'text', the familiar landscape is not only symbolic, but an essential element of the response to grief. By intricately assimilating wider elegiac references with the intensely personal place, the graveyard at Collegelands itself is both one of avoidance and one of acceptance of complex emotion; when visiting for one reason you are always reminded of the other. Furthermore, Coulter is part of the location, anchored to the place. Consequently, the gravedigger, a familiar figure in the community, operates within the realm of grief directly to connect place and the process of elegy. This brings reassurance as he remembers when others have forgotten:

> If the family had itself lost track
>
> He knew exactly which was which
>
> And what was what,
>
> Where among the heights and hollows
>
> Were the Quinns, and the O'Briens. (*PMP* 92-93)

Coulter is thus not only leading the mourning in a familiar manner, but he also provides an element of familiarity and relief, supporting personal responses through himself and

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[26] John Donne, 'The Canonization' *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 6th ed, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall & Mary Jo Salter, (New York: WW Norton, 2018) pp. 309-11.

his actions as he is a living link to death. Through remembering, Coulter is assuming the responsibility for everyone who knows the area or has relatives buried there; the deceased live on beyond their family, even 'if the family had itself lost track'. Therefore, Coulter is vital to every aspect of the poem due to his familiarity with both the local area and its inhabitants, evolving the role of funeral director from a distant controller to a fundamental element of the mourning process.

Coulter is therefore a complicated figure of both loss and solace who is deeply associated with the graveyard at Collegelands and its surrounding communities, providing a broad and encompassing voice. Rather than have him haunting the scene or disrupting the poem through the complicated emotional construction, Coulter speaks directly. This not only guides the elegy and thus the process of mourning, but it also helps to alleviate the internal conflict which has been detailed as the response seems to come from an array of sources, whilst reducing Coulter's distance from the poem.

> 'I've been at the burying
>
> Of so many of the Souper McAuleys
>
> I declare they must be stacked
>
> As high as dinner-plates.
>
> Mind you, this ground's so wet
>
> They're off again like snow off a ditch.' (*PMP*, 93)

The grim scale of emotional pressure on Coulter is jokingly domesticated. The joke creates a warm interior world — plates stacked after a family dinner — for the deceased whilst also not resting on the memory as he speaks of needing to bury more in the future. Here, the family is enlivened — dining as a unit within death. Redemptive, if

but for a moment, this metaphor anchors Coulter within the local emotive processes of grieving and mourning, becoming a naturalistic element of the landscape. Whilst it is not a traditional elegiac scene of mourning, with no parade of mourners, lists of flowers or elysian return, there is a familial closeness that resonates. Already established to echo beyond remembered history, this scene is reassuring and progresses the poem as it asserts an arrangement of life after death which does not rely on you to remember.

However, this scene does not last, with any extensive reassurance instantly cut short in the following verse paragraph, ending the hopeful kingdom and separating out the dead into a tiered list which creates a distance between the deceased:

> The grave of my mother,
> My father's grave, and his father's;
> The slightly different level
> Of the next field, and the next; (*PMP*, 93)

The structure, implied to be an inevitable part of the same reassuring landscape, destroys the illusion of any physical family uniformity in death. Instead, there is an order of the land which values some over the others. In turn, this weakens the preceding image, turning any relief into a fleeting idea that will not support longer term mourning as the world seems still to have some value judgement in death. Not only does this limit the process of mourning, but it also demonstrates a limit with Coulter stemming from his omniscience and the necessary illusion of consolation; how can an all knowing being convince you of something which it does not present to be true. Direct speech ensures that Coulter is immediate to the poem, closer to the mourners than Stevens' emperor. This closeness alters the affective content of the poem as it struggles to believe Coulter

and sincerely find comfort in the contradictions he embodies. The ensuing complexity is an overlooked emotional aspect of elegy and one which has a place in the poem due to the intricate individual grieving experience, but it is not successful in supporting the redemptive journey as it denies comfort from the familiar landscape, instead presenting it as a scattered site of destruction. It also champions the role of a removed individual to progress the structure of mourning, however, it demonstrates that an emotive connection is still necessary for there to be any actual progress toward and through relearning the world.

Looking beyond Coulter, as his poetic power has now been challenged and exhausted, there is a personal connection which appeals directly to the reader within the final verse paragraph. Focusing on the graves of the speaker's mother and father, we are pushed through the physical landscape, deeper into one's lineage and then across the fields to consider the community of deceased who inhabit the land, creating a communal response and establishing a larger natural reaction. This expansive view does not spend long pausing on the graves, nor does it deeply consider each individual. Instead, the lineated description of place offers singular moments of insight, not pausing to consider 'the slightly different level' which could relate to the order of the family or the depth each family is buried. There is now no guiding figure to lead the elegiac process and thus it is beholden to complex relationships which come with biases; Stevens' cold director was removed from the emotional intricacies of grief and thus pushed the poem and its grief forward to ensure responses were given, even if ineffectual. Unable, or unwilling, to regulate the emotional noise of the poem, it ends with a scrambled scene:

Here an O'Hara, there a Quinn,

> The wreckage of bath-tubs and bedsteads,
>
> Of couches and mangles,
>
> That was scattered for miles around. (*PMP,* 93)

The domestic is now associated with death, with dismantled listings which extend the pain of loss into the homes of everyone within the local vicinity. Without the regulating voice of Coulter, homes are ripped apart because of death, with the landscape holding only a scattering of unrelated memories in an apathetic manner, staging a site of destruction without offering support. Muldoon's poem loses the possibility of solace when free from Coulter, demonstrating a need for a guiding voice to lead the process of mourning and bring together the scattered belongings. Unemotive himself, Coulter still carried a redemptive knowledge which supports the promise of reconstructing the world. However, his intense connection to a singular insular place complicates the whole poem: he is part of the eternal conflict that sits at the heart of responding to grief. The closing release is cathartic without seeking ascension for the deceased, dismissing the religious relief which was offered by Coulter and the setting. The wrecked scene is not anti-elegiac but is instead without a conclusion, with the place implied to continue, scattering more personal effects as individuals die. Made possible because of the complex and untimetabled response to grief, it is one section of a larger journey in which emotional and physical ground is covered.

Understanding elegy, or at least some elegies, in this manner provides the potential for wider cumulative elegiac sequences in which relief is found through an extensive working through of mourning. As part of a wider process, there is room for failed, violent, aggressive and contradictory elegies. These poems are still part of the movement towards comfort, desiring to assuage grief, resulting from individual or

cultural complications of the mourning process. Muldoon's scattered scene offers no finality, nor any closing certainty for the poem to rest on. Instead, there is a potential for more to happen in the future. Bound only by the categorisation of poetry, these moments can be mourned again through different means from a different perspective.

Returning to the role of narrator, the personal vs impersonal directorial voice impacts the process of mourning, with distance influencing both the reaction and response. An apathetic voice helps to perform a reassuring ritual, conjuring up traditional elegiac elements to align the mourning with a larger tradition of reaching for moments of consolation. An intensely personal voice offers a direct connection, helping the elegy to be placed within a specific locale to represent and connect the mourners and deceased. However, whilst the former can be too emotionally removed, the latter can carry with it too many complex associations which disrupt mourning or generate conflict. Both are, however, important perspectives for the elegiac process.

2.3.3. Returning to grieve in Robert Lowell's 'To Mother'

As seen, there are benefits to both emotional positions within the elegy, producing different mourning processes that encounter various limitations as they seek solace. Robert Lowell's elegy 'To Mother' straddles the intimate world of mourning found in 'Come into my Parlour' with the distanced grieving process found in 'Emperor of Ice-cream'. Published in *Day by Day* in 1977, which similarly to 'Sailing Home from Rapallo' discussed in the first chapter, mourns the death of Lowell's mother, indicating an iterative process of mourning in which each elegy for her captures an element of the whole experience.[27] This reflects an extended mourning process, enabling us to read the

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[27] For previous discussion of Lowell's maternal elegies, especially 'Sailing Home from Rapallo', see above pp. 51-62.

development of grief over time and through changing interpretations. 'Persistently concerned with issues of inheritance, parental and patriarchal dominance', Lowell returns to elegy to distance himself from his familial past by actively engaging with it until he is beyond the influence to aid his response.[28] The iterative working through of grief is an element of elegiac process. The continued study of Lowell's elegies for his mother enables us to view multiple parts of the same larger movement, whilst also allowing us to consider them as evocations of grief.

Lowell's elegiac impetus is calmly introduced in the poem, noting its role in a larger emotional movement to grieve for his mother: 'I've come a third time | to live in your dour, luxurious Boston' (*RLCP*, 789). Openly, in a casual tone, the poem is aligned with his previous acts of mourning her, becoming part of a personal poetic grieving process which can be traced through his works. In this respect, the poem is placed within a wider body of grief, supported by past elegies as it continues their emotional journey and coming into conflict with the 'subtraction' which Helen Vendler argues is at the heart of the collection *Day by Day*.[29] Consequently, the poem is a break from the collections' norm, diverging to reinforce and renew the poetic catalogue of mourning for his mother in order to further respond to her death.

Present from the opening line, the poem carries out a directly personal work of mourning: 'I almost lifted the telephone to dial you | forgetting you have no dial' (*RLCP*, 789). Her death is conceded rather than confronted, noted by the inability to contact her. Through the construction of the sentence, the possibility of contacting her is teased and thus the desire for her to be alive is demonstrated. The response here is intensely

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28 Gillian Groszewski, '"[R]EPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT; REVISE, REVISE, REVISE": Robert Lowell's Elegiac Poetry', *IJAS Online*, 2 (2010) p. 45.
29 Helen Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books: Stevens, Plath, Lowell, Bishop, Merrill*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) p. 80.

personal and intimate, proceeding through grief without any outside support or pre-determined structure. However, rather than a confessional spur, it is a result of the previous elegies; his mother's death no longer has the sudden emotional shock it once did as he has already reacted to it and started to form a response. Instead, there is an emotional capitulation accepting reality and acknowledging that it must be processed in a different manner to understand it. Lowell does so with both the form and content of the poem, starting a new verse paragraph with a certainty which diverts and confuses the elegy, telling the reader who she was metaphorically. The process is thus not one of clear mourning but is instead complicated. Whilst intimately close to the deceased, mourning with a familiarity that pushes deeply into Lowell's own associations with his mother, there are subsequent detachments in which separation and familiarity of place, belongings and emotion are delicately balanced as they are utilised to mourn through.

Lowell moves through time when walking through Harvard, seemingly searching for an emotive or comforting sign which never comes until the scene is reset to fit elegiac tradition:

> The humpback brick sidewalks of Harvard
> kick me briskly,
> as if allowed the license of age; (*RLCP*, 789)

The distant understanding of processing grief brings no support for Lowell, who instead attempts to use time to consider his own mortality; his mother is notably absent. Focusing on the self, his commemorative walk does not offer an affective comment but is instead a violent reminder: the sidewalks kicking him in repudiation of his emotionally removed metaphorical mourning practices which accept the death but do

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not engage with his emotions. With the location outright rejecting his attempted

mourning, distancing him from the place, Lowell perseveres to find relief. Whilst there

is no funeral director guiding him, Lowell's poem moves away from the complex images

of time and the flow of life and towards images which align with those from the elegiac

tradition:

> One crummy plant can inspire a whole room—
>
> yours were not crummy—bulb, sheath, seductive stem,
>
> the lily that lifts its flag a moment
>
> puckering on the white pebbles of a whiter pot. (*RLCP* 789)

Elements of nature are at once both crummy, a dirty and unpleasant presence in the

poem, and not crummy when associated directly with the deceased. Demonstrably, the

natural world still has redemptive value, desired and denied through poetry.

Additionally, the complexity of grief is emphasised through the contradicting natural

image. However, as emphasised by the complication of the flower's elegiac presence,

relying on the natural world is no longer reliable to the redemptive process as the

pastoral myths can be challenged.

Conflicted by the contradiction found in the dismissal and reliance of the natural

world, Lowell alters perspective with dashes to voice the disagreement and reach a

resolution. Through the use of punctuation, he can interject, negating his broad

rejection of the pastoral to mourn (or remember) his mother specifically, showing a

relearned world in which flowers are now crummy, even though they were not so in the

past. This emphasises the separation from his mother now she is dead. In doing so, the

posed metaphorical scene of mourning is broken; personal facts are necessary to ensure

the moment adequately represents the deceased. There is no overbearing apathetic director to progress the poem, nor a personable figure of mourning with which to associate, instead Lowell's elegy finds its own direction through grief. The poem's syntax becomes convoluted as it struggles to progress under the emotional burden, with many asides that both enliven the image of Lowell's mother and distract the mourning process.

From the reproach of a parlour there is a level of introspection whilst mourning which carries on through the rest of the poem, accepting death as a reality whilst not wanting it to come: 'I wish I was there with you, | the minutes not counted, but not forever —' (*RLCP*, 789). Implied within the dash is death, imbued into the natural passing of time as Lowell wants to impossibly control his access to the deceased. This inevitable progression, found universally in time, helps to drive forward the poem through its implied logic. As such, progress is not centred around a familiar figure of mourning, nor controlled by a funeral director, but rather it is found within the nebulous concept and experience of time, an inevitable distancing process. Therefore, any progress is inevitable, whether or not Lowell desires it; dust will form on his mothers' 'mantelpiece and banister' as he emotionally relearns a physically frozen world which he knows will not be forever (*RLCP,* 790).

Lowell's inescapable reliance on the concept of time to shape his response rather than any other structure does alter the emotional close of the poem as it emphasises the temporal separation between the speaker and his mother. The overpowering presence of time alters the poem's images, inserting an implied ending which weakens their restorative power because they are undermined. Additionally, the poem moves from asides to bringing in another voice. The question it asks, '"Why do we keep expecting life to be easy, | when we know it never can be?"', is not only rhetorical, but also generates

an external figure (*RLCP,* 790). The figure generated is a larger challenge within the elegy which criticises the expectation of an easier mourning process and rhetorically questions why Lowell's poem has not relied upon existing emotional support nor sought out an existing system of mourning. Originating from a voice exterior to the poem, this criticism demonstrates an issue with the extremely personal act of mourning, emphasising a contradiction which holds back a structureless elegiac process and with it demonstrates a limitation within assumptions related to relearning the world. Without a funeral director to help guide the poem, any outside disturbance seems to disrupt the search for relief, challenging it rather than supporting it. Additionally, Lowell's reliance on traditional elegiac associations seems unable to help the grieving process, with the parade of mourners for his mother 'themselves now dust', due to the length of time which has passed since her death (*RLCP,* 790).

The inevitability of time has yet again altered the poem as the affective symbols of the past are no longer possible. However, it has also created a harmony with the mourners and deceased which brings them together once more; everyone will eventually die. Whilst not conventional, the unity found in death not only predicts the chilling 'self-deleti[on]' of the closing lines, but it also makes them a sufficient ending to the poem as they unite Lowell with his mother:[30]

> it has taken me the time since you died
>
> to discover you are as human as I am …
>
> if I am. (*RLCP,* 790)

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[30] Vendler, *Last Looks, Last Books*, p. 81.

Rather than challenging his humanity, the final question, presented as a statement, is considering his state of being, distancing him from the remembered dead. Rediscovering in death an attachment which was fractured in life is both enlivening and destructive as it leads Lowell to desire death to be with his mother as equals, reacting to death in a self-deleting manner. The certainty and consistency of time leads to this inevitability because it does not intercept the emotional build-up, with no outside guide leading the poem down a proscribed path or through an emotional process with cultural or social significance. There is therefore no wider process which forces Lowell to act on his grief, with progression found by an inevitable passing of time rather than a structured emotional journey. This explains the seemingly apathetic opening, presenting the poem as an inevitable return resulting from the passage of time rather than a sudden emotional outburst. However, distance is still overwhelming, with the temporal separation between the living and dead of the poem eventually dismantling the affective symbols and actions which provide some relief.

Lowell's self-directed mourning is part of a wider process, one which gradually builds towards a relearnt world without an overwhelming reliance on traditional elegiac elements or standardised mourning rituals. Through this, we can see that the divergent approaches of Stevens and Muldoon each provide benefits to the elegy, helping for grief to be processed and progressed through in a manner which exists beyond the poet and poem. We see Lowell himself become a victim as he connects with his mother in death, something which the unnamed emperor and familiar grave-digger ensure does not happen; there is a distant figure through which a connection with death is found. However, adding layers of distance into the elegy causes there to be conflict, with grief being either removed to an extreme or made so intensely personal that the very site of mourning becomes congested. Reflecting the altered reality of death, in

which mourners are now positioned both near and far from death, which as a moment comes in a multitude of occurrences, elegy is now so multifaceted that there is no default perspective or voice, with no wider cultural structure suitable for everyone. Whilst it's impossible to measure conclusively the impact of distance within the elegy, be it emotional or physical, distance not only influences the emotional outcome but also the process of relearning the world through grief reaction and response. Furthermore, it also highlights the importance of process within the elegy, with each poem being directly altered by the varied emotional and social processes which dominate each text. Without a larger study, categorisation is nearly impossible, however it does indicate that further study should consider how elegy progresses, what it touches upon throughout the process and which wider social structures, if any, guide elegies.

2.4. Conclusion: Collating various forms of distance

In these elegies, the speaker usually either travels through space to somehow reach certainty and/or familiarity in either a physical or metaphysical sense or attempts to cross the threshold between life and death to communicate with the deceased. However, whilst this presents distance as an inhibitor to grief which must be overcome, we have also seen that distance can be productive for the bereaved as it forces a relearning of the world. The physical need for travel, or return, is the initiation of Clampitt's 'A Procession at Candlemas', presenting separation as an initiator of grief. The journey undertaken is not only physical, to reduce the distance between her and her mother, but also metaphysical as it attempts to both forge new connections and escape her mother's bedside. This complex instance of distance is emblematic of its varied presence within elegy. Building from Heather Yeung's assertion that 'it is out of friction, rather than from a lack of it, that a sense of boundedness but also of

communication can be established and interrogated', it can be argued that dealing with

distance in any manner is crucial to the grief response because it creates an emotional

tension which can be interrogated, evaluated, and learnt from, as we have seen in the

reading of the elegies in this chapter.[31] Distance is multivalent as it operates in both the

physical and metaphysical, with both influencing the relearning of the world through

grief reaction and response by constructing new interpretations, forcing new

connections, returning to disconnections, and reflecting upon the transformations

caused by loss.

The separation in and of distance has also been shown to influence elegy.

Interpersonal separation between the mourner and deceased, brought about by a lack

of insight into the mind of others, can lead to a complex grief experience. This is because

an assumed closeness may have been disrupted after death through new revelations

and the passage of time, complicating grief as it initiates a separation when the mourner

is seeking connection. We have seen how using perspective and memory in elegy this

dis/connection can be explored. The nature of poetry enables this to happen in a linear

or non-linear manner, engendering a relearning of the world through the past. Mainly

metaphysical, this is not the only sense of separation which influences elegy, with this

chapter also uncovering the way in which changing funerary practices have introduced

a physical distance from the deceased which has influenced grief experience. This

separation has been reflected using outside voices and alternate perspectives which

brings the causes of distance into the poem. Not only does this reflect grief experience,

but it also confronts distance directly by imagining the actions of those involved. Whilst

these figures can be cold and uncomfortable, representing an aspect of separation from

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[31] Heather Yeung, *Spatial Engagement with Poetry*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) p. 86.

the deceased which reinforces their death, they can also support a relearning of the world by forcing the mourner to change. This change may be represented through physical acts — burying the deceased — or through a forced new engagement with the world brought about by these outside figures. However, this separation is insurmountable, unlike some of the physical distance discussed in the chapter.

Similarly, we have seen the way the threshold between life and death influences elegy. The existence of the threshold between life and death forces a relearning of the world to take place as one must shape an engagement with the changed world. Some ignore this distance, focusing on other expressions of distance, whilst some focus on this insurmountable divide. However, this distance is inherent in all elegies and is arguably fundamental to grief, coming about at the moment of loss or death. The 'original' distance of grief, its existence indicates the levels of separation which exist, such as those discussed across this chapter, and thus can be confronted within an elegy.

As it is fundamental to grief, the distance within the threshold between life and death is present across every aspect of grief, influencing every means of grief expression. For instance, whilst both physical and metaphysical distance are clearly related to landscape, so too is the threshold between life and death. The threshold causes a separation between mourner and deceased which means landscape has to be either physically remembered or imaginatively changed in order to find a connection. Due to the existence of the threshold, landscape is in some way forced to partake in the relearning of the world as it incorporates the separation into itself. Conversely, landscape can also be used to confront distance within elegy, utilising physical space to form new connections or reform old ones. Again, this influences the relearning of the world as it challenges assumptions and expectations, creating a new engagement with the world.

Clearly, distance and landscape are interrelated, influencing both elegies and the depiction of grief within them. Both individually and through their relationship, distance and landscape help to create part of the process of elegy through the creation of space, implied directionality, plasticity, and elements of relearning the world. Distance alone engenders process and movement through the impossible desire of the bereaved to return to how life was before loss. Implicit within landscape and distance, process and movement will be the subject of the next chapter, building on the existing discussion of relearning the world to consider how loss and grief is expressed through elegy.

<center>Chapter 3</center>

<center>Process in and of Elegy</center>

3.1. Introduction: No strictly unified development

'Process' helps to broaden the consideration of grief, expanding an aspect of both distance and landscape which has been uncovered in the previous chapters. By looking at both longer elegies and the composition process of one elegy, this chapter will discuss how elegy can both perpetuate the process of grief and is influenced by one's experience of the process, helping to interrogate and alter an individual's grieving process. Grief is also not only a passive experience, but one in which the bereaved must actively engage with the reality of loss. Thomas Attig labels this active engagement grief response:

> We engage with the death and the deprivation and changes in the world of our experience, come to terms with and even learn from our reactions to it, reshape our daily life patterns, and redirect our life stories in light of what has happened. We respond as the multi-dimensional beings we are: We exert physical energy. We work through and express emotion. We change motivations, habits, and behaviour patterns. We modify relationships. We return home to familiar meanings in life. We reach for inevitably new meanings. And we change ourselves in the process.[1]

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[1] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxxi.

In *The English Elegy*, Peter Sacks views each elegy as a '*work*, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product and in the more dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience.'[2] Building upon the dynamic sense of working through loss, I use the word 'process' to describe the multifarious experience of grieving, in part to distance myself from Freudian assumptions. Rather than seeing 'process' as describing 'a continuous or regular action or succession of actions occurring or performed in a definite manner, and having a particular result or outcome', 'process' is instead taken to be descriptive of 'that which goes on or is carried on' in grief experience.[3] The process of grief is the totality of its experienced happenings: as we saw in the Introduction, there is no linearity or implied progress, no stages, no correct or incorrect feelings or actions. Attig describes his ideas of 'grieving as a process of relearning the world' which captures 'not only very basic aspects of the experiences, but also their scope, complexity, multi-dimensionality, richness, and variety.'[4]

The chapter focuses on two distinct strands of the multivalent idea of process regarding elegy, looking at how the length of a poem can be used to contain the breadth of experience and emotions whilst also elucidating grief, and also considering how the act of composition can alter elegy, demonstrating the role of revision and change in the grieving process. To support and demonstrate our consideration of the long elegy and process, we will now briefly discuss Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, a book-length poem which becomes a cumulative elegy as each section builds towards a revised approximation of the world.[5] Composed over seventeen years and out of sequence from

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[2] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 1.
[3] OED, 'process, n.', I.1 I.8.
[4] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxvi, (19).
[5] Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A.H.H', pp. 96-168.

its eventual form, *In Memoriam* provides a metaphorical example of the process of

relearning the world through grief, with each section merely one part of the wider

emotional journey.[6] This is compounded by there being evidence that during

composition 'Tennyson thought of the poem, not as a single text but as a number of

separate poems, written on loosely the same themes.'[7] As such, Tennyson's poem is

both a singular movement through grief and a patchwork of individual moments. Both

operate at once to process that which goes on in grief by challenging the assumptions of

life in different ways in order to reconsider his understanding of the world in light of

Hallam's death, representing 'no smoothly unfolding process, no *strictly* unified

development to which all parts are organically subordinated.'[8] Dennis Brown argues

that 'the overall shaping of the poem equates to the persona's own slow overcoming of

loss', with its structure enforcing 'the chaotic but slowly modifying nature of

bereavement endurance.'[9] Therefore, whilst written during the early to mid-nineteenth

century, *In Memoriam* presents a depiction of grief which is more in line with Attig and

modern conceptions of grief than we may expect, 'cutting against the grain of a

conventional elegy' as it attempts to grieve through a personal process in which the

assumptions of the world based on his relationship with Arthur Hallam are re-examined

and redefined.[10]

Whilst readings of *In Memoriam* are ostensibly rooted in ideas of existing elegiac

criticism, the critical dominance of which was called into question in the Introduction to

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[6] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 167.
[7] Anna Barton, *Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'In Memoriam': A Reading Guide,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) p. 2.
[8] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 168.
[9] Dennis Brown, '*In Memoriam*: On Bereavement and the Work of Mourning', *English,* 58.223 (2009) p. 343; 349.
[10] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 173.

this thesis, the structure, length, and composition process of the poem demonstrate a sense of Tennyson relearning the world through grief experience. *In Memoriam* demonstrates that viewing elegies, including long elegies, in this way is both productive and a continuation of an earlier tradition, especially when understanding the way an individual grief process goes on.

The first section of this chapter focuses on long elegies, considering how their length interacts with and dictates the grieving process through a discussion of three poems. Each utilises the quantity of poetry to further discussion around grief, creating a more complex web of expression and connection which helps both to understand loss and proceed through it. Paul Muldoon's 'Yarrow' cycles through memories, utilising formal structures to compile disparate ideas which are related to his mother. Whilst considerably shorter than Muldoon's poem, Wallace Stevens' 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' still utilises the qualities of a longer poem to mourn through three mythic figures. These figures are the 'forms' of the poem, directing grief in a seemingly peculiar manner which is aligned to Stevens' oeuvre rather than a prescribed approach to loss. Whilst seemingly impersonal, they present an alternative perspective on the process of grief. Similarly to Muldoon, Anne Carson's *Nox* attempts to produce disparate connections to understand and grieve the death of her brother. Framed around Catullus 101, an elegy by the Roman poet which addresses his deceased brother, Carson provides productive definitions for each word of his poem, pairing them with considerations on her brother. These are not always her own, including other perspectives on his loss to assemble a repository of grief related to him, evident in the letters, outside voices and discussion of the poem. Each of these elegies demonstrates an accumulation of emotion which, because of the length of the poems, does not need to

be released or destroyed to reach an ending, but instead builds towards it, the length always implying that there could be more to come.

The second section of the chapter will then focus solely on the process of composition of an elegy, explored through a consideration of Ted Hughes' 'Your Paris'. Based on archival research, it will track changes made at the drafting stage and consider them alongside the final poem. Through close readings we will consider how these changes alter the poem, detailing a change in emotion which slowly develops in the drafts. Whilst the considerations will not seek to provide a timeline for these changes, they are evidence of an accumulation and consideration of grief, emblematic of a process which, as discussion on *In Memoriam* has shown, is present in elegy. As each change demonstrates the emotional transitions one experiences as they relearn the world through grief reaction and response, this section will help to elucidate the unspoken processes which occur, highlighting the vastness and complexity of grief experience which is hidden by the finality of a published poem.

3.2. 'Monsters of elegy' - Long Elegies

Considering three modern poems, the following section of this chapter challenges the assumption that accumulation of emotion and experiences works against the dictates of mourning, instead demonstrating the importance of collecting and elaborating on aspects of grief as one challenges assumptions as they undertake a relearning of the world. Iain Twiddy highlights how the poetic structures of elegies can help to organise and progress through grief, especially when the established elegiac system and expectations are seemingly hollow or insufficient, with systems that are 'actually played out on the page in the shape of the poem, since elegy is both text and experience, both

representation and the thing itself'.[11] Throughout the previous two chapters on landscape and distance respectively, the role of process in elegy has been highlighted. Until now, the length of a poem has not been a key focus in this thesis, nor has been poetic form which, whilst touched upon in this section, will take the focus of the next chapter. However, this section will consider three longer elegies in detail, looking at how the formal innovations and network of emotions found within longer poems influence or facilitate the grieving process. Considering the accumulation of emotions, thoughts and experiences related to grief which are engendered by the quantity of thought constituting a longer elegy helps us to understand the process of reconceptualising life after loss or bereavement by considering a complex and extensive experience of grief.

3.2.1. A complex structuring of grief in Paul Muldoon's 'Yarrow'

Paul Muldoon's elegy 'Yarrow', from his collection *The Annals of Chile* (1994), is structured around twelve sestinas and as such is one poem which utilises form in a way to help organise grief, a fact which is highlighted by Twiddy.[12] Its elaborate structure brings with it an odd comfort in a manner which other forms do not, with the internal connections ensuring that there is a link that runs through from the beginning to nearly the end; the 'envoy' is related and yet distinct.[13] Building from Twiddy's emphasis on the internal connections, through the following reading we will see that connections made through form are vital to the emotional processing of the poem, generating an enduring structure which itself reinvigorates the mode, evoking the ambivalent and inevitable spread of the titular flower in the opening tercet:

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[11] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 202.

[12] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, pp. 208-223.

[13] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p. 210.

Little by little it dawned on us that the row

of kale would shortly be overwhelmed by these pink

and cream blooms, that all of us

would be overwhelmed, [...] (*PMP*, 346)

We shall focus upon the mourning process within 'Yarrow', considering how the

presentation of grief experience is supported and challenged by the complex structure

which frames Muldoon's long elegy.

'Yarrow' is an expansive poem, working through the complex network of

memories and emotions related to the poet's mother, Brigid Regan, who died of ovarian

cancer in 1974.[14] Looking firstly at its form, the poem consists of twelve sestinas,

connected through twelve sets of rhyme words, and in this respect creates a sense of

circular movement which dictates the mourning within the poem.[15] These circles reach

forwards and backwards, consisting of a larger structure as well as smaller attachments

that exist within the overarching system.[16] Twiddy emphasises that rather than forming

a destructive 'gyre' that condenses to a singularity, the circles are constructive,

connecting the disparate narratives that run simultaneously:

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[14] Paul Muldoon discusses this context in an interview with Larissa Nolan, 'Poet Paul Muldoon: My father inspired my rhymes, but his death gave me reason to leave Ireland', *The Times*, (2019) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/poet-paul-muldoon-my-father-inspired-my-rhymes-but-his-death-gave-me-reason-to-leave-ireland-ggx3tphk5>.

[15] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 211.

[16] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 211.

two halves mirror each other. The circles of the first half reflect those of the

second, and those of the second reflect those of the first. Left matches right, and

right left, or since these are circles, there are directions of clockwise and

anticlockwise.[17]

This mirroring is further complicated by the fact that 'within the overarching pattern

are the twelve sets of rhyme words which repeat throughout, so there are smaller

rotations of clockwise and anticlockwise within the larger rotations', creating a system

of 'waves' which cause the poem to move cyclically as it progresses through the

narratives.[18] Form is thus providing a structure to the poem, one which works

continually to connect the disparate memories which flow through the sestinas. This is

part of the 'cog' system, which is referenced in the poem, invoked by the early threat

that one 'were to lose an arm│or a leg to the fly-wheel' and present near to the end in

the 'indecipherable code; of the great cog-wheel, all that remains' (*PMP*, 346, 392).

'Yarrow' appears to be formally self-conscious of the mechanical cog's continual

spinning, sustaining the movement both naturally, for example through birdsong 'with

the red-eyed towhee, turn, turn, turn;' or unnaturally ''Wither' as in 'widdersinnes',

meaning to turn│against the sun: [...]' (*PMP*, 382, 361). The complex system which is

supported by the sestinas is only possible due to its length, with a robust structure

found in its intricate interlinking of ideas, generating unexpected connections within the

past which bring a sense of unity to otherwise abstract moments. The form of the

sestina connects these circles and recursions, complexly linking disparate ideas of the

poem whilst ensuring a continual cycling back through the sets of rhyme words,

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[17] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 211.
[18] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 211; 212.

reaching forwards and backwards in grief, spinning a complex set of cogs which make the whole poem work. Demonstrably, this is only possible on such a scale due to the extended length of the poem, with ideas expanded to their limit through accumulation and connection rather than curtailed, utilising the length of the poem to encapsulate a broader expression of grief experience.

Muldoon's complex sestinas are relied upon throughout the poem to provide a direction and boundaries to the grief experience, with the differing narratives overwhelming the reader with information: as Stephanie Burt has observed, during the poem,

the young Muldoon discovers adventure, heroic (impossible) versions of himself, sex (and the idea of the erotic), Latin (and the idea of translation), danger (and the thrill of the forbidden). He discovers, moreover, that for him these things are confusingly, but compellingly, related.[19]

Evidently, the complex interlinking and intermeshing of ideas is not only related to the singular emotional idea associated with loss and grief, but instead constitutes an expanse of ideas in which a variety are brought into conversation with one another in a cycling connection, emblematic of the broad manner in which long elegies interact with grief experience, capturing some of the multi-dimensional approach mentioned by Attig. The poem's very form embodies the intricate system of aspects of grieving as a process, enabling a shifting between disparate memories which create unforeseen connections, 'a voyage into memory, literature, other places, sex, politics, or a drug-induced trip.'[20]

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[19] Stephanie Burt, "Thirteen or Fourteen': Paul Muldoon's Poetics of Adolescence', *Paul Muldoon Critical Essays*, eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) p. 16.
[20] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, p. 212.

This shifting accumulates references and associations, putting them in relation to each other to revise them through new perspectives. Matthew Campbell sees the amount of information presented through the poem as a metaphysical danger, that it 'may annihilate a self caught in a limitless present.'[21] The uncontrollable scale of 'Yarrow' is at first daunting, visually at one thousand two hundred and twelve lines in length and intellectually with the varied narratives which are detailed by a range of experiences and expertise; however, as the poem progresses it becomes more of a meandering flow, 'a necessary part of the mourning process, as the poet works towards accepting loss and a return to the present.'[22] Tamed through the form, all of these memories are connected, becoming structured through the sestinas as well as the sets of rhyme words. However, it also dissuades an ending due to the circular structure, even though the envoi of the form potentially provides an organised finish. Thus, there is no way to 'move on' in the manner consolation implies without breaking the structure and possibly damaging the memorial created in the memories of the poem.

Campbell presents this resistance to teleological movement as an element of Muldoon's elegies as a whole, that they 'find ways of not coming to their point, of relaxing the urge that is in the form for consolation or closure.'[23] This leaves an energy within the elegy which continues after the conclusion of the poem. However, as we have already seen, from a different perspective consolation is not necessary in grief, with the possibility of continuation embodying the open-ended process of re-learning the world; this is, after all, not Muldoon's only elegy for his mother.[24] The memories are all being

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[21] Matthew Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains', *Paul Muldoon Critical Essays,* eds. Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004) p. 172.
[22] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 213.
[23] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains', p. 178.
[24] For discussion of 'Milkweed and Monarch', an elegy for both of Muldoon's parents, see p. 113-126.

re-understood, filtered through a complex connection which re-categorises part of life. Campbell identifies that:

> the unreconciled persistently intrudes into the perfect point. [...] This is the paradox of elegy, one which inheres within the genre as a whole: that the consolations of elegiac art will lead to the extinction of feeling and that the process contains closure and a second death within it. Yet the remains must not be so distinct that its processes will hinder that vital therapeutic activity of the living.[25]

Overwhelmingly full of events and emotion, Muldoon's expression of grief in the poem is sustained by the structure. The formal intricacies keep the poem vital, ensuring that there is not a premature ending and withstanding the extinction of feeling mentioned by Campbell as connections are continually created. The length of 'Yarrow' helps to contain the breadth of elegiac content, providing a sense of order as it progresses. However, the ending of the poem is still a potential site of extinction and requires additional focus to help us understand how the intricacies of longer elegies can remain intact through an ending and beyond.

Whilst there appears to be a destructive ending in 'Yarrow', initiated by the recurring image of the envoi, a sinking ship:

> it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
>
> that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo. (*PMP,* 392)

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[25] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains', p. 179.

— one which destroys the site of mourning and the deceased as it attempts to achieve
an impossible sense of closure — there is also a continual possibility for life to move
forward without destroying the memories. The movement beyond grief or change
within grief experience is introduced with a slip in the machine of the poem, a sudden
development which changes reality for the poet and poem without ending the overall
structure, seemingly unrelated to the natural and supernatural considerations which
surround it:

> of gold on a black field, while over the fields
>
> of buckwheat it's harder and harder to pin down a gowk's
>
> poopookarian *ignis fatuus*;
>
>
> though it slips, the great cog (*PMP,* 392).

The slip of the great cog, although not hard to pin down, is an aspect of grief which
occurs alongside nature and myth in the poem, supported by the continual progression
of time and new connections, a development in which the shift of loss is incorporated
into the changing world. As this happens, life naturally grows around grief,
incorporating the mourning into life rather than attempting to conquer or resolve it.
The end of the penultimate section of the poem is seemingly aware of the coming shift
away from an engagement with grief, accepting that it will happen before it comes:

> indecipherable code; of the great cog-wheel, all that remains
>
> is a rush of air—a wing-beat,

> more like—past my head; even as I try to regain

> my equilibrium, there's no more relief, no more respite

> than when I scurried, click, down McParland's lane

> with my arms crossed, click, under my armpits. (*PMP,* 392)

Change is inevitable, building up slowly through the poem until it is impossible to ignore, finally brought on through the indecipherable singing of a quail — the familiar birdsong which becomes unusual as the pose of the poem is broken (*PMP,* 391). Here, we see the poem attempt to run from the gear's 'click', seeking a moment of respite in memories before the shift occurs and life is changed away from focusing on mourning and grief. Rather than initiating a second death, the patterns of rhyme ensure that there is a connection between pre and post 'slip', bringing a continuity of sense to the complex situation; the memories are still connected to this altered present, even though nothing new can be inferred.

However, after the 'great cog' has turned for the final time, there is a clear change. The ending of the poem is thus only a poetic continuation beyond the complex structure and machinery which has come before, a necessary end which ensures that the memorial, reliant on form, remains intact. Therefore, as Twiddy observes, instead of being a destructive 'inability of the poem and its triplets, triremes or trifoli to reach consolation, the transcendence or transformation which turns lament into consolation, pain into relief,' the ending is a poetic continuation which is necessary now that the poet, and poem itself, has shifted elsewhere:[26]

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[26] Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry,* p. 216.

though it slips, the great cog,

there's something about the quail's 'Wet-my-foot'

and the sink full of hart's-tongue, borage and common kedlock

that I've either forgotten or disavowed; (*PMP* 392)

The quail's song and listing of flowers, argued by Sacks to be an elegiac convention, have

an uncertain significance, forgotten or disavowed in the slip as the poem progresses

beyond grief and into the unknown. Muldoon's use of the word 'forgotten' indicates a

negative relearning in which the natural aspects listed are now changed and unfamiliar.

While Fran Brearton labels the end of the poem as a collapse, the complex form itself

does survive, with emotion carried forward through the slip rather than abandoned to

destruction on the trireme.[27] As such, we are left with the circular structure which

ensures that there is a continuation of the poem's affective content in the end, leaving a

complex memorial of framed memories, system of the past, which can be revised

through verse. Even though there is no clear comfort at the end, we are left with a

memorial, one which is both for and of Muldoon's mother; she is the biological creator,

continual influence, and character in the poem. The form is integral to the memorial,

offering a physical structure to the memories which are achieved at the end. Whilst the

poem does not appear to provide the consolation which is suggested by Campbell due to

its lack of compensatory offering and the mechanical slip which moves the poem

beyond the trireme's destruction, the form is vital in providing a lasting memorial which

also lets life progress.[28]

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[27] Brearton, 'For Father Read Mother: Muldoon's Antecedents', p. 56.
[28] Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains', p. 181.

The forward slip, imposed by forces outside and inside the poem, shifts the sense of the poem without breaking the form, creating a voice which exists beyond the grief which has been 'forgotten' in time, becoming a part of life which is unacknowledged or wilfully 'disavowed'. There is some comfort in this change, with the formal memorial of the elegy enlivening framed moments of the past as the voice carries on. Additionally, the form provides a way of processing grief through the past, ensuring that nonlinear events are connected, imbuing the influence of Muldoon's mother into every memory. Therefore, the intricate sestinas of 'Yarrow' are part of its affective content, helping the poem to keep a memorial fixity in the disparate expression of random realisations which constitute grief experience. With the form not being destroyed by life moving beyond grief or mourning, the end of the elegy does not weaken the form or expression of grief. However, the complexity of the poetic form is not something present in every elegy, nor every long elegy. As we will now see Wallace Stevens' elegy 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' is one such example, with the poetic form being less of a focal point as Stevens writes a longer poem to consider the philosophical realities of death as he works through grief.

3.2.2. Wallace Stevens' approach to death in 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus'

Stevens' 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' — written for his friend and fellow poet Henry Church and published in the collection *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) — approaches grief in a different manner, attempting to discern death directly to confront grief rather than connecting disparate memories to form a network of understanding. Stevens' search leads to a more philosophical tone in the poem, which focuses less on the emotional turmoil and personal questioning and more so on the existential operations

of death. In this, the figures of 'high sleep', 'high peace', and the 'earthly mother' are central to the elegy, being practitioners of death and part of the afterlife (*CPWS,* 456-7). Whereas Muldoon — and Tennyson before him — create monumental memorials through their consistent form, Stevens' poem relies less on the guiding structure of formal elements, with regularity loosely found in six main sections, each containing a varying number of tercets.[29] Instead, the mythic ethereal figures, or 'forms' as they are called in the poem, command the poetics, presenting a structured journey of thought.

Even though Stevens' poem offers us no insight or clarity into the difficulties of bereavement, there is a novel journey through grief which is supported through the longer poem. Whilst Stevens appears to not accept the formally and emotionally impenetrable state of death, raging against it in the final section, 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' is still an elegy, containing within it the complex emotions we expect in the mode and demonstrating an attempt at understanding them through new categorisations which are, at least in the poem, born from death; attempting to relearn the world through the very cause of grief. Joseph Carroll argues that these ethereal 'forms' are not only those of death, but also life, 'part of a universal resolution' which link to the transcendental ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson.[30] Thus, these 'forms' cross the threshold between life and death, not only offering guidance but also a means of access between the two, imaginatively crossing the divide discussed through Amy Clampitt's 'A Procession at Candlemas' earlier.[31] This potential to exist with both living and dead is vital to the elegy, dominating its emotional sense as it offers a level of elegiac clarity so often sought.

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[29] For more on the form of the poem, see Joseph Carroll, 'Stevens and Romanticism', *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens* ed. John N. Serid, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 95-96.
[30] Carroll, 'Stevens and Romanticism', p. 95.
[31] pp. 93-104.

Stevens' poem presents grief in an alternate manner to those seen already in the thesis, one which is less sentimental and more epistemological, channelling the emotions of loss into his attempted understanding of death and a potential afterlife. This is introduced through the three forms which control grief and the elegy:

Two forms move among the dead, high sleep

Who by his highness quiets them, high peace

Upon whose shoulders even the heavens rest. (*CPWS*, 456)

The world of death is not feared, with the significant forms being part of the equal landscape, notable and yet part of the unnamed dead. Even though there is no overt sadness or ritualistic mourning, there is a determined thrust of wonder, one which appears to challenge the changed world to avert the pain of loss. However, one can argue that this journey, trying to understand death, is an act of mourning, attempting to recontextualise the world and the deceased individual. In doing so, the poem is fuelled by the overwhelming emotions of grief rather than seeking comfort or consolation from them. There is thus less of an interest in the turmoil of loss, with the poem instead focusing on the 'forms' of death and the afterlife to familiarise them both to poet and reader, a first step to understanding them.

The focus on knowledge here might seem callous, subverting the expectations of the elegy to the point where it seems barely related to other poems in the mode, as it approaches death as an object to be studied. However, Stevens' philosophical workings are part of his grieving process, detailing a personal approach through the 'forms' of the poem. The 'earthly mother' is one such 'form', a figure which is 'the single most

important motif in all of Stevens' poetry.'[32] Her presence incorporates the elegy into his wider poetic canon, helping to contextualise and understand the death to continue beyond it: 'It was not her look but a knowledge that she had. | She was a self that knew, an inner thing' (*CPWS*, 460). The innate power of the earthly mother is thus potentially reassuring, possessing the repeated knowledge that is sought to grieve in the poem and offering a potential route of learning. As such, the philosophical musings are not only about understanding death, but also a way of mourning, with Stevens processing Henry Church's death through poetry to keep it aligned with his life and work; a conventional elegy following directly from the nineteenth century tradition would have been so distinct from Stevens' oeuvre that it would seem novel and isolated, becoming a separate moment of insincerity.

Even though in this respect the poem is unusual, it is also delicate when approaching death, the earth mother offering a 'Good-bye in the darkness, speaking quietly there, | To those that cannot say good-bye themselves' (*CPWS*, 457). The repeated farewell emphasises the absence from both sides of the threshold of death, voicing the loss of the living as well as the impossible farewell of the dead. Whilst Toshiaki Komura argues that this repetition is part of 'the primary organizing principle in the first six lines', it is one which helps to bridge the divide, constructing a voice which echoes across the threshold between the living and deceased; repetition offers a delicate introduction to the manner in which grief is conveyed.[33] Through the exact repetition of 'good-bye' we see not only a mirroring, the words clearly the same, but also a change. Whilst the first 'good-bye' is spoken, the second is an echo, heard in the emphasised silence of Church's absence: 'The third form speaks, because the ear

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[32] Carroll, 'Stevens and Romanticism', p. 96.
[33] Toshiaki Komura, 'Modern elegy and the Fiction and Creation of Loss: Wallace Stevens's "The Owl in the Sarcophagus"', *ELH*, 77.1 (2010) p. 47.

repeats, ‖ Without a voice, inventions of farewell' (*CPWS*, 457). It is thus implied that the third form speaks to provide comfort in the silence of absence, offering inventions of farewell rather than real experiences. Therefore, even though the elegy is unconventional, it is still delicate and emotional, with elements of poetry helping to detail the painful divide whilst not deviating from Stevens' established poetic norms.

However, the philosophical world of the poem struggles to depict the reality of death, unable to go beyond the imagined Christian-like brilliance of afterlife or to resolve itself emotionally without destroying the elegiac structure. This difficulty is clear in the depiction of an earthly mother at the end of the penultimate section who cannot speak across the divide, with the silence eternal in its erasure:

> With a sad splendor, beyond artifice,
> Impassioned by the knowledge that she had,
> There on the edges of oblivion.
>
> O exhalation, O fling without a sleeve
> And motion outward, reddened and resolved
> From sight, in the silence that follows her last word— (*CPWS,* 461)

The powerful images of the passage seem to exist in a concrete certainty, deliberately moving towards the impossible understanding and knowledge which the elegy has attempted to develop. When peering over the edges of oblivion we are left with a defined stanza break, an artificial structure which extends the moment; the break is not akin to death. Instead, it is met with an alliterative exclamation of apostrophes, connecting to both the ritualistic history of mourning and elements of prayer. In doing

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so, the elegy becomes aligned with elements of traditional mourning that Stevens is moving away from, becoming less philosophical and certain as it becomes aware of the end. Whilst the 'forms' appear to have access to death, they can't continue beyond the conclusion and thus their access to both worlds is lost; the imaginative access gained is 'not to death itself but only to the poetic traditions about death.'[34] This is clearly evident in the closing dash of the section, a visual strike which attempts to manipulate the gap by extending the line into it, providing continuation rather than the termination of a full stop. However, there is no reassurance found in this moment, instead the uncertainty of death extends until it suddenly ceases, the abruptness destabilises the preceding elements of mourning; there is no longer access to death.

This inaccessibility challenges the epistemological thread of the poem as it fails to provide answers, offering no substitute for the traditional elements which provide comfort and support. Whilst Muldoon's 'Yarrow' continued through the sestina form after a shift of grief embodied in the slipping cog, Stevens' elegy continues by moving beyond the myths of death and returning to the world of the living. Angry at its loss of access, the final section rages against the forced sentimentality of grief, desiring an impossible sense of consolation:

> This is the mythology of modern death
> And these, in their mufflings, monsters of elegy,
> Of their own marvel made, of pity made,
>
> Compounded and compounded, life by life,

---

[34] Carroll, 'Stevens and Romanticism', p. 100.

These are death's own supremest images,

The pure perfections of parental space, (*CPWS,* 461)

The affective content is presented as 'pity made' myths which obscure and confuse the reality of death, whilst also helping to form a memorial for Church, providing emotional relief through its continual growth as the memorial is 'compounded and compounded, life by life'. This reinforces the overall elegy by managing to move beyond grief, demonstrating a continuity which previously seemed impossible even though it does not provide knowledge of the process. The anger at the myths of death come about due to a lack of cognitive access to the past and the fact that a memorial is merely a substitute for the deceased, not even attempting to provide closure. Whilst Komura views this ending as 'not compensatory' in a negative manner, it instead demonstrates the impossibility of the destructive myth of closure as an unattainable state which desires to purge grief rather than living with it.[35] Even though the ending of the poem is searching for this state, that is not to say that the elegy is unsuccessful, but rather that Stevens' expectations of poetry are greater than what is possible, seeking unattainable knowledge rather than relearning the world.

The final section of the poem — a rage against the impossibilities of being able to comprehend death — learns ultimately to live with mortality, internalising the grief and continuing beyond. In this, the shift to the final section is a significant movement, a shift in the elegy which ultimately alters it in such a way that it enables the end; the focus is no longer on the realm of grief as the emotion has been internalised. This is also a

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[35] Komura, 'Modern elegy and the Fiction and Creation of Loss', p. 64.

movement away from the forms, disregarding their voice and insight as humanity, or at least our minds, takes primacy:

> It is a child that sings itself to sleep,
>
> The mind, among the creatures that it makes,
>
> The people, those by whom it lives and dies. (*CPWS*, 461)

Innocent, the child can control their interaction with sleep — one of the 'high forms' of the poem — through singing, emphasising the limited power and presence of these forms with an act akin to that found in the elegiac tradition. After failing to understand grief, people are given the power over life and death. This enables the elegy to end without it writing itself to destruction; remembrance is carried through the lives of others. Here, we do not see consolation, but instead continuation. Whilst the 'forms' operate in the world of death; they are unable to continue beyond the sustained moments of mourning. However, the tercets survive, with the physical form of the poem existing beyond the metaphysical figures. Therefore, there is no rejection of poetic form, but rather a survival of the structural aspects over the aspects of meaning; certainty is needed to close the elegy without destruction. Consequently, whilst the poem does not rely on a predetermined poetic form, it does utilise the structural elements of poetry in a manner which supports the grieving but is unable to offer more than that certainty and regularity. Through these aspects the elegy ends in a calmer manner, initiating a continuity of life rather than an understanding of death.

Within both 'Yarrow' and 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus', the mourning process ends, but the world is not destroyed, moving beyond grief as life continues. The world is altered,

with the grief internalised, but it is still recognisable. Stevens' final section is initially appalled by this, angry at the 'mythology of modern death' which is labelled as 'pity made' rather than more objective (*CPWS,* 461). However, life itself continues, and with it the memory of the deceased as Stevens' expectation of understanding is not an obstruction. Muldoon accepts this continuation passively, with the form of the poem seeming to be certain enough to provide a suitable memorial for his mother. The movement away from the memorial is necessary though, with the repeated 'slip' demonstrating an unpreventable change; it seems to be an inevitable consequence of grieving. This ensures that there is no rejection of mourning, no complications of desiring an impossible outcome of resurrection. Whilst neither of the poems seem to mourn directly, avoiding the sentimental language and resurrection of the dead, they do both work through the complexities of emotion related with grief, attempting to comprehend the situation in a 'healthier' manner which reaches an acceptance rather than desiring an impossible consolation nor rejecting an unfelt array of emotion which seems converse to the expected language of grief. Consequently, both poems focus on attempting to comprehend what was. A gargantuan task, neither poem achieves full understanding, with the poetry enabling a sense of emotional comfort and a means of organising experience but not able to provide an insight into death, unable to exist on both sides of the threshold.

The length of the poems enables this journeying, demonstrating the utility of 'space' and 'place' within the elegy combining some of the ideas which have already been discussed in the previous two chapters. Whilst Stevens shows that one does not need to use an extensive form to provide structure, instead relying on a simpler manner of regularly grouping lines, Muldoon's poem has a fixity in its complex whirlwind brought about through the sestinas; disparate connections are made and sustained

through its rhyme scheme. However, both poems aim to work through the sense of grief, with the length of the elegies attesting to the accretion of ideas which help to understand death and work through grief; they accept that mourning requires effort. With their length aligning them with some elements of the elegiac tradition such as *In Memoriam,* 'Lycidas', and 'Adonais', we see the value in building a more complete picture of grief, the deceased and any related experiences by the mourner. Both 'Yarrow' and 'The Owl in the Sarcophagus' are individual processes of re-orientating and re-understanding life after loss, utilising length to encapsulate the larger scope of mourning as they provide a space for mourning to take place and explore its unrealised intricacies. This is part of the poet's responses to death, both on an individual level for direct events and on a universal level reflecting on the social concept of death.

3.2.3. An expansive approach to grief in Anne Carson's *Nox*

Nox, Anne Carson's book-length elegy for her estranged brother Michael, is a mixed-medium approach to death and loss which further encapsulates the breadth of grief-experience. Its use of photographs, translation, lexicography, text, and material texture work together to evoke the range of emotions related to the absence of her brother, presenting a broader poetic response which weaves together the disparate thoughts, impulses, questions, and memories. In this respect, *Nox* is an expansive poem which approaches loss in various manners to interpret the unknowable information surrounding Carson's brother's absence and death. Consequently, it views these aspects from multiple perspectives to achieve some insight, reacting and responding to Michael's death and the history of his life. Trained as a classicist, Carson structures her elegy around 'Catullus 101', which is one of three elegies by the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Catullus for his own brother. She breaks down the Latin poem word by word,

providing imaginative lexicographic entries on the verso which illuminate and augment

Carson's elegy for her brother on the recto. For Christine Wiesenthal, who was

influenced by the work of Brian Massumi on the poem, '*Nox* presents us with a poetics

of loss that unfolds as a dynamic continuum between feeling in thinking and thinking in

feeling, as reason and affectivity more or less inflect one another, modulating tone from

moment to moment.'[36] This is part of the weaving of reaction and response, in which the

unfamiliarity of Michael and the suddenness of his death lead to a processing of both at

once, with Carson seeking an understanding of both his life and his death.[37]

Under the permanent darkness of the poem's titular night, Michael is a concealed

figure whom Carson desires to illuminate, opening the 'elegy with light of all kinds'

(*Nox*, 1.0: *multas*). Whilst the image of light has been used in the elegiac tradition to

offer a redemptive clarity, the verse paragraph challenges this, continuing:

> But death makes us stingy. There is nothing more to
>
> be expended on that, we think, he's dead. Love cannot
>
> alter it. Words cannot add to it. No matter how I try (*Nox,* 1.0: *multas*)

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[36] Christine Wiesenthal, 'Nox Unboxed: Anne Carson's Uncommon Long Verse "Epitaph" (or Economies of the unlost)', *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 89. 2 (2020) p. 194.
[37] When discussing *Nox*, we will be using the referencing system developed by Liedeke Plate, which gives both the numbered paragraphs and the lexicographical entries from 'Catullus 101'; see Liedeke Plate, 'How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age: Anne Carson's *Nox*, Multimodality, and the Ethics of Bookishness', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 9.1 (2015) p. 98.

multas

multus multa multum   adjective

[cf. Gk μάλα, MELIOR] numerous, many,
many of, many a; many people, many,
many women, the ordinary people, the
many especially in phrase *unus de multis*:
one of many; many things, much, to a
great extent, many words especially in
elliptical phrases e.g. *quid multa? ne
multa*: to cut a long story short; an
abundance of, much, large, *multum est*: it
is of value; appearing or acting on many
occasions, assiduous, regular, used many
times; (of persons) too much in evidence,
tedious, wearisome, verbose; occurring in
a high degree, full, intense, *multa dies* or
multa lux: broad daylight, *multa nox*: late
in the night, perhaps too late.

1.0.   I wanted to fill my elegy with light of all kinds.
But death makes us stingy. There is nothing more to
be expended on that, we think, he's dead. Love cannot
alter it. Words cannot add to it. No matter how I try
to evoke the starry lad he was, it remains a plain, odd
history. So I began to think about history.

Figure 3.1 — 1.0: *multas* (*Nox*)

Rejecting established elegiac associations with light due to the impossibilities of the

kind of mourning which it propagates, the poem desires understanding rather than

consolation as it seeks to know Carson's brother through the fragmentary remains. As

an act of recollection, Carson also associates the process of grief with history, presenting

a structure of and for personal grief response to provide possible progression into and

through the darkness (*Nox*, 1.1: *per*).

per

per preposition with accusative case

[cf. Skt *pári*, Gk πέρι] (with expressions of motion) through, across (a space, mass, surface, etc.), through the middle of (a number of persons or objects), through, across (a barrier or boundary); through (an aperture or vent); (indicating the medium through which things are perceived; along (a line, route or direction); over (a specified distance); along with (a liquid especially bodily fluid, in motion); (in stationary sense) through the length of, along all or part of; (with measurement) along a distance of; all over (an area, space, etc.), throughout, *per omnia*: in all respects; at or in each of (several points or places), throughout, to each or to every part of; in the course of, during (a time); *stellae per noctem visae* stars visible at night; through in succession; *per manus tradere* to pass from hand to hand; by units, (in multiplication) by; traversing, from house to house, from one place to another; as far as X is concerned, as regards me, I don't care if; by means of, by whose hands and at whose instance; (in adverbial phrases) *per vim*: violently, *per iram*: angrily, *per virtutem*: bravely, *per facinus*: wickedly, *haud per ambages portendere*: by no means implying a riddle, enigma or dark fact.

1.1.   History and elegy are akin.   The word "history" comes from an ancient Greek verb ἱστωρεῖν meaning "to ask." One who asks about things - about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell - is an historian. But the asking is not idle. It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself. There was a man named Hekataios, who lived in the city of Miletos in the generation before Herodotos and who cannot be called an "historian" because Herodotos is regarded as the author of that role, but who composed (about 500 BC) a *How To Go Around the Earth* (with map) containing this (as I think of it) metaphor for his own activity:

Figure 3.2 — 1.1: *per* (*Nox*)

This creates an impetus for recording her brother, in which the act of asking who he was is undertaken and reflected upon, whilst his death is also reacted and responded to as a result of the complexities of their relationship and its influence on Carson's reaction to his death. This explains the seemingly un-emotional drive of the poem, in which it becomes an act of clarifying grief rather than directly mourning, evident when the materiality of the page reveals 'WHO WERE YOU' (*Nox*, 2.1: *vectus*).
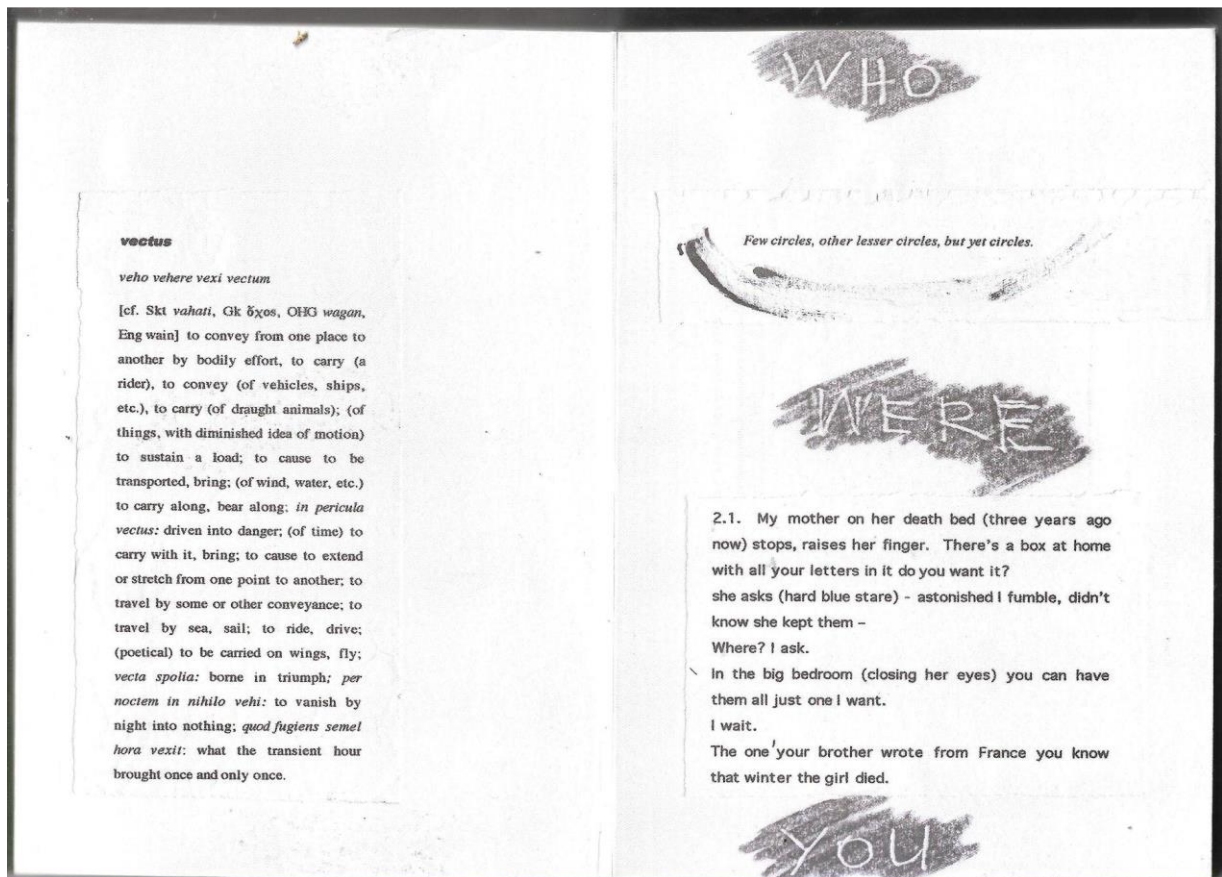
Figure 3.3 — 2.1: *vectus* (*Nox*)

Devoid of a question mark because it cannot be answered, these three words haunt the page, highlighted by a dark rubbing in which the letters are found in absence. Forced from the page, they reveal a hidden impulse which runs contrary to the recording of history, demanding knowledge of Michael which the history making cannot reveal; the personal is lost.

Whilst attempting to represent the loss through the idea of history, Carson is also reacting to his disappearance, death and the impact on their mother. This comes about because of the complicated and intense love her mother held for him until her death, mentioned in '2.1: **vectus**' and referenced throughout the poem at various points (*Nox*, 2.1 *vectus*; 4.1: *donarem*; 4.3: *et*). The disconnection between the intensely emotional input of their mother and the apathetic historical recording causes conflict as the

framed response is not enough to communicate completely the personal emotional breadth of grief, being too removed in layers of reference and association to satisfy the intimate demands. As a light found in darkness, 'WHO WERE YOU' is an unsaid revelation for Carson herself, part of the affective mourning process which is being avoided. On the subsequent page, Carson replies to the statement, 'I make a guess, I make a guess', acknowledging the need for knowledge and understanding, whilst also in the repetition of approximation, demonstrating an inability to be certain (*Nox*, 2.1: *advenio*). This internal call and response are separate to the historical re-telling, brought about because of the need both to memorialise and mourn.

Carson's process of understanding is emphasised through both parts of the materiality of the poem and its use of repetition, examining ideas from different perspectives and in different contexts to revise the content, finding out more about her brother through her retelling of his life. The verse paragraph of 2.2 is repeated four times with the page re-formatted to contain different parts of the letter he sent to their mother, mentioned in '2.1: ***vectus***', and in this respect Michael's handwritten words overshadow the compacted description of his leaving and some of their communication since. As the fragment of the letter changes it alters the context in which the words are received. For instance, it initially presents half of the sentences, the left hand of the page, the opening of a story. Whilst this teases at an insight into Michael, it offers nothing definitive, with the incomplete fragments needing the verse to provide certainty. This modulates the experience, with the death of his partner coming in recollection, 'that winter the girl died', rather than his own words, emphasising the apathetic reactions it likely engendered in their mother, offering a comparison to the emotional reaction to Michael in the following pages. Here, Carson is reacting to his death by considering their relationship, scornfully mourning their mother's loss before

the death of Michael's partner is mentioned. This is an angry denial of his voice, granting

primacy to the turmoil associated with Michael rather than his death itself. However,

the repetition of the letter and verse paragraph allows this perspective to be altered,

more sympathetically listening to his voice in order to consider his experiences, too.

This is emphasised not only in providing an ending to the lines on the second of the four

pages, but on the third providing the completed excerpt of the letter.

Figure 3.4 — 2.2.1 (*Nox*)

Phone:

in toronto
faces. millions

group of head shrinkers
weak people.

met them.

dead. I was
have no choice.

2.2. My brother ran away in 1978, rather than go to jail. He wandered in Europe and India, seeking something, and sent us postcards or a Christmas gift, no return address. He was travelling on a false passport and living under other people's names. This isn't hard to arrange. It is irremediable. I don't know how he made his decisions in those days. The postcards were laconic. He wrote only one letter, to my mother, that winter the girl died.

Figure 3.5 — 2.2.2 (*Nox*)

(they bought the church on avenue road in toronto
just down from anne's old places. millions

they are an out to lunch group of head shrinkers
who take advantage of weak people.
i'll never know how she met them.
Six days later she was dead. I was

I went crazy. it

2.2.   My brother ran away in 1978, rather than go
to jail.   He wandered in Europe and India, seeking
something, and sent us postcards or a Christmas gift,
no return address.   He was travelling on a false
passport and living under other people's names.   This
isn't hard to arrange.   It is irremediable.   I don't know
how he made his decisions in those days.   The
postcards were laconic.   He wrote only one letter, to
my mother, that winter the girl died.

Figure 3.6 — 2.2.3 (*Nox*)

Figure 3.7 — 2.2.4 (*Nox*)

As the act of concealing parts of the letter demonstrates some control over the information, it mirrors the experience of Carson not having knowledge about her brother, with the manipulated text over four pages physically denying the reader clarity as they search for it. When presented as complete the excerpt sprawls over the page, reformatting the whole book at its right edge, hanging some of Michael's writing, notably 'dead', in the negative space unsupported by the scrapbook itself. As demonstrated by the placement on the prior pages, the positioning of the letter is by design and thus we can assume that Carson wanted this word, written in her brother's

own hand, to be associated with the nothingness of the page, placing not only his death but the idea of death originating from him into a created space which is beyond the notebook, unable to be considered on the page itself and surrounded by darkness. Reaching this point through framed repetition demonstrates an act of processing, in which the narrative retelling is revised and altered, changing the emotional significance and tone of the piece each time; Michael's statement 'I went crazy' at first seems to be related to his absence, before being attributed to his own experience of grief. The final repetition sidelines the narrative to provide information which situates him in Kashmir, India, found in the letterhead. This clarifies part of his past, but also initiates a response of knowing, emphasised by the isolation of his words 'have no choice'. Their association with the location, part of understanding him, expresses a need for definition, a desire which has been previously expressed and denied in the poem. Whilst knowing Michael was not even considered to be a viable question, here strands of familiarity and his voice are present, selected to continue Carson's response to his death as she has 'no choice'. Repetition here allows the same idea to be viewed numerous times, altering its significance due to the accompanying textual fragments, with ideas and emotions generated from the revision of significance which happens when considering both texts together, uncovering meanings which were not clear in the initial reaction of both the reader and Carson. As Jill Marsden observes, '*Nox* makes possible newer, more profound connections with Michael, connections with his absence we might say'.[38] Carson utilises the material possibility for reconfiguration, repeating ideas to make connections with not only his absence, but also connections with an approximation of who he was. Whilst this search is not openly emotional it is part of the grieving process, seeking

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[38] Jill Marsden, 'In search of Lost Sense: The Aesthetics of Opacity in Anne Carson's Nox', *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 5.2 (2013) p. 196.

completeness through understanding even when there is a lack of necessary information.

In this respect, as well as an epistemological search, issues of definition and translation are also important to the poem. They are required for the reader to understand the framing around Catullus 101, whilst also part of the search to understand Michael to mourn him. Through the lexicographical retelling, the death is processed through a range of words, altering, and developing their definition with personalised inspection. Building on the associative work of repetition, the lexical entries guide the thought of the poem through their happening. As argued by Plate, 'not only does meaning emerge from the juxtaposition of lexical entries with meditations on Michael and on the process of writing about him, but throughout *Nox*, Carson seems to let the words guide her in her quest as they arise.'[39] Her observations present a manner of reaction and response in which grief is forced into conversation with disparate ideas in order to reconceptualise the world, with Carson aligning this act of reevaluating with that of translation in '8.1: *more'*: 'I study his sentences the ones I remember as if I'd been asked to translate them.' The accompanying Latin definition here for '***more***' reflects not only on the act of translation, but the act of grieving and its associated customs. The '[dubious] … established practice, custom' is implied to be associated with those of grief, denied in the poem due to contextual circumstances and fundamentally doubted due to the square-bracketed remark which is formatted to be a clearly separate introductory thought which alters the whole entry. Challenging the norms and traditions of grief and elegy due to their unsuitability in this moment, the need for a new approach and understanding is clear.

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[39] Plate, 'How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age', p. 103.
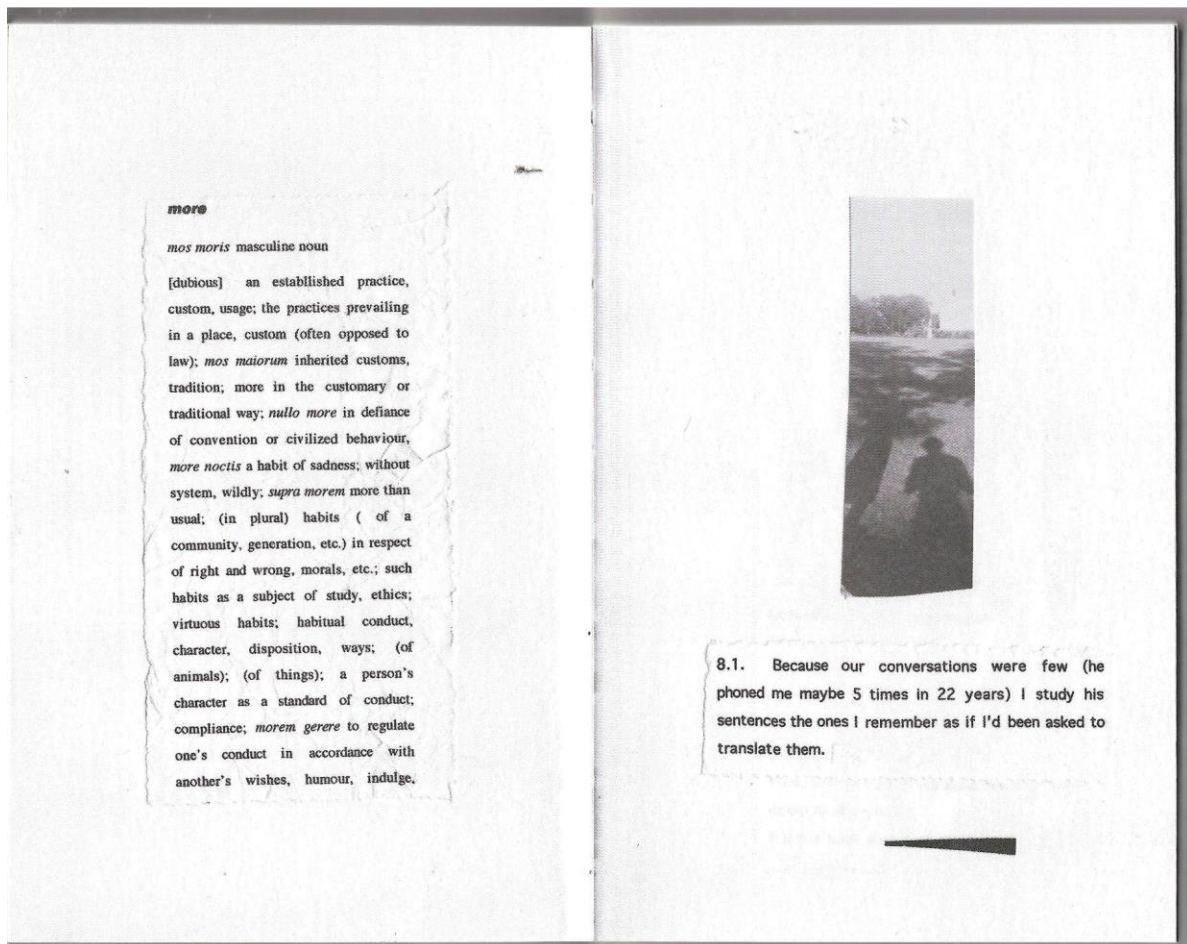
Figure 3.8 — 8.1: *more* (*Nox*)

Furthermore, the final usage of the entry is '*morem gerere* to regulate one's conduct in accordance with another's wishes, humour, indulge' (*Nox:* 8.1: *more*). Here, the idea of a prescribed or standardised mourning process is ridiculed, seen to be part of indulging the desires of others, processing grief in an accepted manner because it is customary rather than because it is how the individual desires. This justifies not only viewing grief as translation, but also for the individual journey of *Nox*, in which loss is approached in a unique manner which attempts to encapsulate the variety of Carson's thoughts, enabling her to react and respond to the entirety of her relationship with her brother, including his death, rather than just his death. Expanding the scope of the elegy, whilst needing to be justified to the speaker and reader in the text, is not uncommon to

the mode. Its breadth reflects the personalised reality of grief experiences and thus a processing of the emotions in an individual manner. In the poem it leads to Carson's need for understanding and definition to guide the process of grief rather than any established cultural practices.

We know from Carson's verse paragraph earlier in '2.1: *vectus*' that their mother grieved for Michael until she died and thus the questioning and its elegiac potential is drawn from her grief, representing it too. Above the verse paragraph of '8.1: *more*' is a clipped picture of the sun behind two individuals, casting shadows of them and their surroundings onto the landscape, embodying in part the individual process of grief which Carson is demanding and performing. Using perspective and shadows, absence is questioned and understood, translated into our knowledge of the world through a fragment. The act of probing ideas, reconfiguring the world by translating it to try to understand is seen as a necessity: 'I HAD TO' uncovered in '8.1: *parentum*'. The highlighting captures Carson's unacknowledged response, implicitly linked to the three words through the smudge over the lexicographic entry, altering it compared to the others. Through this, we can see that the poem is one of grief associated with her brother, rather than only her own grief for him, translating the memories and emotive connections of who her brother was to her and those related to them into the world. This is in line with Plate's perspective that 'in elaborating the parallel between translating poem 101 and remembering her brother, Carson emphasizes (never-ending) process over (finished) product.'[40] The continual process, reflective of the distinctive experience of grief, is what is to be expected given a contemporary understanding of our

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[40] Plate, 'How to Do Things with Literature in the Digital Age', p. 104.

reaction to death, with the added act of translation aiding reconceptualisation and how it may come about.

Visible in the already presented section '1.1: *per*', 'History and elegy are akin', with Carson looking back to the Greeks for definition: history 'meaning "to ask." One who asks about things - about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell - is a historian. But the asking is not idle.' Carson, a classicist, does not identify herself as a historian, even though the poem records Michael's history through its enquiries. Carson's elegy, encompassing a range of approaches and a breadth of content is brought together and ordered in an associative manner. The work is emblematic of the persistence which is needed to proceed through the experience of grief, demonstrating the continual aspect of response. The world is reordered iteratively rather than all at once using history and Herodotos, framing around lexicographic entries, and the determination in the poem to continue as demonstrated through language and imagery. The questioning is carried forward through the poem, imbued now with the act of recording and the desire to 'know' and 'record' her brother. Combined, the lack of knowledge is internalised as part of the world. There is hope that this task may one day be done, found in the conjunction 'or' in the following sentence of the poem, but also a wider acceptance that questioning the death and their relationship in order to understand them has become part of her life:

> [...] It is when you are asking about something that
>
> you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you
>
> must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries
>
> itself. [...] (*Nox*, 1.1: *per*)

The realisation mentioned here seems to detail an understanding of the need for reconceptualising the world, in this case remembering Carson's brother and understanding his death, carrying it as part of life. The metaphor of carrying implies an undertaking in which the facts, memories and essence of the deceased are transported into the present and beyond, incorporated into an individual's journey through life and becoming part of them as they proceed. The implied internalisation of grief here is simplified because it is considered theoretically. However, it does indicate an idealised version of the process which helps both the mourner and reader to understand grief, one which considers the known entirety of the deceased rather than focusing on the emotions of absence and the initial reaction to death: 'a process of asking, searching, collecting, doubting, striving, testing, blaming and above all standing amazed at the strange things humans do' which often 'produces no clear or helpful account', but instead an account of what can be recorded based on what is (*Nox*, 1.3: *multa*).

Carson's example, of Herodotos recording population by describing the bowl of melted down arrow heads, is emblematic of the types of things which can be recorded to capture not only the truth, but the sense of the moment, recording what is there rather than dismissing it because it is unusual or qualitative. This experience is consciously mirrored by Carson in the poem through a rhetorical statement, 'What if you made a collection of lexical entries, as someone who is asked to come up with a number for the population of the Skythians might point to the bowl at Exampaios', recording Michael from the fragments of memory and knowledge she has (*Nox*, 7.1: *mihi*). The framing of the poem provides a structure for grieving which incorporates the need for reunderstanding and recategorisation of the world whilst also acknowledging the interpersonal limitations which sometimes complicate the emotional processes, encouraging the bereaved to do what they can do, even if it appears bizarre, in order to

capture the 'concrete and indecipherable' (*Nox*, 1.3: *per*). In doing so, the poem is also encouraging the readers to revise continually ideas and assumptions which come from capturing aspects of the subject of grief as detailed above, through both the word association of the lexicographic entries and the enforced revision when dealing with repeated Latin words, such as the roots of *multum*, *munere*, and *ego*. The reader is forced to experience reading the definitions of those words, which remain in one place in the poem, in different narrative contexts and associated with different thoughts and emotions as evoked by the work on the recto.
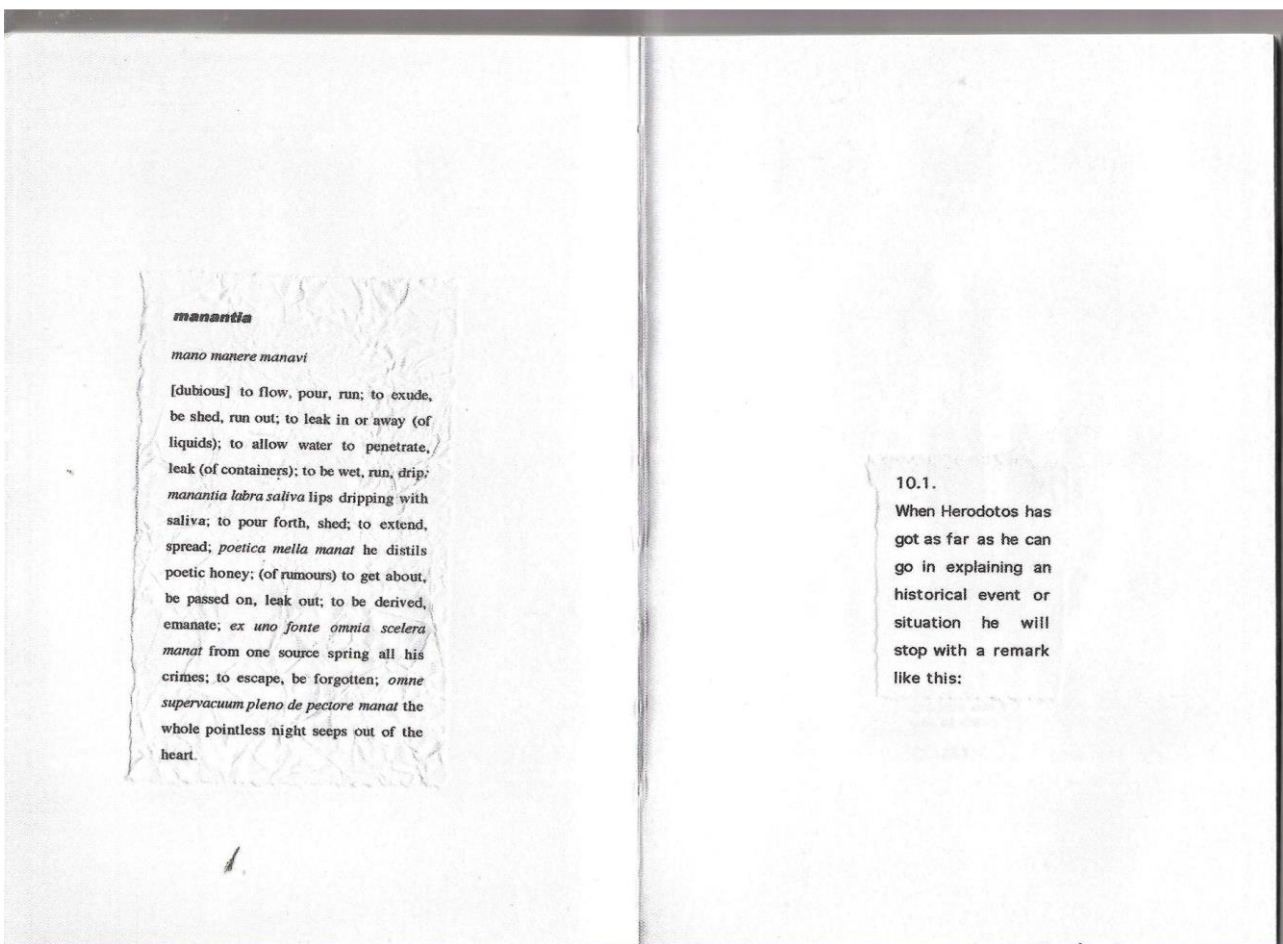

Figure 3.9 — 10.1: *manantia* (*Nox*)

Carson utilises the framing of Herodotos and history to ease into the end of the poem, signalling a transition away from the personal journey without looking for a

conclusion. The poem continues without certainty in a manner similar to when 'Herodotos has got as far as he can go in explaining an historical event' (*Nox*, 10.1: *manantia*). From the lexicographic entry on the verso, '***manantia***' defined as '[dubious] to flow, pour, run; to exude, be shed, run out,' there is a cautious movement towards the end of the poem which seems natural, associated with language used to signify continual directional progression. Whilst dubious, the translation encourages a unidirectional movement like the flow of water. The invocation of Herodotos's open limitations of his accounts, restrained from making concrete claims when reaching the boundaries of his understanding which casts a parallel between recording history, the act of memorial making in the poem, and the wider implications of both on the process of grief. Rather than claiming it to be complete, Carson is indicating that the poem has gone as far as it can go, needing more experiences, perspectives, and time to further the re-contextualisation of life and let the new understanding come to the fore; necessary to 'make use of' the vast corpus of content covered in the poem (*Nox*, 10.1: *fletu*). There is no expectation of certainty in the grieving process either, 'I have to say what is said. I don't have to believe it myself' (*Nox*, 10.1: *atque*). Clarifying those complications in the process which make the act of mourning seem impossible or an eternally inadequate reaction and response to death because of the unknowability of Michael, the poem seems able to end without appearing contradictory or destructive. The incomplete threads and unanswered questions which are excused by Carson when invoking Heredotos's statement are seemingly overwritten by Michael's own hand, with the recto unfurling to reveal a repetition of 'I love you' which is signed by her brother. An excuse for uncertainty is thus overwritten by a recording of her brother's love, silencing the justification from Herodotos and separating the emotional content of the poem from the historical framing. Furthermore, the basis of Herodotos's clarification is contested

through a quote from Plutarch on the next page, centred around the idea that truth is of no concern to Herodotos because he has wilfully moved away from it (*Nox*, 10.1: *in*).

In this respect, there is no single, unitary truth to be uncovered in the poem, leaving the speaker either to stop grieving, an impossibility, or to record and process what they know, an approximation. Carson playfully alludes to the need to mourn, even if it relies on fictional elements, presenting his gravestone as a headstand: 'So from my brother's funeral, a headstand' (*Nox*, 10.2: *frater*). Inverted by the headstand, the funeral still needs to be considered to understand, or attempt to understand, the world now her brother has died. In experiencing his funeral through reported words, Carson does not only describe, but gives voice to words spoken there, accepting that they have additional significance beyond her descriptions which are recollection rather than creation. Even after being unable to participate in the funeral, it is part of the affective content of the poem, accepted and incorporated into Carson's act of mourning. The need for personal familiarity or knowledge is superseded by the significance of the event; she must communicate what is, for as long as it must be said.

Nox utilises both the material and textual elements of the poem to convey grief, reacting and responding to the central idea of loss rather than death, attempting to understand and process the unknown aspects of Michael whilst accepting their unknowability, initiating a journey which will perhaps never end. The longer construction of the poem ensures that the vast scale and influence of the emotions are considered, repeated to reach some sort of insight. Carson's framing is utilised to step away from the grief without ending it completely, indicating a continuation of processing emotion which, whilst not recorded in verse, is ever-present, found in the definition of words, perspectives, pictures, and paper itself. There is thus a conscious consideration of the

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extent of grief and how it is non-linear, individual, and complex, challenging the 'known' through its different perspectives in order to reconceptualise the world in respect to his death.

3.3. 'The final face-to-face revelation' - The process of composition in Ted Hughes's 'Your Paris'

The first section of this chapter has considered the process of grief experience through long elegies, exploring how the longer poems influence the expression of grief. This second section of the chapter will consider the process of a poet moving through the drafting of an elegy and its influence on the expression of grief. Whilst we can study published elegies as work which offers insight into the emotional processes of mourning, or as outstanding poems which fit into a wider mode, understanding the process of how an elegy comes to be can further reveal the broad non-linear experience of grief. From this processual perspective, we can view the iterative changes made to the text in the act of composition and redrafting, consider possible reasons as to why alterations were made and how they influence the outcome of the elegy for us as readers. Through this we can also further our understanding of mourning as part of a personal process rather than as structured experience. Focus on the composition also emphasises the role of continual revision in capturing the changing emotions which occur when writing elegy, rewarding archival work to uncover the unspoken elements of process which correspond with the complex occurrence of grief experience. Within deletions, word changes, re-ordering, and wider alterations as part of the drafting process, the poems become something new. However, each iteration of the poem in manuscript form is valuable to unpicking the emotive processes that go into elegy, considering why alterations have been made and how they fit into the wider mode.

Without disregarding the finished poem, it is possible to trace the emotional threads, seeing how they develop through multiple edits as time passes.[41] Considering a sample of the vast corpus of manuscripts for Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters*, this section shall trace a range of undated drafts of 'Your Paris', which progress in several notebooks and draft sheets, through to the published poem.

3.3.1. 'Beneath it. I had rehearsed' — Working to remember through the drafting process

Hughes's elegy 'Your Paris' remembers and mourns his first wife, Sylvia Plath through a recollection of their honeymoon, focusing on a city which was full of contentious memories for both. Hughes works through the complexity of reconciling his memories of the trip, including his sense of Plath, and a developing realisation of her complex associations with Paris. The published poem opens with an approximation of what the location meant to Plath: 'Your Paris, I thought, was American. | I wanted to humour you' (*THCP* 1065).[42] Whilst the opening line appears to be an assumption about what Paris was to Plath, the syntax isolates his thought as an aside, demonstrating some doubt in his knowledge of Plath's view of the world. His thoughts and desires are tempered by an awareness of their insularity; the unknowability of Plath, in part due to her death but also due to the phenomenological separation, means Hughes cannot be sure of her exact

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[41] This approach is not directly that of so-called 'genetic' 'criticism', instead understanding both the manuscripts and published poems as equally valid versions of the text. For more on genetic criticism, see Oliver Davis, 'The Author at Work in Genetic Criticism', *Paragraph (Modern Critical Theory Group)*, 25.1 (2002) pp. 92-106.

[42] Hughes visited his sister Olwyn in the city after WW2 when she was working for a charity there (Bate, *Ted Hughes: the Unauthorised Life*, p. 82); Plath visited the city with Richard Sassoon, her then boyfriend, more than once, including an arranged meeting in which he had left before her arrival, leaving Plath alone in Paris without explanation. (Heather Clark, *Red Comet: The Short life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020) pp. 387-88; 429; 431-32; 449-50); Hughes later lived in Paris for at least three months from Easter to summer 1971, whilst collaborating with the theatre director Peter Brook, see Bate, *Ted Hughes: the Unauthorised Life*, p. 306.

thoughts. Through the hesitant 'thought' and clarification of desire in 'wanted', there is a level of respect given to Plath's inaccessible experiences as her actions are being filtered through Hughes' perspective. As noted by Heather Clark, Plath 'was less giddy than he knew.'[43]

However, the first set of drafts being considered open in a definite manner, more confident of the speaker's insight into Plath, her thoughts and expectations than the published poem.[44] Her Paris 'was the Paris of Americans', the source of the city detailed and recalled by Hughes in his drafts, an opening which whilst being certain of itself is continually altered.[45] Sprawling, the mention of both Plath's expectations and the trip they shared brings with it a reassuring sense of certainty from the narrator, with Hughes' simultaneous position as poet, partner and participant seeming to give each voice additional reliability; they are substantiated in the past. However, in this seemingly earlier draft and on into the published poem there is the addition of a restrained aside, 'I thought', which alters the very core of the poem's emotional journey as it shifts from an absolute image to one of uncertainty, one which could possibly be disconnected from reality.[46] This internal doubt alters the rest of the poem, with our experience now relying upon whether we believe Hughes now has the depersonalised insight to understand Plath: is being her husband an intimacy great enough to know this all for certain? Inserting this conflict into the elegy could potentially weaken the affective content by introducing a sense of doubt; however, it also makes Hughes more sensitive, demonstrating an awareness of the limitations of his knowledge of Plath

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[43] Clark, *Red Comet,* p. 450.
[44] The drafts are from the Ted Hughes Archive held at the British Library. These drafts are either hand-written or typed, with changes made directly onto the pages. There is no pagination, nor a clear ordering to the drafts, which makes it difficult to trace a linear development of the poem. As such, the changes are seen as a general survey of the alterations made whilst drafting.
[45] London, British Library, Add MS 88918/1/3, f. 52; 53; 55; 60; 65.
[46] Add MS 88918/1/4, f. 52.

which adds a raw and open emotive sense into the poem. Moreover, in acknowledging the realistic barriers between them we are drawn further into the emotional mystery, experiencing Hughes's endeavour alongside him. Accepting these limitations of elegy, whilst still pushing against them, enables Hughes to focus on grieving rather than creating a poetic pretence that he knows to be false; there is a sense of honesty and acceptance in the openness. Without his acknowledgement, Hughes would be challenged by the moments in which Plath's declining mental health is identified and mourned in the rest of the poem because it would assume he always had complete knowledge of her.

Through the changes, the drafts also uncover a moment of extreme self-reproach in which Hughes is clarifying his own understanding of Plath's complex emotional relationship with Paris:

> That were for me plain paving. If I
>
>   half
> Had ~~only~~ guessed what you were hiding from us
>
> Under your agitation, your stone hours---[47]

Hughes's deletion of 'only' and introduction of 'half' demonstrates a changing understanding of the situation which is born from self-reflection and a recognition of what we can control, removing blame from Hughes himself as he accepts the impossibility of capturing another's subjective life. Replacement of language in this manner is not only indicative of a positive element of the grieving process as it ends an

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[47] Also seen in Add MS 88918/1/3, f. 62.

unproductive thought process, but it also brings with it technical elements of poetry,

almost as if Hughes is offering similarities of sound as replacement for the emotive

turmoil. Through the change he introduces a rhythmic alliteration — 'had half' — that

both complicates the spoken line and brings a visual consistency. This alliterative

pairing is congruent with the already existing 'i', with an additional closeness found

with 'hiding'. Whilst his substitution brings with it additional nuance to the relationship

which is being remembered and challenges some of the self-doubt around Plath's

mental health, there is still uncertainty. The published poem completely removes this

discourse of doubt:

> That were for me plain paving, albeit
>
> Pecked by the odd, stray, historic bullet. (*THCP,* 1067)

The pain and blame for not realising Plath's complex relationship with Paris due to the

spectre of her former lover, Richard Sassoon, or perhaps even for what he would see as

his personal failing in the days leading up to Plath's suicide in February 1963, are now

intermingled with the plain paving of Paris: 'I don't want to be forgiven. [...] if there is an

eternity, I am damned in it.'[48] The resulting stone memorial is 'pecked by the odd, stray,

historic bullet' which physically marks the multiple sources of pain rather than being

targeted at only Hughes, acknowledging the complex intermingling emotions which

existed in their 1956 visit and extended as Hughes mourned. The sporadic yet

meaningful representation of the pain surrounding suicide is powerful, becoming ever-

present yet blameless through the drafting, a painful historic wound which is not

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[48] Ted Hughes in a letter to Aurelia Plath in March 1963, *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. Christopher Reid, (London: Faber and Faber, 2007) p. 215.

tortuous but does form part of the poem's ground. Plath's intentions, and the internalised anticipation of them, is buried underneath paving slabs.

Hughes' hidden inscription of self-reproach, only uncovered through viewing drafts, furthers the emotional thrust of the elegy by drawing back layers of abstraction to familiarise ourselves with the grief, confusion, and doubt which haunted Hughes as he attempted to grieve. His journey is aided by the emotive substitution, with the complexity of the situation acknowledged, marked physically to have presence still within the poem but no longer existing solely on the surface where it was aspiring to the impossible. In turn, the published poem does not contain unknowable uncertainty which attempts to comprehend the complex network of grief and blame, but rather a composed movement of recognition which benefits the whole journey of mourning; the poem has a sense of acceptance of what was, including of the unknowable complex association which Plath had with Paris and Richard Sassoon. The drafting process reveals these internal struggles with emotion, reflecting Hughes' working through grief which is hidden from the published poem. The changed world does still contain references to the complex emotions experienced, but it does not get caught up in them. Without acknowledging that the development exists throughout the drafting process, we have only the final version to consider.

There is a personal connection drawn out within both the draft and published poem which add to the affective content of the elegy. Whilst there is not an abundance of seemingly tender moments in 'Your Paris', there is a significant physical connection which is rephrased and relocated within multiple drafts through Hughes's evocation of his and Plath's hand-holding. This contact was vital to Hughes, with Plath's hands a feature of hers which remained a focus of his grief, evident in the poem 'Fingers' in

Birthday Letters: 'I remember your fingers. And your daughter's | Fingers remember your fingers' (*THCP*, 1168). Hughes's connection to Plath's hands was such that when asked by Frieda what her mother was like, he replied 'She was just like you, even in the way she moved her hands.'[49] Within this snapshot of a loving connection, Hughes is struggling to deal with the unknown extent of Plath's emotional state. The fingers, interlinked yet seemingly fragile, are positioned and repositioned throughout the drafting and editing process, sitting in different points within the poem, directed through altering perspective, yet always being emblematic of the intimacy and love between Hughes and Plath.

<div style="text-align:center">

                     that   ~~very~~

</div>

That you were a walking wound, ~~where~~ the air hurt you.

At every corner, my fingers linked in your fingers,

You expected the final revelation

To grab your whole body. I had no notion[50]

Starting in this draft, a typescript manuscript in which they are at first a written in line addition, there is a selection of lines which form a poignant moment of connection, an emotional revelation which is both mournfully constructive and direct, speaking to the very core of Hughes' grief relating to Plath.[51] We find here a connection that is so forceful that it does alter the sense of mourning within the poem — emotional progression is found through the process of grief presented. The opening line alters the specifics of the pain, removing it from place and the adverbial emphasis of precision,

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[49] Bate, *Ted Hughes: the Unauthorised Life*, p. 513.
[50] Add MS 88918/1/3 f. 52 recto.
[51] Add MS 88918/1/3 f.52 recto.

leaving a line which is plainer. There are no additional words to cover the pain, removing the possibility of explaining any of this emotion away. Within one line, the constant, pounding grief is not liberated or abolished. Instead, it is accepted. Closed off, with no overspill, there is an intensification which carefully influences the subsequent lines, directing the acceptance through its precision. Here, Hughes adds in the emotive link after the lines have been printed. Without the connection, the lines are lost. Yet, added in when reviewing the typed poem, there is a direct connection between Hughes and Plath that reaches across time to offer a tender entwinement. Their linked fingers are not a rejection of their love, nor part of a controlling hand, but are a shared moment of fleeting love that is both of then and now, eternal in poetry. Whilst it is impossible to determine if the image brought comfort, however fleeting, to Hughes, we note its fragile beauty that can resonate with a reader.

Making use of advantageous poetic perspectives, Hughes is both within the emotional journey of the lines and overseeing the direction of the poem. As both the 'I' of the poem and a character who experiences part of the poem, Hughes is able to interact with the affective content on multiple levels. As such, the fingers reach out from many places, not only joining hands in Paris but tenderly offering general comfort. We see the expansive connection through the literal sense of touch when there is an instantaneous transition from hand holding to Plath's own mental world; there is an intimate skipping of perspective which culminates with the poem lurking over Plath whilst feeling as she does. As quickly as this is developed, it is withdrawn by Hughes as he admits that 'I had no notion' of what Plath had really felt.

However, through the workings of poetry he had attempted to reach an understanding of Plath in that moment, challenging his original perspective and thought to reconsider the memory. This conflict is a source of poetic tension; we as readers have

both to accept Hughes' sincerity and let our understanding of the momentary insight into Plath's mind be removed from his influence in order to initiate new insight. Resulting from this monumental emotional burden on Hughes there is a poetic culmination in the published poem:

> With conjectural, hopelessly wrong meanings –
>
> You gave me no hint how, at every corner,
>
> My fingers linked in yours, you expected
>
> The final face-to-face revelation
>
> To grab your whole body. (*THCP,* 1067)

Hughes is sensitively withdrawn, accepting his faults and emotional limitations, before turning a sudden corner to link with Plath and truly know her fear of fateful reckoning for a moment. Initially this is not distracting as it is buried in disclosure and reservation, yet it does contain a brilliance that is both enlightening and emotionally progressive. With insight into Plath's face-to-face revelation and its whole-body suspending sense of power which is drawn from the direct challenge of raw emotion, the elegy links Hughes to this essence of Plath. Though fleeting, it is a direct moment of progression in grief as it respects the boundaries of knowledge.

Within the drafting process we can see iterations of these lines as they form.

> ~~and you a walking around~~ expecting
>
> at every corner — your fingers linked in my fingers —
>
> The final revelation, ~~to grab your whole body~~
> > > like a shock-wave,

Here, not only are Plath's fingers leading the connection, which is converse to the final poem, but the emotional power of her fear is also overpowering. The physical interaction is now secondary, replaced with an outside force that is both felt and experienced. Hughes carefully creates a reaction within Plath that is general, the simile demonstrating it approximates her reality rather than his interpretation of her; there are multiple figures of Plath in the poem, ranging from her historical sense to her actual sense, the sense of her in *Birthday Letters*, to the sense of her in Hughes' memory of their honeymoon. This is complex and overwhelming, and as such, the essence of Plath is not yet represented, but the poem is moving towards it as Hughes de-centres himself and revises the situation. This sense of the revelation lives on:

> Yourself the walking wound. ~~And~~ Where you expected
>
> At every corner — your fingers linked in my fingers —
>
> The final revelations, like a (?) wave
>
>   a casualty
> To grab your whole body// You were, the survivor[53]

A more certain drafting of the lines, yet still removed from the published poem, we can see that Hughes is still struggling with Plath's death and an anxiety that on their honeymoon he was overshadowed by memories of Sassoon. The personal connection, holding hands, does not bring strength or closures, but instead is possibly painful for

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[52] Add MS 88918/1/3 f.56.
[53] Add MS 88918/1/3 f.59.

Plath. Even though the thought of her as being 'a casualty' is deleted, it is still present in the draft, a fragment of processing complex emotions.

As with the initiation of holding hands, Hughes is more passive in comparison to the active Plath; he is yet to take control of his grief. We can see this in other drafts where Hughes moves away from what would eventually be published and towards a more withdrawn perspective:

> That you were a walking wound, where the air hurt you.
>
> At every corner, ~~my~~ ^{your} fingers linked in ~~yours~~ ^{my} fingers,
>
> You expected the final revelation
>
> To grab your whole body. I had no notion[54]

By editing the determiners, control is relinquished to Plath, a change which withholds both responsibility and emotional understanding from Hughes as it is now her action, her fingers linking with his. In this draft we see a movement away from introspection as Plath reaches out to Hughes for affection and connection, a possible reaction to an unknown change in the way Hughes is feeling; the turmoil of grief has many results. Not only does this divert any questions from the comfort and support Hughes could have offered Plath, but it also offers Hughes a moment of affection from Plath. It is supportive and personal without requiring him to deal with the complexity of the situation. This change emphasises the minutiae of the lines, with word order drastically altering the sense and thus shifting the way we experience the elegy. Demonstrably, Hughes worked

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[54] Add MS 88918/1/3 f.65.

over the line numerous times, changing the word position within the line as he struggled to identify his preference.

Whilst we can speculate around possible reasons as to why, the drafting offers insight into the act of mourning as a process, showing as it does the same moment revised and refigured with minimal change. There are some poetic arguments for the alterations, but they are also a result of a personal struggle with perspective and action; Hughes wants to know he supported Plath as best he could. The published poem has Hughes take responsibility for experiencing the pain, working with Plath to attempt to comprehend her suffering and offering a clear sign of loving support. Preceding this certain interlocking of fingers, Hughes is processing grief through the very act of writing poetry. The challenge of encountering Plath as she suffers is one which Hughes does not shy away from, linking fingers with her as she expects painful revelations around every corner. Altering the perspective through the use of determiners may not seem like a major edit, however without it Hughes would be a passenger in the poem rather than an active participant.

3.3.2. Textual Revision as Relearning the World

As part of the overall grieving within the poem Hughes is preoccupied with the physical act of remembering, uncovering an odd comfort through the memorial plaques which they chance upon. The act of discovery is found in the drafting process:

<blockquote>
a   ~~as if~~
On each memorial plaque ~~the~~ name ~~of somebody~~
</blockquote>

<blockquote>
~~him it~~
</blockquote>

[That] I almost remembered [55]

We see here lines riddled with deletion as Hughes attempts to identify correctly who or what he is remembering. There is uncertainty within each change, with alterations revisited in the same draft still wrangling with the precise phrasing. This phrase is dealt with in additional drafts, such as Add MS 88918/1/3 f. 53, f. 55, f. 60, f. 65, f. 254, and Add MS 88918/1/7 f. 81, and f. 82.[56] Some add to the tracing:

<div style="text-align:center">

carried all art
I felt I [?] — [?] — remember — rough translation

unkind expanse of
of a name I know too well for a shared nothing[57]

</div>

Illegible handwriting and the layers of edits make it hard to follow his changes completely, yet they still reveal a deeper searching which comes from the memorial plaques, with significance slowly being added to that singular act of remembering as each change searches for an unknown exactness. There is a lack of accuracy, as if the scale of the emotional burden is too large to understand it clearly, with Hughes feeling the weight of other moments bearing in, too. Whilst this is not refined, it demonstrates an attempt at mourning which results in an 'unkind expanse of nothing', completely shutting down any possible consolation through its emptiness. f. 55 offers us a glimpse at a more complete set of lines, still with unclear wording: 'On (?) memorial plaque I read a name | I almost expected to know — rough translation'. A tighter, more concise pairing, the lines still contend hesitation and uncertainty, the dash forcing a long pause

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[55] Add MS 88918/1/3 f. 52.
[56] Add MS 88918/1/3 f. 53; f. 55; f.60; f. 65; f. 254: Add MS 88918/1/7 f. 81; f. 82.
[57] Add MS 88918/1/3 f.53.

in which the expectation both builds and is made to seem impossible before there is an inaccurate or shoddy understanding of the words; language is not only foreign and unfamiliar, but also inaccessible. Whilst each draft has so far developed the idea, f. 60 shows a pull back, 'checking' instead of 'reading', 'the' instead of 'a', which makes it more direct and physical. Furthermore, Hughes removes the hesitation. Instead, the sentence ends, with the line carrying on 'To you'. This is a direct connection between Plath and the memorial plaque, reaffirming the focus of the affective content onto her and away from a more generic sense of mourning that these lines also developed.

Hughes does not completely move away from remembering the atrocities of the Second World War, his Paris is still the Paris of Occupation, however the core emotional content does not centre upon the horror and scale of the war; working through his private grief is his primary concern. This is evident in the deletions of f. 65: 'On each memorial plaque {the}>a< name >as if< {of somebody}>{I might}< | [I might] {I}>{have}< almost remember{ed} >{it}<. Your ecstasies ricochetted [*sic*]'. Removing the specific determiner 'the' and replacing it with the more general 'a', deleting the reference to a potential known identity 'of somebody', and changing the tense of his memory from past to present all severely alter the tone, weakening the emotive importance of this moment and instead making it a more general act of attempted remembrance. Again, the second line ends with the presence of Plath, signifying that she is not forgotten in the tough process of remembering and mourning; this time her memory is alive and active, driving on the whole elegy. Add MS 88918/1/7 f. 81 demonstrates the result of Hughes' difficulty: deletion.

~~like memorial plaque~~

a

> Above ~~the~~ strike sunny exposure of pavement
>
> Like a memorial plaque. Some actually had
>
> Memorial plaques. Your ecstasies ricochetted

The images of memorial become a simile, with the redemptive elements borrowed for significance before presenting itself. Hughes is both using the actual act of memorialising and isolating its affective significance, drawing on both elements. However, it is also a clunky and ineffective repetition which emphasises the physical object rather than the emotive elements; the memorial plaque seems distant from Plath. Hughes' lines complicate the process of grief rather than working through it, trying to generate understanding by replaying the same scene. The recollection is eventually reduced in the published form as if the metaphor associating the tracing of names from the past with the tracing of Plath's name on a grave is too sharp.[58]

> I read each bullet scar in the Quai stonework
>
> With an eerie familiar feeling,
>
> And stared at the stricken, sunny exposure of pavement
>
> Beneath it. I had rehearsed
>
> Carefully, over and over, just those moments –
>
> Most of my life, it seemed. While you (*THCP,* 1066)

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[58] This is found in other elegies, including Lowell's 'Sailing home from Rapallo'. Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' contains a gravestone inscription too, a more elegiac version of the memorial plaque.

The drafted lines have been removed, now imbued as part of Hughes' rehearsals for the coming experience. They are not discarded, but instead become part of the wider emotional process that Hughes experiences.

There is clear importance within the deleted, or buried, elements of the poem as they are part of the grieving process; without them the lines have less depth. Here, we see that the mourning process has subsumed the incomprehensible tendrils of emotion which resist progressing through grief, detailing a destructive act of positive emotional development in which the difficult strings of melancholia are tied into a wider elegiac movement. As such, their difficulty is minimised, with the collected emotional intricacies becoming one larger outpouring of grief which fits with a clearer desire to proceed through loss rather than escape it. Hughes is prioritising a complete sense of mourning over an accurate capturing of a memory or his thoughts on said moment, enabling both the emotions of the poem to continue as well as the poem itself. Whilst at first this appears to be a rejection of authenticity to grieve, it is more of a separation of the physical — what actually happened — from the unknowable metaphysical elements. Consequently, the thread of emotion takes primacy, feeling without resolution.

This internal conflict is further represented by Hughes' own battle within the poem, with Paris as both a physical artifact of war and a metaphorical object which demonstrates the distance and disconnection between both Plath and Hughes. In becoming emblematic of their difficulties Paris forces Hughes, both the poet and figure within the poem, to confront Plath's death. This aids his grieving process as it does not provide him with comforting lies, but instead helps to review and catalogue their relationship, aiding understanding. From this, Hughes is able to move forward with a new perspective, one which helps build acceptance, incorporating the complexity into his life rather than seeking closure.

Together, the draft and published versions of 'Your Paris' tell a story of a wider grieving process, offering insight into the ways in which elegists write and rewrite as they are moving through mourning. The process is not clear, with certain prominent moments eventually buried, other lines refigured numerous times in a process which when detailed seems excessive and fatuous. However, there is a sense of direction, of worked understanding, which flows through the journey through manuscripts to printed text. Hughes does not find complete solace within this one poem, this is but one elegy in a wider movement, and yet still it works through grief. As noted by Carrie Smith, the Hughes archive 'tries to preserve the past, even as the arranging and destroying of the papers alters it; similarly, in *Birthday Letters* Hughes represents the past in poetry by using concrete items. He performs a synthesising of these items by finding patterns in the papers.'[59] The patterns he finds constitute a form of relearning, creating a new approach to the past as it is preserved, representing the unacknowledged multitudes which inflect memory. Consequently, whilst the archive-based reading of 'Your Paris' I have performed reveals an internal process of recognition, there is space for considering the overall archive alongside the published collection to view a larger working through of grief experience in order to consider the 'accrual' of emotion and expression through the composition process and its relationship to grief.[60]

3.4. Conclusion: Capturing the expansive process of grief

As we saw earlier, Thomas Attig states that 'the central idea of grieving as a process of relearning the world captures not only the very basic aspects of the experiences, but

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[59] Carrie Smith, *The Page is Printed: Ted Hughes's Creative Process*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021) p. 196.
[60] Muldoon, *The End of the Poem*, p. 39.

also their scope, complexity, multi-dimensionality, richness, and variety. And it provides general understanding of loss and grief experiences that opens the way to dialogue with grieving persons.'[61] Through the poetry we gain an insight into the broadness of grieving as a process of relearning the world which helps us to elucidate and interpret the experiences of absence and bereavement. Considering the length of elegy and the process of composing elegiac poetry provides only a small insight into the multifarious experiences which go on through grief and elegy. However, they do provide evidence of their connection to the process of grief experience, helping us to perceive the emotional complexities through poetry.

The expansiveness of the long elegy is utilised by Muldoon, Stevens, and Carson further to consider grief, challenging the broad nuances and idiosyncrasies of their grief emotions, seeking connection, and understanding of a complex web of absence. The scope covered in long elegies embodies an aspect of Attig's description of the grieving process which can be obscured by the study of shorter poems, helping to uncover the non-linear, complex, and rich experience of mourners. Long elegies thus help to present grief as an extended process of relearning the world, offering a broader insight into the experience than shorter elegies. However, this does not diminish the role of other elegies, such as those read in previous chapters, in communicating grief, with their focus usually on one specific aspect of the nebulous experience. This is evident through the close reading of the drafting process, in which we uncover the depth of changing grief emotion, which alters over time and in turn alters the poetry, presenting a changed view of the world. This uncovers the process of one approaching the complexity of grief, embodied through the drafting changes, as the ideal expression of grief is sought and

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[61] Attig, *How we Grieve,* p.xxvi (19).

with it a relearning of the world takes place. Individual in scale, my reading of 'Your Paris' and its archival material encourages more work on the depth of content which constitutes an elegy, especially to capture and consider the scale of grief experience.

Whilst it seems as if the poetry is ineffectual in concluding the process of grief, especially in the misguided expectation of providing consolation, it is important to recognise that 'some write carelessly as if bereavement were a process of contending with loss when it is nothing more than the sometimes nearly unbearable recognition of it.'[62] The connections created by form, rhyme, listing and metaphor facilitate the process of recognising death, attempting to integrate the loss into life slowly through reconsideration and recontextualisation. Rather than drawing out an acceptance, longer elegies demonstrate the expansiveness of grief experience, creating new connections which recognise loss and incorporate it into life, creating a changed world in the process. We also can see the recognition of loss through the drafting process, with continual alteration and refinement necessary to communicate this particular experience to the universal. The process of elegy helps to embody the extended experience of grief, offering a means of carefully recognising the emotions in a structured manner, producing a dialogue of the grieving process, which is both of and for the poet, and can be interacted with by others.

Poetry also helps to elucidate the process in and of grief through form. As discussed in the previous chapter, the villanelle form facilitates revision and reorientation in grief through its rhyme and repetition. As we have seen, Carson also utilises the repetition of lexicographic entries to recontextualise ideas, notably early in

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[62] Attig, p. xxvii.

the poem through the return to individualised definitions of *'multas'* and *'per'* which are recontextualised, referred back to accompanied by another picture or text (*Nox*, 1.0: *multas*; 1.1: *per*; 1.3: *multa*; 1.3: *per*). Even though not written in an identifiable form, the formal concerns of *Nox* still contribute to the expression of grief and the depiction of the process of grief. Archival work, such as that discussed in this chapter, also helps to reveal revision and reorientation in the grief experience. The presentation of the drafting process of 'Your Paris' reveals 'that which goes on' in grief through the writing process, highlighting deletions, additions and variations which encapsulate the changes of grief underneath the final poem and uncover a scale of elegy which goes beyond published poems. The process of communicating grief relates to these formal concerns.

My next chapter will build upon the continued presence of form to further consider the role of poetic form in elegy. Form has been necessary to consider throughout the previous chapters as it structures the presentation of landscape, both embodies and confronts distance, and is necessary to the consideration of process. Each chapter has in some way touched upon formal concerns and thus in the final chapter of this thesis we will turn to consider form as its own subject. We will firstly do so through considering the physical structure of form which defines and guides the poetry, and secondly through the patterns of reaction and response which are engendered through poetic form and structure. Together these considerations will complement the discussion of form which has already occurred, supporting the considerations of landscape, distance and process which are built around formal concerns, whilst also demonstrating the role of form in presenting a relearning of the world.

Chapter 4

Structure and Form of Elegy

4.1. Introduction: Shapes of grief expression

In the Introduction to this thesis, we encountered the history of perceiving elegy as a distinct poetic form and challenged the validity of relating such taxonomic notions to the mode.[1] Nevertheless, whilst the notion of a distinct elegiac form can be soundly rejected, the importance of poetic form to the function of elegy has clearly emerged across the previous three chapters. Consequently, this final chapter will consider specifically the role that form can play in an elegiac relearning of the world, viewing it as an expansive utilisation of poetic expression which supports and represents grief experience. Consideration of elegy and form in this chapter will embrace both that of existing forms and the utilisation of looser formal elements within poetry which express grief. In this regard, as we will see, whilst some poets have distanced themselves from strictly adhering to traditional poetic forms, they have not transcended formalism.

For Eric Falci, form is a collection of 'the composition activities, assumptions and implications that are involved in the shaping [of a poem]; the nature and structure of the shape that results; and the ways that a poem is realized within the processes of reception.'[2] Poetic form provides structure and shape to the poetry, helping to produce the landscape of an elegy, interact with ideas of distance, and support the process of elegy and grief. Likewise, landscape, distance and process are not isolated from each

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[1] See above pp. 5-6.
[2] Falci, *The Value of Poetry*, p. 4.

other. All are brought together in the formal shaping of each elegy, which as will be discussed, prioritises individual grief expression over an attachment to formal expectations or rigidity. A combination of elements such as rhyme and syntax are elements of form due to the way in which they shape the physical poem and readerly experience, whilst also being created by the shaping of other formal elements. Form can also help to shape the experience of relearning the world through elegy in its reconfiguration of similar ideas, with poetry supporting a non-linear consideration of death. As uncovered throughout the thesis, repetition and rhyme are central to the depiction and interrogation of mourning, revisiting ideas to garner new perspectives which engenders a reconsideration of the same event or creating unforeseen connections which aid in relearning the world. We can see these emotionally generative formal aspects utilised in a range of poems, seeking certainty and definition through revised repetition of the same event, depicting nuances which help to evoke the multifaceted experience of grief. Attig argues that relearning the world requires these changes to re-shape our caring engagement with the world.[3]

When approaching form in this chapter we will see how existing, or known forms, such as the sonnet or the villanelle, which have a historic place within poetry and as such usually have traditional associations and formal lineage, influence grief expression and portray grief reaction and response. Alongside this, we will also consider the role of less established verse forms, which come about through the poet's own design to produce a particularised portrayal of grief. These forms are separate from those existing forms, whilst still utilising the formal elements highlighted by Falci. This chapter will consider the role of form in elegy in two ways; the first section

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[3] For more see p. 19.

examining the role of existing and less-established forms in elegy, the second section considering the effect on the emotional experience communicated through elegy and the process of relearning the world through the structural role of patterning in form.

The first section opens with a consideration of Robert Lowell's 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' as both an individual elegy and part of a series of elegies which have formal links. We will consider the role of these connections on the series of poems, whilst also offering close readings of the effect of existing form on the poem. The section proceeds to a reading of Anne Stevenson's 'Elegy'. Written in an open form, the intricately patterned poem utilises form both to proceed through the content and enrich meaning, demonstrating the utility of form as it operates through both visual shape and language. Finally, the section closes with a reading of Paul Muldoon's 'Hedge School'. Arguing that it is a mutated sonnet, we will consider the role of form on the poem and the place of additional forms in the mode of elegy.

The second part of the chapter then focuses on the patterns of reaction and response which are found within forms. Opening with a close reading of Natasha Trethewey's 'Graveyard Blues', an extended sonnet for her mother, we will again consider the role of existing forms on the elegy, especially how they dictate a poetic patterning. To close this section, Trethewey's poem is partnered with her own elegy 'Monument', which is also for her mother. Alongside reading connections between the two poems, we will also consider the visual aspect of the poem when it is converse to the content of the poem.

4.2. 'He always got the pieces back in place' - Forms of grief

Whilst elegy is not a distinct poetic form, form is still utilised by poets to help shape their personal expression of grief. This does not only come in the means of existing forms, but also in the usage of formal elements to guide thought in the poem, highlight emotion, and shape grief. Doing so aids a relearning of the world as it offers a structure to part of the experience which in some way aids communication and/or comprehension of loss. Utilisation of named poetic form brings with it literary connections which have their own significance, some elegiac, which can, depending on the form, overshadow the elegiac intentions or amplify the emotional aspects of the poem. These significances can be generic or specific but open another means of expressing grief experience. The following section will consider both known and unknown forms, viewing how the formal elements and variations can express a relearning of the world.

4.2.1. Regularity and form in Robert Lowell's 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow'

Written to memorialise Lowell's maternal grandfather, 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' is one of his earlier elegies, published in his second collection *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946). The poem constitutes part of a corpus of family elegy which, as we have seen when considering elegies for his mother, extends throughout his oeuvre. Whilst we will consider the affective content of this elegy, the focus of our discussion will be on its form, which crafts not only a link to an idealised pastoral past — invoked by the formal lineage — but also a regularity across time. This formal lineage provides an underlying consistency throughout the poem, ensuring a regularity which supports the elegy as it restrains the disparate grief experience and aids an extended process of relearning the world. We will view how the form itself influences the process of the elegy and the

possibility for an ending in grief. This will not only provide us with a new approach to Lowell's elegy, but it will also provide insight into some of the roles of form in the elegiac mode more widely.

Whilst not written in an immediately recognisable existing form, 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' has a poetic consistency, providing the elegy with both a generative structure and key associations which develop the emotional sense of the elegy. As noted by Marjorie Perloff, the stanza form which Lowell deploys is actually derived from Matthew Arnold's 'The Scholar Gypsy', where 'each iambic pentameter stanza has ten lines rhyming *abcbcadeed*; in each case the sixth line is shortened to three stresses.'[4] The stanza form, thus, provides not only a structure for processing loss, but also poetic and cultural associations, especially those related to the pastoral of Arnold's poem, creating a link between the poem and an expression of loss which exists beyond the language or content.

As Antony Harrison argues, Arnold's poem 'presents a comprehensive and damning — albeit highly generalized — critique of the cultural values that dominate the historical moment of its composition' and thus by creating an association to 'The Scholar Gypsy', Lowell is connecting 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' with a repudiation of dominant cultural values.[5] Whilst the utilisation of Arnold's stanza form challenges the cultural values which his grandfather represents, within the form there is also an already developed and accessible depth of context and associations around absence which alters the sense of loss in Lowell's poem. His use of form also establishes a historical link between himself and Arnold, connecting the poets into an intricate web of

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[4] Marjorie Perloff, 'Death by Water: The Winslow Elegies of Robert Lowell', *ELH*, 34.1 (1967) p. 118.
[5] Antony Harrison, 'Matthew Arnold's Gipsies: Intertextuality and the New Historicism', *Victorian Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed. Valentine Cunningham, (Newark: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) p. 101.

literary lineage. Gillian Groszewski identifies the importance of this lineage to Lowell, with elegy and previously used elegiac forms proving 'attractive to him as a vehicle through which he could assert his place in the line of distinguished elegists that came before him.'[6] For Lowell, form is thus not only for the poem but also for the poet themself, embedding them into poetic tradition through association as a means of ensuring continuity beyond the moment. This seemingly personal desire is aligned with aspects of grief, ensuring that the poet and their mourning continue to exist beyond the poem, associating the loss to a larger genre or mode which has already survived since Ancient Greece and becoming one tribute of many in a cumulative memorial. The formal association embeds the poet and deceased into an extensive lineage, structuring the emotion and thought in an identifiable, and usually consistent, manner, whilst also striving beyond the dominant cultural expectations. However, form in 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' is also a conscious response to the death of his grandfather, structuring the memory in a specific manner. The importance of form on the expression of grief and relearning the world is notable when we consider deviations, viewing a breakdown in consistency which seems to come after an extended grieving period in which Lowell's opinion of the deceased appears to have changed. Consequently, from the outset form is both a means of physical ordering and a conscious response to the death of his grandfather, changing in significance over the course of the poem.

At its most fundamental level, as detailed by Perloff, the form, especially rhyme and metre, provide a consistency to 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow'. These two aspects irrefutably connect the disparate elements which make up the whole poem and support the presentation of grief experience. This reduces the temporal divide, aiding in the

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[6] Groszewski, 'Robert Lowell's Elegiac Poetry', p. 36.

comprehension of death in not just the instant, but also from the past and into the future. Established across the threshold of death, the first rhyme is emblematic of the connecting role of rhyme within the poem.

I.

DEATH FROM CANCER

This Easter, Arthur Winslow, less than dead,
Your people set you up in Phillips House
To settle off your wrestling with the crab—
The claws drop flesh upon your yachting blouse
Until longshoreman Charon come and stab
Through your adjusted bed (*RLCP*, 23)

Not only are 'dead' and 'bed' emphasised and fused together through sound, including the hard 'd' which is repeated in 'dead' and echoed at the end of 'bed', they are also intrinsic to the whole sense of the poem, creating a familiar image and place of death within one of the poem's organising principles. This is determined not only by the language itself, but also the sense of the poem; 'dead' requires a related word not only to match its severity, but to embolden our understanding of it. Through this, the rhyme is generative to the emotional sense of the poem as it helps to build an impression of completeness in the elegy, ensuring that the death cannot be continually avoided or obscured in the manner which it is in the lines in between the two; cancer, which has been openly referenced in the title of the section, is obscured through the use of its astrological form in the body of the poem.

Whilst not every rhyme pair is as vital to the overall poem, they are each filled with possibility, conjoining the poetic beauty of rhyme with the additional interrogation of ideas found through non-linear connection. Consistent rhyme ensures that the potential of new perspectives is constantly at the fore of the reader's mind, initiated by the first pair. 'House' and 'blouse' create a distracting domestic interiority which is converse to 'dead', 'crab', and 'stab' which isolates the cause of death from the imagery of Charon (*RLCP*, 13). The manifold role of rhyme adds a tension to each instance as it could again be pivotal to the emotional sense, or decorative, aiding the poetic sense. Whilst one would expect the rhyme scheme to follow that of the form, in part IV 'A Prayer for My Grandfather to Our Lady' the structure breaks down, with certain rhyming sounds occurring on multiple lines, reaching across stanzas:

> O Mother, I implore
>
> Your scorched, blue thunderbreasts of love to pour
>
> Buckets of blessings on my burning head
>
> Until I rise like Lazarus from the dead:
>
> *Lavabis nos et super nivem dealbabor.*
>
> "On Copley Square, I saw you hold the door
>
> To Trinity, the costly Church, and saw
>
> The painted Paradise of harps and lutes
>
> Sink like Atlantis in the Devil's jaw" (*RLCP*, 25)

As evident in the quote, which provides some of the repetitive rhymes in the two stanzas, the repeated sounds become nearly overwhelming, causing a constant return

and revision of the line endings, with their sonic familiarity working in conjunction with their divergent meanings both to connect and divide, searching for continuation whilst also blaming the deceased. Whereas the intricate scheme of the earlier parts both expands the sense of the poem and connects ideas, the rhyme in part IV is constrictive, turning inwards as if to reject the possibility of an ending and complicating the extended timeframe of mourning which has been created in the poem.

This uncertainty comes from the breakdown of form, expressing both the inevitability of progress and an existential fear of admitting it. Perloff identifies a 'verbal confusion' which she believes 'reflects the larger structural irresolution of the poem.'[7] However, the constant rhyme does resolve itself, ending with an even number of rhyme words to ensure there is at least some sense of completion after the extended rhyme sequence. There is no comfort found within this resolution, with the cyclical structure encouraging a return to the start of the part, asking for 'more' of the complex processing rather than progression beyond. This return is stunted by the clear visual failings of the rhyme, as if resisting the end is formally encouraged and yet alienated by the specific language; restarting the rhyme sequence causes the reader to encounter again the unfamiliar and seemingly impossible connections. Whilst Anthony Hecht argues that 'too close an identity of sound [...] strikes the ear as banal, obvious, and flat,' the mundanity of Lowell's rhymes is vital to the elegy, evoking an uncertain unity in which the words are both familiar and unfamiliar, part of two separate, yet related, realms.[8] Language here seems to be reflecting the threshold between life and death, finding resemblance but not perfection. Therefore, even though the rhymes may seem trite, they are alterations of Arnold's form, with the comfort of rhyme being contrasted

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[7] Perloff, 'Death by Water', p. 122.
[8] Anthony Hecht, 'On Rhyme', *Melodies Unheard*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) p. 253.

against the uncomfortable changes, all compounded by the triviality of the word play which both avoids the reality of death and forces the poem to confront it.

With its mundanity and confusion, the elegy does not end gloriously, but instead in a manner symbolic of complicated grief. This is found in part because of a reluctance to relearn, utilising near repetition as rhyme to concentrate emotions rather than recognising the need for change. Perloff argues that this, along with the continual critique of Lowell's Grandfather, leads to the elegy being 'ultimately a failure'.[9] 'Failure' is a hard concept to securely ascribe to an expression of grief; however, the formal variations are emblematic of the turmoil of mourning, with the constant rhymes of part IV continually causing the reader to return to past rhyme words, creating a connected web which draws away from the ending and back to the start. As it breaks from the poem's form, there is a breakdown of poetic posture, with the intensity of grief taking precedence. Therefore, the rhyme of the poem provides both a poetic and affective purpose, communicating some of the unspoken intricacies of mourning in a manner which reflects their incorporeality; complicated grief becomes a sense in the form. Without the use of formal elements, the burden of expression would rest solely on language and thus Lowell's intricate alterations are found specifically within the mode of communication. Rhyme is therefore key to the poem, especially in its closing part, ensuring that the complexities of the moment can be comprehended without taking over the whole poem.

The drawn-out experience of grief is reflected in 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow' through a pliable structure, with formal elements creating a poetic consistency which crosses the temporal divide of the poem as over time Lowell relearns the world.

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[9] Perloff, 'Death by Water', p. 123.

Alongside the already noted formal characteristics, there is also a regular change in the form, with the sixth line always shortened to six syllables, becoming a visually notable variation. Collectively, these formal features are present throughout the four sections of the poem, crossing the geographic and temporal settings which separate them. Not only does this ease the connection between the time of death, in part I 'Death From Cancer', and burial, in part II 'Dunbarton', but also accepts the elongated process of mourning; we return to grief in part III 'Five Years Later', 'This Easter, Arthur Winslow, five years gone | I came to mourn you, not to praise the craft', and experience 'A Prayer For My Grandfather To Our Lady' in part IV (*RLCP*, 23; 24; 25). We gain insight into a connected process which is not defined by ritual but is moulded around the emotional journey. There is no disconnection after the burial, no expectation of consolation or completed mourning. Instead, there is an acceptance of continued mourning, with aspects of the formal process remaining until the end, creating a consistency which considers the various aspects of grief as equal. As argued by Allan Cole regarding both Lowell and mourning in general, 'grief is an active process by which a struggle is undergone to both repair and to transform the self.'[10]

Lowell's formal rigidity enables this transformation, regulating the varied experiences through the set structure to consider the experience as a whole. There is thus an ability to encapsulate the multitudes of grief, with geographic locations and varied temporal moments unified within the process of mourning. Whilst the rhyme scheme breaks down in part IV there is still an overarching structural regularity which is expressed metrically. Perloff finds a weakness in this larger system:

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[10] Cole Jr., 'Robert Lowell's Elegies as Case Study', p. 136.

tone and theme clash throughout. The larger structure does not cohere for there is no relationship between the final prayer to Our Lady and the blistering attack on Winslow piety in part II and on Winslow materialism in part III.[11]

However, her desire for unity is flawed, based on a negative assumption of normative mourning practises in which there is a coherent and accepted formula rather than accepting the expansive personal variety which feeds into the process of mourning; grief can at times contradict and at other times cohere. Whilst it is reasonable to comment on the dismissive themes of the elegy, they do cohere with the formal elements. We have seen that the structure provides consistency, connecting the elegy through the complex and divisive emotions which run through it. Furthermore, there is a unity between the temporally divided parts, creating a woven fabric of grief which acknowledges the role of time in the mourning process and engages with it at a formal level rather than struggling against it. Existing at mainly a metrical and sonic level, the form is generative of the speaker's emotional sense, not only establishing a consistent backdrop for grief which enables it to be considered throughout different scenes, but also reflecting in its deviations the complex turns of grief. These variations are only possible because of the consistency; without form there could be no breakdown of it. As such, we see the form providing a unity beyond time and place, continuing the sense of mourning through the varied content which is noted by Perloff.

Through the unity of form there is a consistency which sustains mourning as Lowell's poem confronts the deceased and processes death in an antagonistic manner. As the conventions of elegy are contravened, the poetic brilliance is still present,

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[11] Perloff, 'Death by Water', p. 123.

detailing the exploration of emotion. Found in the intricacies of poetry, the fundamentals of rhyme and metre, there is a reassuring certainty which progresses the mourning. The formal elements create a structure which is implicit in the necessary hope of continuation, becoming symbolic of both the social systems which carry on in grief and the natural cycles that surround us with the idea of change and its symbiotic destructive and generative potential. Juxtaposing the negativity which commands critical attention, as discussed by Perloff and Groszewski, there is a value to the poetic form in not only progressing grief but also enabling the range of emotion to be present through its detailed structure.

4.2.2. Anne Stevenson's 'Elegy' and a personal approach to form

Like Lowell's poem, Anne Stevenson's poem for her father, 'Elegy' from her collection *The Other House* (1990), is not written in an existing or known form. Instead, it is structured in a manner which reflects Stevenson's father, Charles, as both an amateur pianist and philosopher, memorialising two strands of his life through numerous poetic means. The affective content of the poem is reflected and furthered through the use of formal aspects which in part embrace the musicality associated with the deceased. As we will see, Stevenson's use of stanzas within the poem, including their shape on the page, is crucial in helping to represent grief. Additionally, the role of rhyme, including its aural elements, generate harmony and divisions which influence mourning within the poem. Through both stanzas and rhyme we will consider how structural elements of form aid the presentation of relearning the world within the mode.

As already mentioned, the stanzaic structure of 'Elegy' is not drawn from an existing form or one engaged in the kind of intertextual dialogue that we saw Lowell's poem enact, and in this respect, it brings with it fewer traditional poetic associations

which may guide the poem. Instead, it is written in a form which is both 'freer' and intricate.

> Whenever my father was left with nothing to do —
>
> > waiting for someone to 'get ready',
>
> or facing the gap between graduate seminars
>
> > and dull after-suppers in his study
>
> grading papers or writing a review —
>
> > he played the piano. (*ASP*, 178)

In the opening stanza we can see the physical indentation of the lines creating a natural rise and fall, or call and return, within the poem which is sustained throughout as the poem's fixed structure. Instead of creating a potential separation or discordance between the lines, it expresses Stevenson's grief more fully by representing her father and imbuing a separate but connected partnership into the physical structure of the poem. The indentation echoes her sense of separation within her father, with the two sides smoothly transitioning into one another through the enjambment between offset lines. Sustained throughout, this provides a basis for the poem's metrical and aural variations, with the lineation always producing an individual consistency to which one can return, balancing within its offset movement his passion, profession, and aspects of homelife. Form keeps the musicality of her father alive throughout the poem, even when it is not the subject — the indented lines in some way echo hands playing a piano — structuring the memorial to be one 'of' him rather than 'for' him.

Whilst Tim Kendall identifies the elegy for Stevenson as 'an empty form', it is instead one which through her formal innovations she fashions into a mode of

representation which does not attempt to 'restore only the illusion of their presence' but also the sense of their being through their remembered characteristics: 'he played the piano'.[12] Although elegy cannot conjure the dead, it can help to represent them to the mourners in a manner they remember, expressing part of the absent father in the present: 'Only at the piano did he become | the bowed, reverent, wholly absorbed Romantic' (*ASP,* 178). Stevenson's creation of form thus connects directly to her memory and grief, helping the deceased to exist beyond just the ideas of the poem and its emotional associations. In embedding the representation of the deceased into the physical structure of the poem, their memory is ever present, preserved as well as enlivened through the lines.

The indentation of lines thus invokes a sense of musicality, creating a distinct visual flow to the poem that does not alter the sound but rather the visual experience. Through this we see how formal innovations form part of a personal approach to grieving through poetry, benefitting from a liberation of meaning derived from past formal associations in order to focus on particular expression. However, the musical attributes of Stevenson's elegy do not stop here, with the poem utilising the aural capacities and potentials of end rhyme to create moments of sound which mourn, connect, or create absence.[13] In the previously cited opening stanza, there are two examples of rhyme, the aurally perfect 'do' and 'review' and the half rhyme of 'ready' and 'study' (*ASP*, 178). These two examples demonstrate the levels of play within rhyme, with the visual dissimilarities of 'do' and 'review' tricking the silent reader as they align in sound, creating an unexpected harmony. In doing so, rhyme in this manner

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[12] Kendall, "'Time will Erase': Anne Stevenson and Elegy', p. 212.
[13] Whilst end rhyme is important to the poem's musicality, I acknowledge and make reference to Carol Rumens' point that 'far more importantly, its defining elements are rhythm and harmony.'; see her 'Talking and Singing: Anne Stevenson's Variations on a Rhythmical Theme', *Critical Essays on Anne Stevenson,* ed. Angela Leighton, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) p. 192.

is shown to be not only possible, but to be expected in the coming poem; there are moments of musicality beyond explicit reference in the poem. Furthermore, the use of half-rhyme creates a level of uncertainty within sound in the poem, with the same final syllable 'ee' sound in each implying a connection. Coming before the perfect rhyme has been found, the half rhyme appears to be somewhat negative, striking a note of discordance which instils a level of doubt into the poem. This reflects the partial role of music in representing Stevenson's father, with 'Elegy' resisting an idealised view of her father that doesn't align with her memory of him. It is clear, then, that rhyme has a role in the affective content of the poem, working to generate possibilities of attachment and separation, similarity, and harmony which help to direct both the speaker's mourning and the attachment to the deceased, remembering her father and reorienting their connection after his death.

In her use of rhyme, unlike her stanzas, Stevenson does not stick to a set scheme throughout. Instead, it becomes a possible moment of clear linguistic connection and aural pleasure, in which the musicality of language helps to emphasise and reject certain moments in the poem and consequently in the memorial to the deceased:

> I think of him packing his lifespan
>
> carefully, like a good leather briefcase,
>
> each irritating chore wrapped in floating passages
>
> for the left hand and right hand
>
> by Chopin or difficult Schumann;
>
> nothing inside it ever rattled loose. (*ASP*, 178)

The only seemingly perfect rhyme pairing in this stanza, 'lifespan' and 'Schumann', is one which is both musical and emotional, creating a continuity of not just sound but also metaphysically, linking the work of Stevenson's father as a philosopher with his passion for music through the layers of connections, making each reliant on the other. However, rhyme relies upon a certain Anglicised pronunciation of 'Schumann', needing inaccuracy to bring complete connection. Here, the harmonic attachment offers a fixity for the grief, a certainty of expression which will last as long as Schumann is played; the speaker's father is one with the composer's music. As such, the rhyme depicts a possibility for a continuity of thought and emotion, of mourning the deceased, for as long as the music is played and enjoyed. Within this is an implied, yet suspect, certainty that this will continue forever, but even so it is an example of the extended mourning process; instead of attempting to move on, the poem creates a continuing presence. Thus, the very idea of the deceased's lifespan is challenged and extended through rhyme, creating a site of constant memorial as they are enlivened by the music whenever it is played.

However, the rhyme of 'Elegy' is also interesting, not for its occurrence, but the ways in which it is denied. Implied by the possibility of a rhyme for 'briefcase' due to the first stanza, the poet plays with the visual characteristics of word endings to ensure there is an isolation or rejection of ideas and associations from the overall work, and in the case of this specific poem music, of mourning. As already stated, there is no clear rhyme structure, demonstrated by the complete lack of aural similarity between 'briefcase' and 'hand', even though there is a mental link to be made between the two. However, this does not mean that the poet eschews the potentials of rhyme, especially slant rhyme, to offer a clear rejection of ideas, separating them from the musical joy and mourning which runs through the poem in order to de-emphasise these remembered facts. Contrasting the aural similarity found in the endings of 'ready' and 'study', the

poet offers 'passages' and 'loose' as potential rhymes for 'briefcase' (*ASP*, 178). Here, the closing sounds are either inverted, as in passages, or heteronymic in the case of loose. This creates a visual similarity or closeness which signals towards the denied potential, creating a clear absence as his briefcase cannot be in his hand. The absence, undefined, exists in opposition to the musicality of the poem. A prominent and generic element of the elegy, absence is to be expected. However, it becomes a counterpoint to the grief of the poem, offering nothingness into which not only are the human aspects of the deceased lost but also those memories which are less important, less musical. The quotidian of the briefcase does not rhyme, existing in its clear absence a sense of 'being' in the world which is lost. What is lost is associated with the physical actions rather than the emotional being of the poet's deceased father. Within this, we see an attempt at both sustaining parts of his memory, whilst letting others go; a value judgement is made by the poet on behalf of the speaker and reader.

The importance of this absence can be seen in the way in which it both kills the father's musical presence and demonstrates the futility in attempting to keep him alive. The poet's sixth stanza counterpoints 'hum' and 'him', highlighting a disunity within the household noise and that which sustained him, contrary to the content of the lines, as she remembers a vital emotional part of what 'he was' to the 'household'.

> for he was affectionate, and the household hum
>
> he pretended to find trivial or ridiculous
>
> daily sustained him. (*ASP*, 178)

The aural memory, the specific hum, no longer exists, remembered rather than re-experienced. The visual connection of 'him', the father, is a vowel different, ensuring

that the reader grasps the possibility of an attachment, but without the aural connection there is no harmony. In not providing a rhyme pairing directly with her father, Stevenson creates a clear disunity in which he is associated with absence and nothingness. Whilst it does not depict a violent death, or even clearly a death, it shows a lack of 'being' which has emotional resonance in the poem, a counterpoint to the existence of music in the poem.

In separating her father clearly from the world of rhyme, the poet is separating him out from the site of memorial, acknowledging the impossibilities of resurrection, altering her continued attachment as she remembers him and his role in her life. Memory is used in the poem to evoke a sense of his presence in the past, creating a closeness which has at times been formally denied.

> We'd come in from school and find him
>
> > crossed-legged on the jungle of the floor,
>
> guts from one of his Steinways strewn about him.
>
> > He always got the pieces back in place. (*ASP*, 179)

This memory of reconstruction, breaking apart a piano and reassembling it, is one in which the deceased is present, but is also not alive. This is reiterated by the rejection of a possible rhyme with 'him' being paired with 'him'. The emptiness of rhyme, as discussed earlier, is pushed away in order to remember, cherishing what was whilst not attempting to change things. However, the memory is one of reconstruction, exemplifying what needs to come in grief even though it does not pursue it. In these lines we see a framed memory which is presented in such a way as to access it

emotionally and experientially whilst also staving off the metaphysical problems of death, remembering rather than attempting to revive.

Thus, Stevenson's formal innovations are both 'free' and deliberate, creating a well-wrought structure for the poem which furthers the process of grief. Without the expectations of a set form there is space for not only expression, the musicality of both language and structure, but also a rejection of it when it is not appropriate, incorporating variation into the poem's form rather than viewing them as exceptions. As Angela Leighton argues, for Stevenson 'what matters is the fit, the poem finding its final shape, which is not only a visible shape on the page, but also an intellectual shape in the mind and an aural shape in the ear.'[14] With her intricate detailing of a soundscape, we see not only the rejection of impossible moments of mourning but also a continuation of his memory through the association with music which runs throughout the poem. As there is no certainty within the structure, the soundscape is reassuring in its happening, valuing the acts of memorialising over the endeavours of attempted resurrection, or fighting against death. In this, we see the use of an elegy to mourn and remember. Part of the continual process of grief, the poem is one moment in a journey which, even in its conclusion, is not fully ended, a shape within the nebulous experience of mourning.

4.2.3. Form mutating to match death in Paul Muldoon's 'Hedge School'

Whilst Lowell's and Stevenson's poems have both demonstrated the affective potential of less-established verse forms, with the lack of externally imposed structures aiding the expression of the grieving process by not enforcing a guideline at the formal level, Paul Muldoon's 'Hedge School' utilises and mutates the sonnet form to reflect the cause of

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[14] Angela Leighton, 'Introduction', *Critical Essays on Anne Stevenson*, p. 8.

death in verse. Written for his sister Maureen, who died of ovarian cancer at 53, the poem utilises rhyme, lineation, and etymology not only to mourn but also consider 'growths' which have influenced life in other ways.[15] Through this, we can see the role of an existing form in the work of elegy, supporting a mourning process as it journeys through experience, crossing emotive and geographic boundaries as it works towards a close: 'tracing the root' (*HL*, 94).

Muldoon's poem works through the situation by reflecting the reality of the death onto the poem itself, mirroring the metastasis of cancer as moments of memory and grief grow beyond their natural textual bounds. From the opening line we see the sonnet form mutating, extending beyond the complete line length without moving to another.

> Not only those rainy mornings our great-great-grandmother was posted at
>
>   a gate
>
> with a rush mat
>
> over her shoulders, a mat that flashed
>
> *Papish* like a heliograph, but those rainy mornings when my daughter and
>
>   the rest (*HL*, 94)

The overflowing words are an opening, 'a gate', through which the poem enters this new changed world of cancer. The rhyme scheme, in this case *abcd abcd* in the octave, enforces the pre-existing expectations of form, ensuring that the reader considers these growths as part of the prior line due to the poetic familiarity of a sonnet, not only linking

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[15] Muldoon explains the context of this poem in an interview with Barry Egan, 'He lost his mother and sister to cancer before their time, but Paul Muldoon found solace in the written word and channelling "the force of language in the world"', *Belfast Telegraph,* 20th July 2019.

the poem with a continual poetic tradition but also offering a point of comparison from which it has mutated. The physical alteration to the poem is a forceful manner in which the form becomes part of the representation of the cause of death which it mourns, seemingly carrying the cancerous growth through as it remembers and reconsiders the speaker's sister. Innovative, the origins of the extensions are not clearly labelled. They are instead an insidious element which helps move along the poem and eventually causes it to end. Consequently, the sonnet form here is thus altered in a manner which fits the content, helping to further the tone of mourning within the poem as it embeds the cause of death within part of the grieving process itself.

Cancer, the cause of death, is unavoidable in the poem, complicating the whole movement of the lines and presenting an uncertainty in which the reality of death must be paradoxically at once appreciated and dismissed. This is further emphasised by the final word of the poem, '*metastasis*', in which the cancerous growth becomes verbally realised, no longer only affecting poetic form but also being present within the language of the poem (*HL,* 94). Mia Gaudern's argument that in seeking out this word and its etymology, the realisation and the root, the speaker finds that it has 'changed and developed', being 'fatally volatile from the beginning'.[16] Growth and development are reflected in the changed sonnet structure of the poem, which becomes a conduit for the cause of death to be realised in the text, dictating the shape and content internally before being recognised through a means of diagnosis, The poem ends in a new world of definition which realises and accepts the growth that has been present the whole time; the extended lines have a new meaning in light of the cancer. This growth plays with the language of the poem, altering the sense and role of words through not only its

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[16] Mia Gaudern, *The Etymological Poetry of W.H. Auden, J.H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) p. 40.

cancerous spread but also its rapid transition from one point to another, detailed through the sporadic interconnected vignettes and moments of consideration.

Through both the memory of rainy mornings and the creation of possible ones as 'all past and future mornings were impressed || on me just now, dear Sis', the poem creates a matrilineal connection, joining the great-great-grandmother posted at a gate, the daughter in school, and sister in an unspoken lineage of both suffering and freedom (*HL*, 94). Within this, they are all memorialised, becoming a significant part of history as they grow, experience, and challenge the world, demonstrating through family history the changes which are embodied by form. This is partnered by the role of language through the whole process, with the possibility of words to be corrupted and liberated vital to the journey of emotion, connecting form with content. The great-great-grandmother's resistance is one of both education and Irish identity, with the derogatory '*Papish*' signposting her religious and cultural background. The teaching she received is likely to be at least partially in Latin, foregrounding the subsequent mutation of the language to one of oppression from the liberation of the first stanza.

> of her all-American Latin class may yet be forced to conjugate
>
> *Guantánamo, amas, amat*
>
> and learn with Luciana how "headstrong liberty is lash'd
>
> with woe"—all past and future mornings were impressed (*HL*, 94)

Here, the Latin verb *amare*, 'to love', is altered by 'Guantánamo', corrupting the two subsequent inflections with its reference to the US Naval Base in Cuba which is famous for its detention centre holding suspected terrorists indefinitely and without trial, and

associated with torture.[17] According to Elisabeth Weber, the word 'leaves its mark on the thesaurus of language but, more insidiously, it may affect the grammar, the structural rules that govern the use of language.'[18] Not only does this affect the sense of love in the poem, which is assumed by the form and an aspect of grief, but it also challenges the purity of the grandmother's actions. The language of her and the daughter's education being now manipulated to contain suffering and torture, with any positive associations becoming secondary as it is now also an oppressive force of control.

Gaudern identifies that 'remembering his great-great-grandmother's and his daughter's schooldays means finding images of oppression as well as freedom.'[19] Thus, there is a clear conflict within language, brought about through a contamination of a word's root and presented using italics, isolating the language. The reader and poet are forced to reconsider the world, reconfiguring the remembered experiences in the same manner as one does when dealing with death. As such, Muldoon is detailing part of the complex processes of grief through an alternate means, helping to vivify the thought process through a metaphor of adjusting memories as a result of new information; all past and future mornings in the poem are now impressed with the subjugation and brutality of Guantánamo, as is Latin. This corrupts the family lineage; with the hopeful and liberating experience of the great-great-grandmother's education tainted by the time it is experienced by the daughter. Within this is a fear of death as the very contamination is part of the cancerous mutation which is present throughout the whole of the poem. The Latin suffix, which is to be conjugated, is dominated by the earlier part

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[17] Richard L. Abel, "Guantánamo Bay", *Law's Wars: The Fate of the Rule of Law in the US 'War on Terror'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) pp. 106-207.

[18] Elisabeth Weber, 'Guantánamo Poems: Guántdnamo, Amas, Amat', *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies,* 2.1-2 (2014) p. 161.

[19] Gaudern, *The Etymological Poetry of W.H. Auden, J.H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon*, p. 40.

of the word, its sense shifted due to the corrupting growth which alters the sense of the lines and of language overall. By isolating this through italics, Muldoon is formally creating a connection between the italicised language which notably emphasises the extremity of the poem's final word.

Language is an unknown which must be discovered and defined as the poem proceeds, with a solution unsealed at the end of the poem, initiating the idea of changed understanding. The speaker is shown to be seeking to check and redefine the world through a reliable source, '*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*' (*HL*, 94). The dictionary serves as an arbiter of truth in the world of uncertainty, offering support to the speaker by providing definitions to help them process and proceed through the experience, an understanding which is both new and condensed. However, in serving this purpose the dictionary also destabilises all other language in the poem as it is not given the same level of scrutiny, creating tiers of reliability within the very means of communication, causing a tension between what is 'known' and what must be discovered as both work together through the mourning process.

Made visually distinct through the use of italics, the words which require additional definition, '*Papish*', '*Guantánamo, amas, amat*', '*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*' and *'metastasis'* are clearly identified as separate from the rest of the poem. Crudely and evasively, they cover identity, variations of love and their complications, knowledge and the search for understanding, and cancer and death. Thus, the language which is highlighted for additional scrutiny is directly related to ideas associated with loss and grief. Nevertheless, under this additional emphasis through the need for definition there is not found to be more insight; the knowing is not enough for understanding. This is made clear through the instability of the very source of knowledge given in the poem, the dictionary, which itself needs to be inspected and

queried. These words gain additional scrutiny without any more insight, reflecting parts of the mourning process and its crucial threshold between life and death. Thus, language itself helps to emphasise the divide which it is attempting to understand. Whilst this does not move beyond the grief of the elegy, ending it on not only the very word associated with cancer, but also the wider possibilities associated with the word, it does demonstrate a possible reconceptualisation of life and being which is necessary for the grieving process. The highlighted language is crucial to the process of understanding, and thus identifying them is the first part of moving forward, being a visual part of the mutated sonnet form. Therefore, there is the possibility of a change, one which promises to lead to the unsealed understanding that is currently desired.

4.3. 'The future is where the dead go' - Patterns of reaction and response

As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter and in the discussion of existing and non-established forms, form is more than just the utilisation of an existing structure to shape the poetry. The act of shaping a poem through language and formal elements are vital to considerations of form, influencing readerly reception and the depiction of language. Grief reaction and response can be informed by the actions which go into shaping a poem, with the combination of rhythm, sound, rhyme, and syntax forming part of the expression of relearning the world. This next section will closely read two elegies by Natasha Trethewey, uncovering how these specific aspects are utilised to express and understand grief.

4.3.1. A desire to clarify grief in Natasha Trethewey's maternal elegies
In both 'Graveyard Blues' and 'Monument', from the collection *Native Guard* (2007), Natasha Trethewey elegises her mother, Gwendolyn Ann Turnbough, who was

murdered by her second husband when the poet was nineteen. The two poems are independent from one another in *Native Guard*, appearing third and third-from-last, yet are part of a continual mourning process, notable through their interconnectedness as both focus on her mother's burial and grave. Through their formal characteristics, each poem can be read individually and in unison, allowing an examination of how they represent individual parts of a larger process of Trethewey confronting the death of her mother and relearning of the world. Through a focus on repetition, rhyme, and revision, we will see the way that — at a formal level — these poems engender a relearning of the world through and within the grief experience.

'Graveyard Blues', situated in the first section of *Native Guard*, remembers the day of Trethewey's mother's funeral through a sonnet. Structured with four tercets before a closing couplet, the poem presents its own meditation on grief through reconfiguration of ideas, bringing with it formal associations which enhance the poem's emotional significance. The following discussion will consider how the sonnet form of 'Graveyard Blues' is altered using repetition and revision. Opening with a two-line meditation on the weather at the funeral, the poem revisits the same idea through a clear repetition of language, accumulating a sense of the occasion rather than progressing a narrative: 'It rained the whole time we were laying her down; | Rained from church to grave when we put her down' (*NG*, 8). The rain, with its purported biographical accuracy and emotional associations, is unavoidable, saturating the beginning of each line. Not only does this reinforce the emotive atmosphere of the scene, but it also creates a clear consistency within the two lines, signposting the act of reconfiguration rather than continuation. This reconfiguration is reinforced when considering the semi-colon which ends the first line, demonstrating an equal link between the two units of sense. The revision of the

scene causes it to expand, considering not only the act of burial but encompassing the whole occasion from church to grave. However, in doing so, the burial becomes more impersonal, changing from the soft 'laying' to the matter of fact 'put'. The emotional sense of the line has shifted, revising the situation by offering a different perspective as the second line is less personal than the first.

The opening two lines of the final tercet provide a striking comparison: 'The road going home was pocked with holes, | That home-going road's always full of holes;' (*NG*, 8). Whilst the language of the two lines has obvious relations to each other, these two lines produce different perspectives of the road rather than an identical one; a slight variation which alters interpretation. Through the specific reference to 'home-going', the act of going home and returning to life without the deceased is associated with the African American funeral tradition of 'homegoing' which emerged 'from the slave tradition that held that death meant a return to the homeland' with the term suggesting that 'amid the sadness of a passing, there is a kind of joy about the release from pain and the movement to a better place.'[20] This creates a connection between the emotional turmoil of grief experience when relearning the world, which is pocked with holes or difficulties, and the individual experience of Trethewey's mother, which rather than being pocked with holes is 'always full of holes'. Instead of finding any joy or release, Trethewey is creating an individual variation on grief experience which influences the relearning of the world by altering the significance of challenges and grief through the new perspective on the holes which hinder movement in the poem.

Here, the reiteration of ideas shows a development of grief as Trethewey makes additional connections, considering not only the funeral but its wider emotional and

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[20] Simon Stow, *American Mourning: Tragedy, Democracy, Resilience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 66.

cultural significance, accruing meaning through meditation on an idea. The repetition and refiguring is present in each of the tercets, with the opening line of a verse paragraph iterated upon, developed through revision. Whilst doing so does not find clarity, nor does it offer a sense of closure, it presents a layering of emotion, with the nuances of the repeated lines helping to encapsulate the broad perspectives of grief whilst also ensuring the sense of loss is reinstated. Whilst only revising each idea in a singular manner, it is emblematic of part of the process of relearning the world. Each idea is iterated upon to consider the depth of emotional significance, uncovering memories and associations which stem from different focuses, altering the grieving process in different ways.

Also evident in both excerpts from the poem is the use of repetition in line endings, which when considered alongside the final line of each tercet evolves into a consideration of rhyme and its relationship to the presentation of grief, including the use of identical rhyme, half rhyme, and perfect rhyme. The repetition of end words reinforces the iterative revision of the opening two lines of a tercet, offering an unusual mirror which unsettles poetic expectations, especially when considering 'Graveyard Blues' as a sonnet. Instead of a refiguring of ideas which creates a new soundscape, the end of line repetition ensures that the lines are intrinsically linked, seeming to have a circular relationship:

> When the preacher called out I held up my hand;
> When he called for a witness I raised my hand —
> *Death stops the body's work, the soul's a journeyman.* (*NG,* 8)

Rhyme here creates a patterning of grief, offering a connection for the revised lines which progresses beyond the circular meditation on a single idea. This is not a perfect connection, with the 'an' sound of both hand and journeyman disrupted by the harsh 'd' of 'hand'. However, it still creates a pattern within the tercet, with both iterations of an idea finding a sense of unity in continuation. This reinforces the importance of both perspectives as the final word of each tercet has two possible rhymes, each as likely as the other. As such, Trethewey is presenting the two lines as equal parts of the whole, both finding a sense of harmony.

Whilst the rhyme of the second tercet is imperfect, undermining any possible sense of completeness which may be found within the pairing, it is not always so in the poem. Instead, in the first and third tercets rhyme is either completely embraced, forging clear connections which provide a certainty to the lines, or subverted visually, creating an unexpected disjunction. For instance, in the third tercet:

> The sun came out when I turned to walk away,
>
> Glared down on me as I turned and walked away —
>
> My back to my mother, leaving her where she lay. (*NG,* 8)

The perfect rhyme of 'away' and 'lay' stands out when compared to the other tercets. When coupled with the content of the line it provides certainty at not only a turn away from her mother now she is buried, 'leaving her where she lay', but also a turn in the sonnet form, with the volta of the ninth line clearly connecting the octave and sestet, continuing the emotions rather than challenging or turning away from them. Additionally, with the preceding two lines repeating the idea of 'turn[ing] to walk away', the first present tense and the second past, the volta forces Trethewey to walk away.

Whilst also a development brought on through the tercet structure used in the poem, the volta progresses her grief experience, moving it from the funeral to a meditation on her mother's passing. In subverting the expected formal progression, Trethewey is challenging a point of poetic progression at the exact time that the content is moving from the buried mother, creating a tension between formal expectations and personal emotions. This undermines the certainty of the tercet's third line, refusing to leave her mother forever and instead inscribing their connection to continue beyond the burial, extending past the culturally prescribed moment of closure. Formal detail is thus used to highlight individual grief experience and illustrate the incompatibility between social expectations and personal feeling, with the speaker's continued grief present even when they are apparently moving on. As observed by Meta DuEwa Jones, Trethewey's elegies are more broadly, 'enclosed in forms that open.'[21] The opening of the sonnet form in this instance enables the complexity of grief to be vocalised beyond the posed funeral scene without disrupting the event itself, continuing imperfectly. The harmony of rhyme is a distraction, appearing to unify through its familiar patterning whilst covering up the complications of grief.

Perfect rhyme is also used to communicate an unsettling tension in the poem's closing couplet: 'I wander now among names of the dead: | My mother's name, stone pillow for my head' (*NG*, 8). Unlike the previous instances of rhyme there are no other possible interpretations, no alternate perspective to her death. The rhyme words 'dead' and 'head' are matter of fact, coolly certain in her mother's death rather than offering any comfort. This is compounded by the image of the gravestone as a pillow, hard and unable to offer any consolation. Unlike the rest of the poem, the rhyming couplet is

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[21] Meta DuEwa Jones, 'Reframing Exposure: Natasha Trethewey's Forms of Enclosure' *ELH*, 82.2 (2015) p. 425.

dismissive of the breadth of grief experience, teasing a certainty which belies content, setting the idealised closure against the complicated realities of mourning. In an interview, Trethewey discussed the couplet, expanding on the significance of the lines and exposing the cause of their tension:

> That's an image of hard, or cold comfort. I might want to lie my head down on my mother's stone and that would be a kind of comfort, but one that was stone and cold. A few months later, I could not, I could not simply deal with the fact that I had written these two lines in that poem because I felt that whatever obligation I have to truth was being sacrificed by the poem. So I started writing another poem to undo the lie that I told in "Graveyard Blues." My mother does not have a stone or any marker at all.[22]

Rather than confronting the complexity of her grief experience, Trethewey attempts to conceal it, with the rhyme offering a poetic relief which is in keeping with expectations of the sonnet form. However, the untenable perfection found in the rhyme is an element of the poem's destabilising 'lie', perpetuating a false reassuring comfort and tainting its effect in the poem. Trethewey's contextual information about the poem exposes perfect rhyme as an evasive technique, avoiding the reality of her mother's grave in a similar manner to the way in which it glosses over the separation between them as the speaker turns and walks away in the third tercet; the harmonic certainty of perfect rhyme is an idealised depiction of the grief experience. Conversely, the near rhymes demonstrate a

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[22] Pearl Amelia McHaney, 'An Interview with Natasha Trethewey', *Conversations with Natasha Trethewey*, ed. Joan Wylie Hall, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013) p. 48.

discordance which is found as one relearns the world, challenging connections and assumptions and seeking new ones through playing with the similarity of language.

Whilst 'Graveyard Blues' strives for a form of closure, burying the mother with a finality which is converse to the revision of the rest of the poem, it is insufficient to end Trethewey's grief. This is not only because of the impossibility of consolation, but also because of the fictional closing image which leaves the emotions abstract from the speaker and her mother. As Trethewey revealed, she was driven to write another elegy for her mother to confront some of the inaccuracies, revisiting her grief to clarify it both for herself and the reader, relearning the world rather than imagining a comforting fiction. The resultant poem, 'Monument', is placed third from last in the collection, far apart from its sibling poem 'Graveyard Blues', separating the two elegies mourning her mother to ease the notable separation between the depiction of grief in the two.

Semi-regular in its physical structure, the poem appears to be a marker for her mother, a poem which acts as a monument. Rather than replacing the non-existent gravestone, it is a different sort of memorial, not only marking Turnbough's death or site of burial but also commemorating her. The subtle difference between a tombstone and a monument is an important distinction because the latter attempts to encapsulate the full extent of the deceased, remembering and celebrating at the same time. This broadens out the emotional associations of the poem, encompassing not only the negative emotions of loss but also the depth of her identity. Thus, in considering the work as a monument rather than a gravestone, Trethewey is opening her grief experience and considering its inner workings. This is presented in the poem through the digging and weaving of ants which operate under the grave's surface. Whilst she is self-critical about her elegies for her mother in interviews, stating that 'I've created a

monument to [...] Natasha's mother. I haven't created a monument to Gwendolyn Ann Turnbough,' Trethewey has opened up possibilities of grief which exist beyond personal guilt.[23] Rather than seeking closure, the poem instead acknowledges the complex depths of grief which must be worked through, altering the landscape as her mother's grave is slowly reworked by an outside influence.

Opening with an observation of the ants at work, Trethewey metaphorically details the reworking of memories, emerging and disappearing, displacing the ground whilst building something new:

> Today the ants are busy
>
>   beside my front steps, weaving
>
> in and out of the hill they're building.
>
>   I watch them emerge and —
>
>
> like everything I've forgotten — disappear
>
>   into the subterranean — a world
>
> made by displacement. In the cemetery (*NG*, 43)

The 'weaving' has traditional elegiac connotations, performed by the ants to emphasise their significance as they work to alter the world, building a hill, and in doing so emerge from and disappear into an unseen landscape akin to that of memories, whilst also distancing the speaker from an elegiac tradition.[24] The new world they make is one of displacement, with material reconfigured and rearranged to form a new place.

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[23] McHaney, 'An Interview with Natasha Trethewey', p. 52.
[24] Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 19.

Emblematic of a grieving process akin to Attig's idea of relearning the world, the opening of the poem presents a different approach to grief than 'Graveyard Blues', one which encompasses the internal complexities vocalised publicly by Trethewey whilst not trying to force past them, tending to her memory by reworking it.

Whilst initially observed, the actions of the ants are significant as they are also active at her mother's grave.

> At my mother's grave, ants streamed in
>
> and out like arteries, a tiny hill rising
>
> above her untended plot. Bit by bit,
>
> red dirt piled up, spread
>
> like a rash on the grass; I watched a long time (*NG,* 43)

Rather than working abstractly, the ants are now directly bringing up ground from her mother's grave, seeming partially to vivify her as they act as arteries, bringing up a variety of associations and memories of her mother as they literally displace her. The contents of the 'red dirt' pile are not examined but is acknowledged to contain part of Turnbough. Uncomfortable due to the presence of her mother in the soil, it is a 'rash', marking the pain of grief as it sits on the grave. It is Trethewey's self-criticism and guilt which makes her unable to examine the soil as:

> their industry, this reminder of what
>
> I haven't done. Even now,
>
> the mound is a blister on my heart,

a red and humming swarm. (*NG,* 43)

Growing over the poem, from a 'tiny hill' to a pile and finally a mound, the presence of the ant hill does not only imply a lack of care, an untended grave. Instead, it represents the accumulation of emotions which have not been considered, the disparate whole of who Gwendolyn Ann Turnbough was to Trethewey and the complex relationship between a daughter and her deceased mother.

It is this unacknowledged and undiscussed element of grief which is the blister, inflicting pain on the speaker who is otherwise focused on her failure to erect a headstone. What she has not done is more nebulous than not marking the grave or tending to the memory of her mother, an immeasurable task of displacing associations and emotions, and trying to reconfigure them. Trethewey is aware of the scale of the metaphor of tending to the grave, 'a larger idea that can encompass the literal,' even though she does not utilise it.[25] Thus, there is an acknowledgement of a possible grieving process, one which is separate from the socially expected process which is portrayed in 'Graveyard Blues', without complete engagement with it. This process is a seemingly natural 'industry', with numerous constituent parts working together to build the mound of grief slowly, typifying the extended iterative process of relearning the world through its various ever-moving parts. 'Monument', whilst marking her mother's death, is thus also part of the process of grief, highlighting a different approach to mourning which may aid the speaker despite their self-reproach.

Rather than assuaging grief through correction and clarification, righting the wrongs of 'Graveyard Blues', 'Monument' extends the scope of grief, including through

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[25] McHaney, 'An Interview with Natasha Trethewey', p. 51.

its open form. Whilst the altered sonnet form of 'Graveyard Blues' enables a

contemplation through its repeated rhymes, its final couplet binds the poem, seeking an

ending and closure rather than continuing to grieve. As has been discussed, perfect

rhyme in the poem is antithetical to mourning, consequently tainting the associations

between rhyme and her mother; the completeness and beauty it provides is not

consistent with the grief experience. Consequently, perfect rhyme is absent from

'Monument', in part because of its previous superficiality when elegising Trethewey's

mother, with the only harmony found in the line-ending verbs of the ants or landscape

'weaving', 'building', 'waving' and 'rising', all actions which are beyond the speaker (*NG*,

43). The poem is, however, not without a regular structure of six quatrains, with the

second and fourth lines indented. This creates a monolithic presence on the page, with

the indentation limiting the ripple of line length to depict the poem as a monument.

However, this marker is only a visual part of the grieving process, signifying

Trethewey's grief but not proceeding through it in any way, perpetuating a lie rather

than changing the situation or relearning the world. Formally representing the desire to

mark her mother's death, life, and grave, converse to the physical reality of an unkept

landscape of 'weeds and grass grown up all around', the monument is as much for her

grief as it is for her mother (*NG,* 43).

In her interviews, Trethewey views this monumentality negatively, as a

seemingly selfish act. However, it is a part of her grieving process, marking that even

though she has not performed the expected acts of care, tending to the grave, she has

still grieved for her mother as she loved and loves her. Whilst the monument does not

capture or represent Turnbough completely, it does encompass who she was to

Trethewey. Consequently, the monument of the poem is a new starting point for her

grief. The poem's open form both directs the reader to this monument, alerting them to

its physical presence without rigidly enforcing it, and enables an extensive view of grief that does not seek closure in the manner of 'Graveyard Blues'. The closing image of the mound, internalised as a heart, is there to be examined, 'a red and humming swarm' which is painful but alive (*NG,* 43). The dull constant hum of the final line, alongside the open form, suggests a continuation in which Trethewey's examination of her relationship with Turnbough could take place, a continuation of grief beyond the end of the poem as the world is relearnt. Rather than merely clarifying the inaccuracies of 'Graveyard Blues', 'Monument' is an initiation in changing the way Trethewey grieves for her mother, open rather than closed, personal rather than culturally prescribed.

In this respect, Trethewey's two elegies for her mother both utilise patterning to interrogate the grieving process. The rhyme scheme of 'Graveyard Blues' reconsiders ideas through repetition, creating two perspectives of the funeral to consider it in more detail, capturing different aspects or significance which are only uncovered through the reconfigured line. However, as already discussed, the certainty of the poem's final couplet is incongruous with the grief experience, evident in its cold image and factual inaccuracy, as highlighted by Trethewey in an interview. This tension is concealed by the poem's application of a broken sonnet form, in which the somewhat traditional couplet is to be expected, normalised rather than central to an abrupt ending which assumes emotional certainty and a readiness to stop grief in a poem which previously questioned those very ideas. Form is thus a camouflage to emotion, providing an escape which is not destructive, with the poem's unresolved grief hidden behind the cultural associations. 'Monument' is formally looser, with the poem's structure constituting a visual connection to the titular image. Without a form to hide behind or the certainty of a regular formal feature, Trethewey is less evasive as the process of grief is

metaphorically observed. It does not attempt to offer closure or consolation, documenting a moment of contemplation on Trethewey's grief experience rather than a completion of the grieving process. Through these two poems it appears as though patterning can at times limit the expression of grief and at others reflect the complex experience of relearning the world.

4.4. Conclusion: Forming a relearning of the world

Rather than finding strict formal connection or continuity, this chapter has begun to uncover the scale and breadth of poetic structures and expression which constitute the elegiac mode. Whilst there is no prescribed form of elegy, the poems discussed here utilise form and formal innovation to varying degrees to engage a relearning of the world. The individualised forms of elegiac poetry which we have discussed are emblematic of Thomas Attig's non-prescriptivist approach to grief, each producing a structure for and of their own experience to shape grief expression whilst representing the deceased and mourning them. As shown throughout the chapter, form can be used to engender a certain readerly reaction — especially through the use of existing, known, forms which bring with them poetic associations — or to further the connection of ideas which are part of a relearning of the world.

As highlighted through the use of the sonnet form in both Muldoon's 'Hedge School' and Trethewey's 'Graveyard Blues', and to a lesser extent Lowell's invocation of Arnold's 'Scholar Gypsy' in 'In Memory of Arthur Winslow', existing forms have a clear role in the mode of elegy. Muldoon utilises the formal expectations of lineation to embody the cause of his sister's death, cancer, with growths of language that uncomfortably disrupt the sonnet by causing the fourteen lines to extend over seventeen whilst representing his grief experience. In mutating the form, Muldoon's

elegy is still a 'powerfully condensed expression of ideas and emotions' which for Regan typifies the sonnet.[26] Additionally, we can see how formal expectations and associations do not dominate the poem but instead augment the expression of grief, supporting a certain readerly reaction and connecting ideas which are part of a relearning of the world. Therefore, whilst it is important not to see elegy itself as a form, it is also important not to overlook the role of established poetic forms in elegy, especially as they can generate formal associations which help to articulate and proceed through grief experience. Formal features engender a relearning of the world through their control of ideas, enforcing new connections through poetic structure and initiating actions and expressing emotions which may be unwanted or difficult to articulate.

With both existing and non-established forms vital to the expression of grief in elegy, the consideration of formal elements is obviously important. When reading both of Trethewey's poems we saw not only how an extended and incomplete grieving process can be expressed poetically through two poems from one collection, but we also saw how formal elements create a pattern of grief response and reaction which helps to further a relearning of the world. Evident in every poem discussed through this thesis, formal elements do not need to be utilised in a standardised manner, but instead through their happening exemplify the complexity and multi-dimensionality of grief which is highlighted by Attig. Formal elements, and specific and purposeful utilisation of them, represent an active engagement with the world through language and poetic techniques, providing potential for a new engagement with the world. Considering form as a collection of topics, as presented through Falci in the introduction to this chapter, ensures the personal depictions are respected whilst also comparing them poetically.

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[26] Stephen Regan, *The Sonnet*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) p. 1.

The interconnectedness of these formal elements alongside their specific applications demonstrates poetically how elegy is an individual expression of a universal experience.

Collectively these formal elements provide structure and shape to poetry, helping to produce the landscape of an elegy, interact with and manipulate ideas of distance, and support the process of elegy and grief, all as a means of furthering an individual relearning of the world. Similarly, landscape, distance and process are not isolated from each other, joining with form to represent four aspects of elegy which represent the realities of a changed world due to grief and which aid in coming to terms with these changes. In the conclusion we will consider all four of these aspects together to view how they operate in communicating grief experience and express a process of relearning the world. In doing so we will directly return to Attig's philosophical approach to grief, reconsidering it in the light of the elegies discussed whilst also looking at poetic links to Attig's ideas through William Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.

Conclusion

In its purest state: a series of durations

Through close readings of numerous poems from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this thesis has shown that a critical realignment is necessary in the study of elegy to better appreciate the relationship between poetry and grief experience. Critical realignment comes about through broadening the expectations of elegiac content and the use of formal techniques in elegy, reading them as a reflection of an individual relearning of the world in which, as a complex evocation of grief, multiple aspects of attempting to relearn the world are occurring simultaneously. Doing so will also embrace the role of elegy as a means of expressing a particular grief experience as part of a process of relearning the world and as a grief narrative. This presents poetry as both a creative outlet to aid in an individual's relearning of the world by presenting the realities of change in the world bereavement entails and poetically coming to terms with these changes, and as a work which can be read to gain insight into the experience of others: 'personal stories of loss and grief are [..] the heart of the matter in developing general understandings of loss and grief.'[1]

Throughout we have interacted with Attig's ideas of relearning the world through grief reaction and response by focusing on four aspects of the selected poems: landscape of elegy, distance within elegy, process in and of elegy, and the structure and form of elegy. We have seen how elegy benefits from an unidealised and yet particular landscape which in some way represents, or is at least familiar to, the deceased. These

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[1] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxv.

landscapes can provide a controlled setting for grief in which one can relearn the world and reflect the grief experience as it in some way partakes in the relearning of the world. Implied within the breadth of landscape, we have seen how the nebulous idea of distance influences the depiction and processing of grief in elegy. Ever-present, distance needs to be traversed or acknowledged in numerous ways in elegy to confront grief and the changed world. Distance is also present in the contemporary funerary system, places of death, and means of death, influencing grief experience and showing how poetry responds to changes in the social expression of loss and grief. Reacting and responding to grief is a process, one in which we modify our understanding of the world and change ourselves. Present too in both landscape and distance, we reflected upon the process of grief through the drawn out grief experience depicted in long elegies. These examples of the mode demonstrate an undertaking of relearning the world, in which experiences are collated, reflected upon, structured, and reformed in a longer poetic representation of a relearning of the world. We also saw how this process of grief is present within the drafting of an elegy, in which the act of composition captures the changing emotions, associations and significances which in part constitute relearning the world. Form connects all three of the previous chapters, shaping and directing expression of grief response and reaction. With no singular elegiac form, we saw how both existing and less-established forms are utilised to direct and structure grief expression. Alongside broader formal endeavours, elegy is also influenced by specific instances of formal practice which present a poetic effort at relearning the world. Related to the larger topic of form, these specific techniques are ever-present throughout the chapters, demonstrating a means of communicating grief which is both productive and expressive. In selecting these thematic aspects, they are not being isolated from the other aspects, but instead offer a means of working through four

connected ideas which are emblematic of the extensive and intricately connected
workings of grief and their expression in poetry. Whilst not a comprehensive view of
grief experience, for there are extensive aspects of grief and mourning which could be
discussed and examined through poetry, the readings we have seen help to attune our
critical attention to how these aspects of elegy interact with Attig's philosophy of how
an individual experiences grief, '*learning how to be and act* in a world transformed by
loss.'[2]

Elegiac conventions, which have long been presented as part of a singular grief
experience, do not encompass the range of contemporary experiences of loss and grief
as conditions of death and traditions of grief have changed, leading us to revise our
understanding of these traditional conventions.[3] Realigning our understanding of these
techniques enables them to be seen as a defined interpretation of grief experience
rather than a specific or broad continuation of existing ideas. Similarly, as we noted at
the outset, existing critical approaches usually rely on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic
approach to grief and mourning.[4] Consequently, they make, or rely on, broad and
questionable assumptions of grief experience and the 'process' of mourning. As Freud
has fallen out of favour in psychology and his theories been replaced by other concepts
of grief, there is an opportunity for elegiac criticism to realign itself with a new
understanding of loss and mourning which is related to current psychological and
philosophical thought to better reflect contemporary debate around the complexities of
grief which constitute elegy. In reflecting this new understanding of grief, elegy will be
able to participate in discussion as both a primary source of grief expression and elegiac

[2] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. viii.
[3] For a reminder of the taxonomy of such elegiac conventions see Sacks, *The English Elegy*, p. 2.
[4] See above, pp. 16-17.

criticism will be able to offer interpretation of how these experiences of grief are expressed.

The approach to grief on which this thesis has relied, presented by Thomas Attig, constructs an understanding of grief experience which is closely aligned with clinical approaches. However, my work does not assume any diagnostic power through literary criticism, such as identifying through the 'dual process model' the oscillations between loss and response orientation, because it would require one to make assumptions which go beyond interpretation.[5] That is not to say that elegiac criticism could not inform psychological conventions of grief. One of the intentions of this current study has been to reinvigorate elegiac criticism by realigning it with clinically informed views of grief experience, detailing through close-readings how poetry presents the broad experience of grief which both informs and is informed by other work on grief. This should make elegy appear more accessible to the general reader, offering new outlets of understanding which are seen to align with common experience. Additionally, elegiac criticism in this manner could uncover an understanding of grief experience which clarifies positions in ongoing psychological discussion, informing further research through its studied insight into the deliberate and crafted expression of grief experience. Importantly, as Attig has noted, 'the ultimate test of validity of such descriptions and interpretations is, and always will be, whether those who experience loss and grief resonate with the general understanding they provide.'[6] The continued presence of elegy shows a cultural resonance in the way in which poetry engenders an expression of grief.

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[5] Stroebe, and Schut, "The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement", pp. 197-224.
[6] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxvi.

However, the universality of grief is in tension with the fact that societal and cultural beliefs do influence the depiction of grief and personal expectations around the experience. In providing an understanding of grief through Attig which does not provide primacy to one cultural depiction of grief, we may be able to move towards a consideration of elegy which can be utilised as universal, helping us to accumulate and consider together poetic depictions of grief experience as at their core they reflect the same emotion of loss and grief. Within this, we must view individualised depictions of grief processes equally, including the value of poetic and formal aspects, even though we can judge their clarity of expression. Usually, elegies are not a complete retrospective of grief experience, but rather an insight into the experience at one moment, a part of an extensive and turbulent process which comprises a range of emotions, desires, reactions, and responses. As is evident throughout the close readings we have seen in the previous four chapters, a new approach to grief enables us to encapsulate the breadth of experience and expression without partaking in the 'ancient interplay between melancholic and compensatory mourning' or viewing elegy as shifting 'from the rationalizing consolations of normative grief to the more intense self-criticisms and vexations of melancholic mourning.'[7]

As grief will never cease to be a human experience, it is unlikely that elegies will cease to exist, nor will they stop providing us with insight into grief experience. As critics of elegy, we not only benefit interpretively when ensuring our views on grief are not outdated nor relying on unsubstantiated ideas, we also promote the role of elegy in the wider consideration of grief experience utilising elegiac criticism to enhance and question these established positions. Grief is at once universal and individual, the

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[7] Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, p. 31; 5.

product of intense emotion and the object of scientific investigation. William Wordsworth, in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, points up these contradictory yet complementary tensions that:

> If the labours of Men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself.[8]

As our evidence–based understanding of grief has developed, altering our critical understanding of elegy to follow in its steps enables us to carry poetically expressed 'sensation into the midst' of the scientific understanding of grief. As mentioned, elegy could clarify psychological thought on grief, whilst also providing an insight into experience which could be overlooked or lost in other means of gathering or interpreting grief narratives. Not aligning our critical understanding of elegy with the scientific understanding of grief undermines the nuanced role of poetry in expressing grief experience as it provides both an individual outlet and record of emotion, reaction, and response, isolating elegiac criticism and avoiding its position in debates. Attig himself urged scientifically inclined individuals working in the field to value literary depictions of grief and loss: 'reading fictional (or real life) accounts of individual stories would give caregivers invaluable practice in attending carefully to the subtlety and

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[8] Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads' (1802), pp. 606-607.

nuance of the particularities of a grieving persons' experiences.'[9] Utilising the individualised elucidation of the universal experience of grief and loss which constitutes an elegy's refinement of our understanding of grief furthers our insight into and understanding of grief experience. From these elegiac accounts of grief experience, critical engagement uncovers the distinctions, details and individual utterances which exist within the very heart of personal and universal experience.

[9] Attig, *How We Grieve*, p. xxv.

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