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The Poetics of Loss and Consolation in Afro-American Elegiac Poetry: A Study of Robert Hayden's Poetry

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

﴿ وَلَا تَهِنُواْ وَلَا تَحۡزَنُواْ وَأَنتُمُ ٱلۡأَعۡلَوۡنَ إِن
كُنتُم مُّؤۡمِنِينَ ١٣٩ ﴾

صدق الله العظيم

ال عمران (١٣٩)

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I was asleep while she was dying
Oh, in vain, under the dust that
beautiful face.
A big wound, a big hole in thy heart
Not harsh you are but this is the life.
We miss you, and nothing remains
Only an image and faint deep sound.
Withered, and not knowing
How fast she withered
A person not yet mere dream or
imagination, disappeared and gone
Forever. Under the earth, cold earth
Freezing eternity, cold, forever.
The practices of life are mere
shadows, covers, just covers we are.
Pain, bare souls,
tears and sobs, loss is always there.
In dark nights, in bitter solitude,
I mourn you, and among
The mourners, I mourn.
Farewell ……. my sister.
For you this gift I dedicate.

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Abstract

The two psychological paradigms – mourning and melancholy – form the organic theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the study of the poetic form of elegy. Traditionally, elegy deals with the more general topic of death. Elegy exhibits a poetics of loss that fashions the logic of consolatory acceptance and substitution of the original lost object of love. Therefore, elegy in its conventional sense creates a successful (normal) work of mourning. Modern elegy, by contrast, creates a pathological work. Orthodox consolations – as the world of pastoral and its pathetic fallacies, religion, or the consolatory creation of art – are rejected in the twentieth century. So, elegy in the modern era becomes anti-consolatory. Against such conceptual and psychosocial considerations, Robert Hayden significantly wrote his own version of elegy. Importantly, he coloured it with his own black consciousness.

Depending on the form of loss Hayden's work of mourning is viewed as complex and intractable. Loss, here, encompasses greater issues than merely the death of a person dear or near: for example, the loss of history, the loss of the heritage, the loss of country (land), the loss of language, the loss of culture, the loss of the ideal of whiteness and, most importantly, the loss of identity. These forms of loss have greater negative effects: the sense of shame, guilt, hatred, estrangement, humiliation, "natal alienation," social death, disenfranchisement, and general dishonor.

To examine Hayden's unique work of mourning, the thesis is significantly divided into three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One is divided into eight sections: the first four sections would examine the roots and historical background of elegy starting with the Greek form, the Roman form, the old English elegy, and later medieval elegy. The fifth section would examine the major principle in the elegy study which is pastoral. The subsequent section on the work of mourning – the most important and the longest one – would attempt at studying and theoretically analyzing the meaning of the poetics of loss. This section is to be

regarded as the raw material and the general basis for analyzing and interpreting any work of mourning: traditional, Renaissance, Romantic, Victorian, pre-modern, modern, postmodern or contemporary. The seventh section is a general examination of the theoretical workings of the modern elegy, which would be to a great extent a contrast to that of the traditional elegy examined in the preceding section. The last section looks at the general issues, tendencies, practices, topics and themes of the American elegy.

The Second Chapter is divided into two sections: the first one is devoted to Hayden's life and his general views of the world, religion, and the mankind. Importantly, this section also searches Robert Hayden's views on poetry and the theory of poetry, which, beyond doubt has a strong bearing on theorizing and interpreting his elegies and elegiac texts. The second section would be limited to an interpreting discussion of five of Hayden's symbolic elegies and elegiac poems.

The Third Chapter is also divided into two sections: the first section is restricted to the analysis of five historically-based elegies. The other section searches Hayden's blues elegies, which would contain, firstly, a general theoretical issues and meanings of the blues genre, and how they are manipulated by the poet in order to create specific African-American elegy.

The conclusion ties up the loose ends of the discussion and sums up the findings of the study.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief.

– Samuel Johnson

It is a well-known fact that elegies are poems for, to, and about the dead. Of all poetic genres they are one of the easiest to identify and yet the definition of the genre is still under dispute in the rich specialist field of elegy studies, specifically the question of the role of elegy. This is because elegy is a process poem or performance piece and it is performed for a purpose.[1] The composition of the elegy, and the work of mourning it thus represents, should be understood as comparable to an active engagement with loss:

> The emphasis on the drama, or "doing," of the elegy is thus part of the crucial self-privileging of the survivors, as well as a way of keeping them in motion, ensuring a sense of progress and egress, of traversing some distance. For a stationary poet that distance may be figurative and purely psychological, but it is crucial to any successful mourning.[2]

Elegies do not exist as a form of expression, but as an activity – in this sense elegy has to do something.[3] Theocritus in his Idylls, like so many of his successors, saw love-in-absence as a wound that jeopardizes the very existence of the lover. In this light, elegy is to be seen as treatment, a salve, or balm applied to a psychic wound from which otherwise one might bleed to death through heartache or heartburning, depression or melancholia (cathectic misinvestments).[4] As a psychological cure, elegy is supposed "[t]o feel the burnings of an injur'd breast."[5] This is a point attested to by the symbolist writer Maurice Maeterlinck in his play Mary Magdelena where Silanus says to Mary: "To console, lady, is not to do away with sorrow, but to teach one how to overcome it."[6] Silanus' comment conveys one of the universally acknowledged roles of elegy, that of consolation.[7]

One of the least well observed elements of the genre is the enforced accommodation between the mourning self on the one hand and the very words of grief and fictions of consolation on the other.[8] The poetics of loss was never involved in expressing death or the very experience of loss but in performing healing through consolation via tropes.[9] It may be a truism that elegies are for the living: it proceeds on the supposition that elegy, as meant for the living, is seldom the expression of grief per se.[10]

1.1: Ancient Greek Elegy:

> I have here not one but many things to mourn.[11]
> — Euripides, Andromache, 1.91

Elegy inhabits a world of contradiction. When taken in its modern and contemporary sense as the framing of loss, elegy can be drawn between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the present life of sorrow and the vanished past of supposed greater joy. Between "the extremes of life and death, joy and sorrow, the receding past and the swiftly moving present," falls the elegy as it is known today.[12]

The term elegy itself derives from the Greek elegiac couplets, traditionally accompanied by the flute, or more precisely, by a double reed instrument resembling what is known as the oboe or aulos.[13] The roots of elegy involve "poetic form and subject matter."[14] The elegiac couplets of alternating dactylic hexameters existed in interdependent relationship with the dactylic pentameters could contain a fairly broad range of heterogeneous topics, including admonitory martial epigrams, political philosophy, commemorative lines, or amorous complaints of personal distress. But behind this bundle of topics "there may have lain an earlier, more exclusive association of the flute songs' elegiacs with the expression of grief."[15] Despite so many moments of celebrating the pleasures of life in ancient Greek elegy, however, death and mortality are never far away.

Sorrow and deep sadness over mortality presses against the joy of being alive, and that is why life's transient pleasures must be seized and enjoyed all the more.[16] The impression of deep grief and sadness may be well summarized by Euripides in his Andromache: "But I, involved as I am all the time in laments and wailings and outbursts of tears."[17]

In the scholarly world of classical studies about the origins of elegy, an argument can be made that elegy developed from traditions of singing songs of lament. These traditions of ancient Greek lamentation had their own complementary function.[18] Lament is defined as "an act of singing in response to the loss of someone or something near or dear, whether that loss is real or figurative." Elaborating on this definition, Nagy outlines three characteristic features of lament:

> (1)The prime mover in the signing of a lament is conventionally the one person [conventionally a woman] who is most closely affected by whatever loss is being lamented [most] commonly the death of a loved one]…. And in signing her lament, she can cry while she sings and sing while she cries… (2) As the lead singer, she interacts with an ensemble of women representing a given community. The ensemble responds to the lament of the lead singer by continuing it. The continuation is an antiphonal performance… ranging all the way from stylized crying and gesturing to the full-blown singing and dancing. (3) In short, lament is a communalizing experience. It leads to a communalization of emotions, in all their diversities[19]

Disentangling the tradition of lament from that of elegy, one of Nagy's powerful claims is that elegy could function as an antidote for the sufferings of lament: mourning and lamentation produce song, and song gives pleasure, what he terms "the delights of elegy."[20] For elegy, both the context and the occasion of lament have changed. The context is no longer "an exchange between lead singer and chorus" composed exclusively of women, and the immediate occasion is no longer the coming together of mourners in procession at a funeral. Instead, the context is now "monodic" singing, and the immediate occasion is the coming together of revellers – bacchanals – at a symposium, where men drink wine together as they stretch out on settees or couches and enjoy each other's company while conversing or taking turns in singing monadic songs.[21] Such monadic songs were restricted to be sung only by men, and appeared in two basic social contexts, namely, the symposium and the public festival.[22]

In a convivial sympotic setting, there is a wide range of possibilities for expressing emotions – not only the “primary emotion of sorrow over the death of a loved one and over all the sufferings occasioned by that death” – but also extends to expressions of the mourner's diverse feelings of love, fear, anger, hatred, and so forth.[23] In the context of public festivals, elegy could serve the function of civic feeling – gratitude – by glorifying the culture heritage of the city in which festive celebrations take place.

The civic seriousness of elegy, however, as sung at public festivals must be contrasted with mixture of seriousness and lightheartedness found in elegy as sung at symposia. In the good company of fellow symposiats, “the spirit of conviviality can induce even the voice of elegy to abandon from time to time its seriousness in tone and to forget about the cares and worries of civic existence. For example, affairs of the heart can at times overrule the affairs of state in the poetic agenda of elegy.” Comparable is the extravagant abandonment of civic virtue in the atmosphere of hedonistic unrestraint or spontaneity that imbues Roman love elegy,[24] as to be explained in the coming section.

1.2: Latin Love Elegy:

> Fall silent gossip: transgressive love submits to the laws.[25]
> – Statius, Silvae l.2. 1.28

Elegy in Rome is odd. It rarely deals “with country churchyards, and only indirectly broaches the subject of death. Although Tibullus mourns a vanished Golden Age, elegy more commonly bemoans a beloved's indifference and reflects archly on its poetic presuppositions.” Thus, though there is a general recognition that elegies should be plaintive, sorrowful and mournful – if no always absolutely sad, they are frequently ironic, darkly comic, politically self-conscious, and almost always about love and passion. It is thus common to speak of Latin love elegy, by which is meant a canon of elegiac poets beginning with Catullus, extending through the fragmentary remains of Gallus, and coming to its full flowering in the works of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid.[26]

Latin adaptations of the elegiac form continued the fairly diversified approach of the Greek exemplars.[27] Like its Greek ancestor, the elegiac metre (rhythmical dactylic hexameters followed by dactylic pentameters) in Latin continued to be used for both literary epigrams and mournful or sepulchral inscriptions. But whenever elegy is mentioned by itself, the referent is clear. Epigram may be composed in elegiac metre, but "elegy unmodified refers to the largely erotic poetry written by the canonical elegists." In this respect, Latin erotic elegy with its extreme emotional situations differs essentially from its Hellenistic practitioners and is closer kin to the Renaissance sonnet succession than to the poems of mourning and lament that elegy appeals to in the modern imagination.[28]

Thus, few would confuse the work of the later Latin elegists with that of their acknowledged Hellenistic predecessors.[29] While eroticism was a general topic of Greek elegy, "for the canonical Roman elegists each of their books was primarily, though not exclusively, devoted to a single beloved of the opposite sex, who was often portrayed as an all-powerful mistress or domina to whom the lover, a Roman aristocratic citizen of equestrian nobility, stood as a subjected servant or servus amoris."[30]

Elegy is, then, the symptom of a crisis in the conventions of Roman life and its ideological truisms. Augustus' moral reform regulation, which sought to interdict fornication and sanction marriage for aristocratic males, recognized this crisis but could not fully control it. Elegy's potential to disrupt traditional manners, the return to which was a major part of the political program of the emperor Augustus, was not limited to its depiction of men subjected to women. The situations portrayed by the genre also "threatened what were considered the legitimate relations of power and property that governed the commerce between men and women. Elegiac romance is thus always, by definition, extramarital."[31]

Roman elegists regularly invoked their self-confinement to the minor themes of love and erotic intrigue in opposition to the heroic sweep and political engagement of epic.[32] Such that, the mournful elegos was discontinued by the lyric poets, and was survived only as a literary term.[33] Now, it would be of great benefit to recapitulate the standard tropes of erotic elegy in Stella's poetry – Lucius Stella is a major literary patron and elegist proper in the Flavian period – as Statius attempts to immortalize it:

> The citizens have long since seen the kisses they recount.
> Nonetheless, although the abundance of so great a night has been granted,
> Thunderstuck, you still seek the vows conceded by a propitious god,
> And fear them too. Put aside your sighs, sweet poet, put them aside.
> She is yours. It is permitted to come and go to her undefended door
> With an open step. Now there is no guard (ianitor), no law,
> and no shame. (Silvea 1.2.30-36)

Here the standard motifs of the Roman love elegy are used explicitly by the Roman poet: the focus on the erotic violence and the clear depiction of extreme sexual passion as it is further illustrated by Ovid in his Amores[34]: "I tore off her tunic, which, skimpy as it was, did little harm"[35]; the malign gossip of the crowd; the longing for one night of rapture, which is almost never allowed; the lover's late night and backdoor journeys during the wee hours of the morning to the beloved's locked door[36] – here the lover is locked out, because the beloved's door is barred to the lover for one of three reasons; the vir (or husband) has assigned ianitor, or door slave; the dominia is with another lover; or a lena, or madam, has locked the lover out for deficiency of treasures[37]– the malicious guard that must be threatened, bribed, or cajoled; the social condemnation that casts the lover as, if not an outlaw, at least a social bohemian.[38]

Therefore, the relationship between man and woman is de facto, if not adulterous.[39] It was never a strictly legitimate passion. Nonetheless, Latin love elegists elaborate on erotic themes in certain strategies that it would lead to make them lawful love and legal consummation. Each of the signifiers mentioned above about the elegist as a figure of violation and transgression is converted into a sign of approval or approbation. All the blocking figures of old– the husband, the guard, the law – that had prohibited the lawful consummation and possession of the poet's love and so yearned for another encounter, are converted into the promoters of lawful love.[40]

To conclude, Latin erotic elegists, who sought to continue the genre of elegy, succeeded only in sounding its death knell. Yet the Roman elegists "did not lack for true heirs." The entire tradition of love poetry in the west is largely unthinkable without them, from medieval courtly love to the Renaissance sonneteers and their successors. John Donne's elegies are a particularly remarkable example of this inheritance and continuation. Nevertheless, "in the history of elegy as a genre, the Romans are outliers." Their complex, ironic, and erotic verse had subtended the elegiac ideal of the mourning, self-pity, and long good byes that elegy conjures in the modern imagination. Tibullus may shed tears "outside his harsh mistress's door, but only as a prelude to breaking it down."[41]

1.3: Old English Elegy:

> Lonely and wretched   I wailed my woe.
> No man is living,   no comrade left.[42]
> — Anonymous, The Wanderer 11.9-10.

For a topic never precisely defined, the bibliography on Old English elegy is impressively broad and sprawling, "a testament in itself to the pervasive nature of Anglo-Saxon elegiac sensibility." To much extent, Old English verse is overwhelmingly retrospective and contemplative in theme; lost to memory and ancient past, but enshrined in song that was ultimately passed on orally.[43]

Admittedly, the elegiac prose passages by Aldhelm, the first English man of letters[44] and king Alfred's favourite poet in Old English, had affected Old English elegy both in techniques and themes. In an elegiac passage by Aldhelm in his so-called Epistola ad Acircium, one could find the relevance of this passage to Old English elegy.[45] Aldhelm writes:

> For what is wealth of a transitory world, or the happiness of a failing life? Does it not, by a most apt comparison, vanish like a dream, disperse like smoke, fade like foam?... Would that for us the possession of present goods were not a substitute for those of the future! Would that a wealth of transitory possessions does not prove a dearth of those to come! Would that the blandishments of the fading world do not produce risks to eternal blessedness! Much rather, when the brief span of fragile life is passed, should, with Christ's help, the perpetual prizes of just deserts appear![46]

Here, what is of great relevance to Old English elegy is the way Aldhelm derives his theme from the so-called ubi sunt topos, an elegiac conceit that permeates Old English literature, and has been definitely identified as a source for two of the best-known Old English elegies, namely The Wanderer and The Seafarer.[47] And too, one could easily sense the topos of contemptus mundi – "contempt for the world, i.e. rejection of temporal and transitory pleasures and values in favor of the spiritual and eternal."[48]

In a similar manner, Alcuin, the most learned, Latinate, and influential Anglo-Saxon author, "should wax lyrical" in ways that recall several surviving Old English elegies, even as he evokes the theme of exile that is so closely tied to Old elegy.[49] In his celebrated lament, one could find a heavy reliance on the trope of memento mori; "the implicit epigraph of all elegies"[50]:

> Nothing remains forever; nothing is truly immutable, dark night covers the sacred day. Cold winter suddenly shakes the beautiful flowers and a harsher breeze disturbs the peaceful sea. In the fields where the holy youths used to chase stags now a tired old man leans on his staff. We wretches, why do we love you, fugitive world? You always fly from us, failing ever.[51]

The Old English Elegies, composed toward the end of the tenth century, are perhaps as many as nine elegies surviving in Old English verse, including some of the best-known poems studied today. All are contained within a single manuscript, the so-called Exeter Book (Exeter, library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter

Cathedral MS 3501). The elegies identified, however, are an eclectic bunch, and there remains considerable disagreement as to the date, context, and precise elegiac tone of each.[52] The object of loss the elegiac group as a whole elaborates is, according to Klinck, a heterogeneous one, comprising questions of life and death of communal identity, often formulated in traditional themes of alienation, exile past glories, pilgrimage, transience, and the search for stability.[53]

Readers of poems such as The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Wife's_Lament, Deor, and Wulf and Eadwacer, often note that they evoke a melancholy mood, that they are filled with longing and that they brood upon the losses and sorrows of the earthly existence.[54] In a chapter on the elegies in Old English Verse, "Wisdom and Experience: The Old English Elegies"(1972), T.A. Shippey's "major concern is in mapping the implication of the chapter title, how personal knowledge of hardships in the world is transformed in the grind of poetic work into a moral vocabulary and a communal purpose."[55] Poems such as The Wanderer, The Seafarer and Deor are in sense consolation poems, not because they resolve crisis in a didactic manner, but because they offer as cure "poetry itself, the expression and formalisation of raw experience."[56]

The journey motif so prevailing in the Old English verse "foregrounds this pattern whereby the spontaneous outburst of calamity is worked through and gradually controlled within the trajectory of public speech."[57] W.G. Kyle in his Letter to The Times (1916) has stated clearly the persistent goal of poetry from the late antiquity till the modern time, as he put it: "In a time of stress like this, poetry's ancient claim to be the great consoler, the great lifegiver, justifies itself."[58] Thus, consolation is to some extent the effect of character: The Old English poems work through pain and loss in order to re-frame the mourner's experience in the language of community. The individual psyche most Old English Elegies construct embodies that conjunction: "the public speech of interiority"[59]

In brief, Old English elegiac group are "clearly marked by diachronic development from dejected lamentation to stoic acceptance: the speaker in The Wanderer moves from vivid memory of the past, through its hallucinatory recall" or invocation, “to a detached view of human destiny”; The Seafarer's persona is a sailor, literally and metaphorically, crossing the ocean as a religious exile, at first expressing ambivalent desire for the heavenly pleasures, but in the latter half of the poem, embracing and explicating Christian doctrine; in Deor, a Boethian figure, who has achieved consolation through the memorializing of, as well as sympathy with, the misfortunes of others.[60]

As in the standard consolatio, the mourners in the Old elegiac group test principally three areas for potential solace to their misery – the area of personal lament, and autobiographical solution (stoic consolation), the area of the divine, or Christian doctrine (Christian consolation), and the area of public discourse, or philosophical council (Boethian consolation).[61]

1.4: Later Medieval Elegy:

> For, certes, swete, I am but ded.
> — Chaucer, Book of the Duchess: l.204.

Elegy as a pure or self-articulated form of “mortal loss and consolation"[62]did not exist in medieval England; when employed by modern critics with reference to poems such as Pearl or Book of the Duchess, the term is no more than a matter of critical convenience. According to Oxford English Dictionary, “the word elegy is not recorded in English until 1514.” When occasional lyric poems of mourning were composed in medieval England, they were most likely to be labeled “complaint,” “lament,” or “poems of human loss.”[63]

Chaucer's first attempt at “evoking an elegiac perspective in his poetry is surprisingly problematic.” The Book of the Duchess is “a dream-vision about the self-consuming yet erratically generative capacities” of sorrowful imagination. The poem embeds the Ovidian tale of Seys (Ceyx) and Alcyone.[64] In his version of the tale, Chaucer stresses the disconnect between husband and wife rather than the promise of their reunion – whether through physical metamorphosis as in Ovid's

Metamorphoses ("the lovers transcend their grief through a double metamorphosis into sea-birds") or the linguistic metamorphosis effected by elegy. Here the consolatory concept is unpredictable. Something troublingly incongruous and strange underlies the remark that forms the focus of Seys's postmortem consolatory speech to his grieving wife[65]: "For, certes, swete, I am but ded." Alcyone's grief only exacerbated by her husband attempt at comfort, and she gives in suicidally to despair.[66] Consolation here fails dramatically because Seys speaks from a perspective that is "both incomprehensible and absurd to the living: death, reduced to the unremarkable, is denuded of its sting."[67]

One other form in which the Latin understanding of elegy as mournful poetry did survive in The Middle Ages is found in the opening lines of the first metrum of Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. Matthew of VendÔme's Ars versificatoria reinforces the association of elegy with Boethius by introducing the personified elegy (albeit with reference to her Latin association with erotic poetry) in the company of Lady Philosophy. When alone in his dungeon of sorrow, Boethius turns to the composition of Ovidian-style exile poetry in elegiacs to soothe himself of sorrow:[68] ("See how Muses grieftorn bid me write,|And with unfeigned tears these elegies drench my face").[69]

If the Consolation of Philosophy preserves one Ovidian stream of elegy for The Middle Ages, however, it also exposes the genre as a dead-end.[70] In chasing away the Muses, Lady Philosophy illustrates that "elegiac poetry can only circumscribe [Boethius] despair; it cannot provide consolation";[71] elegy binds Boethius to worldly sorrow – by inviting a narcissistic focus on his own loss – rather than liberating him from it.[72] Thus, the prisoner at the urging of Philosophy abandons the meretricious claims of mournful elegy for rational consideration of his circumstances; Boethius / Philosophy seems more concerned with the debilitating effect of indulgence in grief.[73] In order for consolation to take place, "the monologia of elegy must be displaced by a prolonged dialectal exchange with Philosophy which in turn reestablishes the promise of dialogue with God through prayer."[74] The self-consuming tendencies of tear-drenched verse must be written over by philosophy's salubrious Muses, inspirers of the progressively healing that alternate with her medicinal prose.

Smoothly acquired consolation is somewhat “more difficult for the elegiac mourners of Middle English poems of human loss to access.” Indeed the problems inherent in attaining philosophical mastery of loss – including negotiation of the visionary form that delimits Boethian elegy – come to outweigh the conceptual value attached to the Stoic-Christian diminution of death.[75] In medieval English elegiac poetry a tension thus arises between, on the one hand, a Stoic-Boethian understanding of loss as an index of unsound possession (to which those fully possessed of their rational natures are immune), and, on the other a competing fascination – which may be labeled Petrarchan – with the creative excess of loss, its uncontainability save through “new ways of meaning” shaped by poetic invention.[76] In other words, a tension arises between a Stoic-Boethian assertion of loss (for which grief would be castrated) and the creative potential of loss, a potential that yields poetry with a recuperative function.[77] The Book of the Duchess is acutely concerned with the process of symbolic figuration – the process of poetry as a mode of celebration and consolation.[78]

The poem retreats, speechless, from the stark reality of death exposed, leaving the reader somewhat ambiguously to seek resolution in the narrator's own creative power and artistic reconciliation.[79] It has been argued that Boethian consolation is thwarted in Chaucer's poem by the creative (and not necessarily therapeutic) emergence of melancholy as a potentially visionary mode of thought.[80] Grief is creatively displaced rather than resolved; poetry may function as “a therapy that transforms loss into new ways of meaning,”[81] but it does so with full consciousness of the cost of this substitution.

It has been made clear of the late-medieval tension between the trajectory of consolation, which denies grief a voice, and the recuperative function of literary art as self-conscious medium of creation that facilitates differently authorized forms of consolation.[82] The prospective revival of the deceased through poetic expression – not simply through representation but through the extra temporal access of dream-vision or an imaginative reliving of experienced events – is thus a fantasy upon which Chaucerian elegies are predicated.[83] Admittedly, Chaucerian elegy serves as a point of origin for the development of a vernacular poetic as well as a national myth of English poetry. The process of mourning cannot end – indeed, is creatively perpetuated – because it opens the door to invention.[84]

1.5: The Meaning of Literary Pastoral:

For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
– Milton, Lycidas: 11.152-53.

Pastoral, literally, shows country life or the countryside, especially in a romantic way.[85] Pastoral literature in its various forms has a well-documented history from the time of Theocritus in the third century BCE until the present. Although pastoral can be loosely defined "as nature writing, not all nature writing can – or should – be characterized as pastoral." The latter is best seen as a mode rather than a genre, as a kind of green template that can accommodate or colour virtually any of the formal canonical genres (e.g. comedy, tragedy, romance, elegy, and, paradoxically, even epic). As such, it trades heavily in the so-called pathetic fallacy, imbuing nature with human feelings and attributes. Although not rigidly formulaic, pastoral is conspicuously artificial and consists of a matrix of recurring themes and conventions. "Primitivistic rather than primitive, pastoral is typically the nostalgic product of sophisticated urban writers whose vision of the countryside and its inhabitants is informed by their own self-conscious alienation from both."[86]

Recurring binary oppositions – as the various combinations of city and country, citizens and shepherds, nymphs, or tutelary deities, school and field, art and nature, literacy and music and song, aspiring mind and contentment, order and spontaneity, corruption and innocence, duty and pleasure, restraint and freedom, sophistication and simplicity, ornament and plainness – usually appear within pastoral contexts.[87] Elegy's formal identity might be thought of as a mode, that is, a means through which a specific function of poetry, here lamenting the dead and finding consolation, can be performed. Other such modes include satire and pastoral. In satire, private and public failings are mocked and castigated. In pastoral, the rural is explored as a place of temporary resolution of life's complexities and conflict feelings.[88] This is a point backed up by Renato Poggoili in his book The Oaten Flute:

> Man may linger in the pastoral dreamworld a short while or a whole lifetime. Pastoral poetry makes more poignant and real the dream it wishes to convey when the retreat is not a lasting but a passing experience, acting as a pause in the process of living, as breathing spell from the fever and anguish of being.[89]

Following this, the elegy should be seen as a working through of experience and as a symbolic action, which should, then, be compared with various nonliterary responses to loss. For the elegy, as a poem of mourning and consolation, has its roots in a dense matrix of rites and ceremonies, in the light of which many elegiac conventions should be recognized as being not only aesthetically interesting forms but also the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices. Among the conventions to be interpreted in this way is the use of pastoral contextualization.[90] The literary landscape of the pastoral has influenced the elegy and been appropriated by it since its classical beginnings to the extent that the conventions of the pastoral elegy are practically synonymous with the conventions of the elegy itself.[91] Paul de Man has observed that pastoral equals poetry. There is no skepticism that “the pastoral theme is, in fact, the only poetic theme, that it is poetry itself.”[92] It is well to remember another aphorism from T.S. Eliot's “Little Gidding”: “every poem is an epitaph.”[93] Hence, Costello argues, “pastoral, poetry, and elegy are often seen in terms of one another.”[94]

The key elements of pastoral, as appropriated by major elegists such as Milton, Shelley, Tennyson, can be seen as the poet as Orphic singer, the procession of mourners and laying of flowers, the idealized landscape, the sympathetic cycle of nature, the consoling power of nature, the nostalgia for better times, the comingling of grief with topical commentary, and the reassertion of continuity and purpose in response to rupture and anxiety.[95]

Investigation of the pastoral “extends beyond the conventional structures or metaphors adopted in pastoral elegies to a critique of the poetic sensibility the conventions reveal.”[96] Pastoral elegy in this sense draws heavily on the concepts of nostalgia, remembrance, and fantasy, which as Jorge Borges remarks, are in charge of revealing that the past is not a burden without life but, rather, a potential to keep on living.[97] Laurence Lerner writes that “nostalgia is the basic emotion of pastoral.” If nostalgia dominates notions of pastoral and pastoral elegy, then the past is kept at an idealized, separated distance from poet and audience. Peter V. Marinelli also argues that pastoral literature can postulate one of two escapes from historical time: “the looking forward to the future results in the production of utopian vision, the looking backward to the past in the Arcadian vision.” Similarly, Lerner explores two theological constructions that epitomize pastoral escape from historical time in terms of idealized past and future landscapes: Eden and the New Jerusalem.[98]

For all intents and purposes, “pastoral elegy” is an academic category invented by scholars seeking to establish a link between Theocritus’s first “Idyll” (Thysis's lament for Daphnis) and all subsequent mourning poems set in a “green cabinet” in Spenser's phrase. Pastoral elegy may be further subdivided into two substantive categories: poems in honour of people who were actual historical subject (e.g. lamenting the death of a poet) and poems in honour of purely fictional characters including mythological ones.[99]

Pastoral ordinarily “exhibits sentimental attachment to a bygone time and/or ethos, what one scholar labels a ‘setting’ in which questions may be posed, or better, placed.”[100] In The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal (1975), Renato Poggioli writes that “the psychological root of the pastoral is a double longing after innocence and happiness, to be recovered not through conversion or regeneration but merely through a retreat."[101] In classical pastoral that nostalgia may be for the Golden Age, and in Christian pastoral, for Eden before the Fall. The Arcadian pastoral tends to be idyllic, decorative, even Epicurean. Court pastoral in Elizabethan period often represents nostalgically "rustic recreation as an antidote to the intrigue and machination of imperial politics, even as it hints at moral truancy and acedia as the motive for such retreats."[102] Ostensibly a low form, according to Webbe in his Discourse of English Poesie (1586), the pastoral "seemeth commonly to be rude and homely," but he goes on to allow for its cryptic allegorical potential; the pastoral rude and humble speeches can insinuate and glance at greater matters.[103]

According to Ellen Zetzel Lambert, one of the major theorists of elegy alongside Peter Sacks, Eric Smith, Renato Poggoili and W. David Shaw, the pastoral is like the trope in that it has a mature attitude towards loss. She notes: "This poetic world to which the pastoral elegist 'escapes,' this imaginary world, is not… less substantial than the world he actually inhabits."[104] Adding: "The pastoral landscape pleases us not, like the vanished groves of Eden, because it excludes pain, but because of the way it includes it. Pastoral offers us a vision of life stripped not of pain but of complexity."[105] At the same time, Lambert argues for the pastoral as a world where pain can be confronted as such, even as it is a world apart from pain.[106] This is a point attested to by William Shenstone's definition of the genre of pastoral elegy in his Prefatory Essay on Elegy:

> Epic and tragedy chiefly recommend the public virtues; elegy is of a species which illustrates and endears the private. There is a truly virtuous pleasure connected with many pensive contemplations, which it is the province and excellency of elegy to enforce. This, by presenting suitable ideas, has discovered sweets in melancholy which we could not find in mirth; and has led us with success to the dusty urn, when we could draw no pleasure from the sparkling bowl; as pastoral conveys an idea of simplicity and innocence, it is in particular the task and merit of elegy to shew the innocence and simplicity of rural life to advantage: and that, in a way, distinct from pastoral, as much as the plain but judicious landlord may be imagined to surpass his tenant both in dignity and understanding.[107]

Perceptively, “pastoral suffering, like pastoral joy, calls for applause rather than pity or fear. The appreciation is that of the connoisseur, not of the bewitched sympathizer.”[108] Admittedly, then, the pastoral elegy appropriates the experience of loss and suffering by transforming it into a sense of aesthetic sublime; sobs, sighs, and weeping might constitute the lowest part of the work of mourning, no more.

1.6: The Work of Mourning:

> These pleasures, Melancholy, give;
> And I with thee will choose to live.
> – John Milton, “Il Penseroso,” final couplet, 1645
>
> There are echoes of another world, a world of
> neither prophetic ecstasy nor brooding meditation,
> but of heightened sensibility where soft notes,
> sweet perfumes, dreams and landscapes mingle
> with darkness, solitude and even grief itself, and by
> this bitter-sweet contradiction serve to heighten
> self-awareness.
> – Raymond Kilbansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl
> (On Milton), Saturn and Melancholy, 1964 [1939]
>
> … then moved his plumes,
> And fanning us, affirmed that those,
> who mourn,
> Are blessed, for that comfort shall be
> theirs.
> Purgatorio XIX 49-51,
> trans. Henry Francis Cary

Most academic works of the elegy “tend to describe rather than interpret the genre's conventions.” The traditional forms and figures of elegy are related to the experience of loss and the search for consolation. It is worth noting that an elegist's language emerges from, and reacts upon, an originating sense of loss rather than finding absence or loss to be somehow already there in the language. Each elegy is to be viewed, accordingly, “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” – the sense that underlies Freud's phrase “the work of mourning.”[109]

Mourning is a work of art dominated by a poetic practice; a poetics of loss.[110] Loss, philosophically, is ontological; hence it is clearly a concern for metaphysics and subjectivity. Certainly loss impacts on the spirit and sense of self, but at sometimes it also impacts on the physical being – loss affects both emotional and somatic levels. The first representations of loss, the first expressions, occur in clearly embodied forms: tears, sobs, screams, fainting, gestures.[111] Loss and bereavement "are linked ontologically because bereavement" has consequences for being. Mourning, however, "while seemingly similar to grief, is in every way an epistemological and ideological activity and has no direct ontological origins." [112]

The poetics of loss is not a way of making the meaning of death and loss more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived, but the opposite. As an experience, death is too powerful and too painful and exact, and thus "the role of poetics is to deaden the effects of death on the individual and on the community, not augment them." The traditional reading of elegy as a mode of expressing grief was never truly convincing to the world of the art. Instead, the mourning ritual, like the cockfight, is a method of display. Within literary studies expression has quite another meaning to display. The latter means to put on show, to bring into view, but it does not mean to express.[113] Commemorative art exists not to heal the community through the display of therapeutic emotionality, but to provide opportunities for a community to reflect aesthetically on issues of death, loss and emotion and their communal implications.[114]

The elegiac conventions, as seen by Peter Sacks, are reflective of "the actual project of mourning" in an anthropological and psychological sense; elegies demand attention "not so much to the figures of language as to the workings of the mind that uses them."[115] Elegy is the dominant poetics of mourning and is designed to reduce death and loss to a series of ideologically and socially acceptable tropes. The figures of death (or what is called thanatropes) work to tame death and tone down its radical message and so to get to death one has "to cross the elegy landscape of thanatropic death. A valley strewn with flowers, tears, memento mori and therapeutic expressions of eternal life." In order to get the ethical consolation offered by elegy, one must travel through an illusory vale of flowers and structural tears.[116]

Of all genres, the elegy specifically requires and provides a unique perspective, for it is characterized by an unusually powerful intertwining of emotion and rhetoric, of loss and figuration.[117] One of the fewest well recognized 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."[118] G.W. Pigman viewed elegy "as part of the process of mourning rather than the poetry of praise."[119]

In order to understand well the successful work of mourning, it is better, at first, to examine the traditional myth of Apollo and Daphne. The traditional story of Apollo and Daphne, which is narrated by one of its influential narrators, Ovid in his Metamorphoses, points to loss as the mother of the following, more specifically poetic, inventions.[120] This story represents the primary example of successfully achieving detachment from the deceased (i.e. or the lost object).[121] The narrative of Apollo and Daphne "itself exemplifies the dramatic relation between loss and figuration." Having insulted Cupid, Apollo is punished with an unrequited passion for Daphne. The goddess Daphne was controlled by her father, Peneus, whom she begs for deliverance and freedom. Then, as Apollo grasps her, Daphne becomes the laurel tree – only her gleaming beauty remaining unchanged. But this apparently organic metamorphosis, by which the tree substitutes for the nymph, is only part of the consolatory story. Apollo's embrace of the actual tree "will not in itself give comfort, nor it will be accepted"[122]: "But even the wood shrank from his kisses."[123]

Only when Apollo "turns to the projected founding of a sign, the laurel wreath, does he appear to accept his loss, by having invented some consoling substitute for Daphne." This second alternation seems to confirm that Apollo's consoling sign can never enjoy a purely organic relation to the object that it signifies or for which it substitutes. Instead of becoming "the object of a sexual conquest, Daphne is thus eventually transformed into something very much like a consolation prize – a prize that become the prize and sign of poethood," later on in the future. What Apollo or the poet pursues turns into a sign not only of his lost love but also of his very pursuit. Daphne's "turning" into a tree meets Apollo's "turning" from the "object of his love to a sign of her. It is this substitutive turn or act of troping that any mourner must perform." Thus, interruption and loss is followed by a figurative or aesthetic compensation.[124]

Once again, that subsequent alternation, moving from nature (tree) to artifice (laurel wreath), requires an unnatural severing of the tree and an artificial entwining of its cut leaves. This episode portrays a turning away from erotic pursuits and attachments to substitutive, artificial figures of consolation. Unlike many other grievers in the Metamorphoses, such as Cycnus, Egeria, Niobe – all of whom fail to invent or accept an adequate figure for what they have lost and all of whom are consequently altered or destroyed – Apollo, in contrast, is a successful mourner. "(The fact that they are, after all, gods may tell… something of Ovid's pessimism regarding the difficulty of their task.)" For unlike the others, Apollo as well as Pan accept their loss and can retain their identities by what may be called a healthy work of mourning, a work that, as Freud points out, "requires a withdrawal of affection from the lost object and a subsequent reattachment of affection to some substitute for the object."[125]

The psychological theories of loss, mourning, and melancholia by Freud, Klein, Lacan, and Kristeva, contain the basic duality of mourning, that it is something that happens to the interior and exterior of being at the same time. Loss affects both "the mind and the body together." Freud's seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia" has proved most of the groundwork for theories of mourning.[126] Elegy is primarily a genre of mourning and the dangerous spectre of melancholia, which is called depression nowadays.

When a subject "losses a beloved object they begin, understandably to mourn. Mourning is a process, a work, and like a work of art, which in many ways it is, it has an aesthetic process which presents a reward at the end and that reward is health"[127] Mourning is neither a purely external nor internal phenomenon and the literatures of loss (i.e. elegy) gain their power because they negotiate between the private realm of the affect and the public realm of its effects and expression. Psychoanalytic theories which emphasize, therefore, "the psycho-somatic come close to this combination of inner and outer forces from which the literature of loss is constructed."[128]

Melancholia, like mourning, is also brought on by loss, "but most thinkers in the field now see such a loss as a trigger for already unbalanced chemical levels in the brain to begin to produce the dangerous, negative affect which, at its worst, leads a significant number of sufferers… to try to kill themselves."[129]

Loss, generally, names what is apprehended by discourses and practices of mourning, melancholia, nostalgia, sadness, trauma, and depression. Loss functions as a placeholder of sorts and legacies of, among others, revolution, globalization, war, genocide, slavery, decolonization, exile, migration, reunification, and AIDS. In particular, loss focuses upon the shifting meanings of melancholia – a theoretical concept with a capaciousness of meaning in relation to losses encompassing the individual and the collective, the spiritual and the material, the psychic and the social, the aesthetic and the political.[130] Mourning, admittedly, does not solely involve the death of a person near or dear, but it can also

> … involve the demise of a number of abstract ideas, ideals, polities, or human rights, such as civic liberty and freedom of expression or democracy, as well as the loss of an era, a political regime, an economic system, a historical movement, a homeland to settler colonialism, a culture or a language to the forces of globalization, and so on. [131]

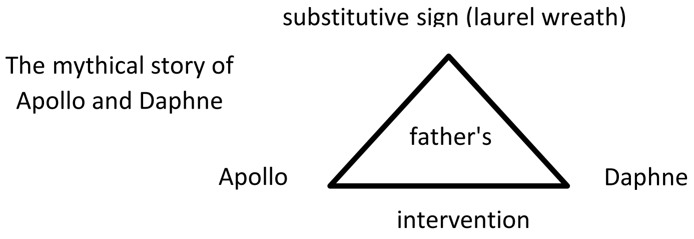
Mourning, as defined by Freud in his "Mourning and Melancholia," "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on." In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and one consequently suspects them of a pathological disposition.[132]

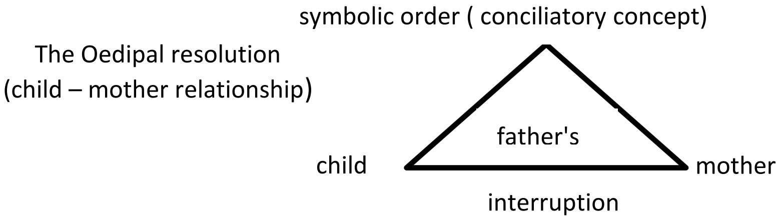
At this point, it would be better to outline briefly a general Freudian framework for elegy, underpinned by Peter Sacks' exceptionally fine study of poetry, consolation and psychology in The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spencer to Yeats (1985). In Sacks' regard, the usual task of elegies “is a project of self-consolation, a working-through of the crisis of loss.” Thus, elegiac discourse carries with it the mourner's psychological burden as he searches the adequate expression, the fitting system of figures, tropes, or symbolic register, to represent his grief. Linguistic articulation, in elegies, “is potentially therapeutic because it mobilizes the mourner's social energies, deflecting his narcissistic malaise within dispassionate conventions.”[133]

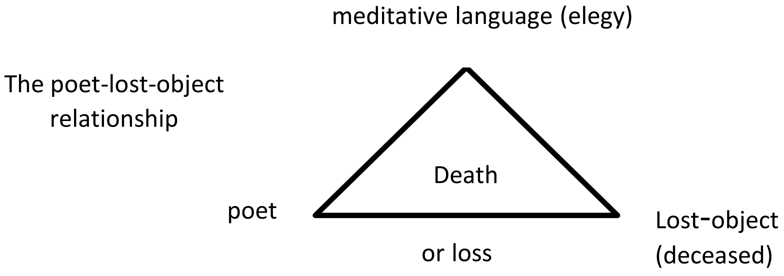
The elegiac utterance crystallizes the “work of mourning” as a process of signification; the healthy mourner improvizes a sustaining consolatory trope, or a system of tropes, which register not only the loss itself but also the awareness that the figure is quite other than the loss, a substitute, a displaced symbol. If an adequate fiction is not constructed, the mourner will fall into pathology.[134] In noteworthy elegies, “those that have truly worked through mourning, language may alternate between functionalism and pathology, but the final product is always true speech, some dispassionate image or sublime sign, which does not impose the burden of passion, but merely evoke it.”[135]

Furthermore, since it has been noted that a paternal intervention forced Apollo not only away from erotic pursuits but toward an adoption of signs or aesthetic instruments, it is worth recognizing how thoroughly an important elaboration of Freud's Oedipus scenario stresses precisely this submission of the child to society's symbolic order of signs. According to Lacan, “it is the figure of the father, representing the symbolic order, that formally intervenes between the child and the child's first object of attachment [mother].” The child's imaginary, dyadic relationship with its prior love-object is thus interrupted and mediated by a signifying system (i.e. the child's entry into language or practicing a certain substitutive game), which acts as a third term, much as the laurel sign comes between the god Apollo and the nymph Daphne.

Similarly in the world of elegy, the poet's preceding relationship with the deceased (often associated with the mother, or Nature) is conventionally disrupted and forced into a triadic structure including the third term, death (frequently associated with the father, or Time). The deceased, like the prohibited object of "a primary desire, must be separated from the poet, partly by a veil of words." [136] Depending on what is mentioned earlier, the theoretical ideas could be explained more clearly by drawing a diagram:


substitutive sign (laurel wreath)
The mythical story of
Apollo and Daphne
father's
Apollo
Daphne
intervention


symbolic order (conciliatory concept)
The Oedipal resolution
(child – mother relationship)
father's
child
mother
interruption


meditative language (elegy)
The poet-lost-object
relationship
Death
poet
Lost-object
(deceased)
or loss

(diagram mine)

In order for the work of mourning, and hence elegy, to be interpreted effectively, one should recapitulate the theoretical ideas of the mirror stage and the fort-da episode, pinned down by Freud. In Lacan's account, the Oedipal resolution succeeds the major narcissistic events or crisis, the first occurring at the mirror stage and the second during the fort-da episode, called so after Freud's descriptions of his grandson's play in Beyond the Pleasure Principle.[137] From this perspective "the oedipal resolution actually governs the child's entry into language, an entry that the work of mourning and the elegy replay." Such occasions, "notably the mirror stage and the fort-da episode, represent rehearsals for the formal alienation and symbolic castration of the child during the oedipal resolution.” Since these superimposed occasions reveal themselves in the elegy, it is worth discriminating them now.

Sacks has produced explanatory models or typified narrative constructs for theses stages based, nevertheless, on sets of observations:

> During the mirror stage, an infant between the ages of six months and eighteen months locates an idealized image of himself either in mirror images or in the forms of others – in each case imagining himself to possess the integrity and functional completeness of what remains nevertheless a merely specular self. The actual and as yet primarily unformed and incompetent self is thus alienated and displaced by a coherent image of an idealized self…. The child's relation to this mirror image is dyadic, remaining within a condition of primary narcissism but now revealing a preliminary spilt in, or we might say for, the constitution of the self.[138]

If the child were to remain at this level – the child still attaches his affections to himself and he still fails to discriminate a world genuinely other than himself – “he would obviously fail to establish a stable, socialized sense of himself or the outside world.”[139] In order to compose a formalized identity, that inchoate self and its private fantasy should be suppressed in favor of a more signifying system of signs and positional codes of society. The child will achieve a more sophisticated and more realistic form of narcissism by doing attachments outside the self. But the threat of death may shatter his own more “sophisticatedly narcissistic illusions of security; and the deprivation of someone whose presences had supported the survivor's self-image may join the threat of death to drive the mourner back to the earlier form of narcissism.” [140]

This narcissistic regression – the mourner's a-social retreat into solipsistic reveries of the mirror stage – “may also be caused by the withdrawal of affection from the dead, followed by an inability to reattach that affection, or, more strictly speaking, libido, elsewhere than upon the mourner's self. This is what Freud described as the secondary narcissism at the core of melancholia.” As Sacks points out:

> One of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner's damaged narcissism – but without allowing that repair to have permanent recourse either to melancholy form of secondary narcissism or to the fantasies of the primitive narcissism associated with the mirror stage.[141]

Sacks goes on to claim that major English elegies such as “Adonais” and “In Memoriam” cannot be fully understood without observance of their intricate work of reparations. [142]

“Mourning and Melancholia,” which is going to be explained later on in this research, “is not the only essay by Freud that has proved influential in the discussion of loss. The widely discussed fort-da episode in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) shows how the child learns to experience and cope with loss.[143] It is worthwhile noting the fort-da section as the key literature of loss of the modern era although never admitted as such. The child, Freud's old grandson, is a normal one and a half year old. He is on good terms with its parents, and “with his attachment to his mother being very strong who had not only fed him herself but had also looked after without any outside help.”[144]

Approximately, children may master words before the age of eighteen months, but the fort-da game has captured the imagination of theorists like Freud and Lacan because it seems to demonstrate the child’s acceptance of certain rules of experience and of language.[145] In a general way, the consolatory performance of elegies can be linked to the second major narcissistic event – the fort-da game – as Sacks explains it carefully:

> Whenever the child's mother left the room, he controlled his anger and grief by repeatedly casting away and then retrieving a wooden reel, to the accompaniment of the syllables fort and da. Freud saw the reel as a surrogate for the mother, and he interpreted the syllables to mean approximately “gone” (away) and “there” or “here” (in the sense of regained presence).[146]

Freud regarded this game of “disappearance and return” as “related to the child's great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach."[147] By an undeveloped form of mourning, "the child not only comes to terms with the otherness and absence of his first love-object; he also learns to represent absence, and to make the absent present, by means of a substitutive figure accompanied by an elementary language."[148]

The estranging displacement of "the inchoate self during the mirror stage is thus reinforced by this instance of instinctual renunciation and by this substitutive use of reel and syllables. The child is manipulating signifiers which are at an obvious remove from actual mother they signify."[149] The young child's elemental language, his consolatory figure, represents his loss, grief and narcissistic desire; at the same time, this figure is at a far remove from an interiorized sense of self: it is displaced, abstract, and other.[150] Once more, "the groundwork has been laid for his subsequent and more thorough submission to the laws of renunciation and symbolic codes."[151] Admittedly, the child's instinctual renunciation; acquiescence to a separation from his mother; his enforced self-suppression; his acceptance of, and / or submission to, the rule of displacement, substitution and transference requires, at first, an essential symbolic self-castration of primary desire, and this may point to the subsequent exercise of a displaced, figurative version of such desire.

Furthermore, submission to the laws of renunciation and symbolic codes could lay the groundwork for any essential reconciliation – displacement and transference could not take place unless acceptance and mediation took place.[152] Here, "the conciliatory is consolatory."[153] The acceptance of mediation or substitution for the original desire is the price of survival and defiance.[154] The child's ululation "a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o'" is the first stage of elegy, as has been noted by numerous critics of the genre.[155] The ululation is an expression of grief, but not of authentic grief aimed at deriving consolation; it is an inauthentic re-enactment of what the child has learnt about grief.[156] The child plays the real game of love – it established the Lacanian mainstay that to learn to love one must learn to lose love.[157] Satisfaction, healing, and pleasure gained by practicing the game is, in fact, that of proximity / metonymy – the child does not exclaim “here" (hier) but “there” (da). The child's elegy is not only “disappearance but disappearance and proximate placing, is not fort/hier but fort/da.”[158] The da, therefore, provides unity and solace which is a fake.[159] As it shall be more clear, this psychological process is extremely close to the procedure of the elegy, and to the mythology that underlies the genre.[160]

Elegy is not a form with specific rules affecting length and disposition, but an event-based form that has attracted to itself a powerful body of conventions and attitudes.[161] There is a number of general conventions and classical tropes which represent the literary lineage of the genre of elegy. Such conventions and models include: the use of pastoral contextualization; 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 and cursing; the procession of mourners, the movement from grief to consolation; and the traditional images of resurrection.[162]

While these conventions help characterize the genre of elegy (as distinct from epitaph, dirge, or threnody), elegy's defining trope cannot be classified as a concrete feature but is instead better described as a movement: from grief to consolation. Without this movement “the poem is merely elegiac.” Quite what enable this movement has been well described by Abbie Findlay Potts according to what Aristotle called anagnorisis. In so far as this term is employed by literary critics – variously translated from the Greek to mean “recognition,” “revelation,” “discovery” or “disclosure” – it tends to be used in relation to drama.[163] But if anagnorisis may be said to crown the plot of dramatic and epic poetry, and to reward the logic of didactic poetry, it is the very goal of elegy, determining the whole procedure:

> [w]hereas drama and epic primarily concerned with action and didactic poetry with dogma, elegy is the poetry of sceptical and revelatory vision for its own sake, satisfying the hunger of man to see, to know, to

> understand…. In its latest as in its earliest guise elegy labors towards human truth as its end in view.[164]

The affective universe of elegy across boundaries of place and culture is recognized by Jahan Ramazani as such: grief, love, and anger; the search for, and thwarting of, consolation; commemorative and anti-commemorative impulses.[165] Be it Greek, Renaissance, Romantic, Victorian, or Modern, elegy has, of course, always had to answer the question of what to do about desire. Kate Lilley has observed that "the elegist spends himself in the service of desire."[166] The elegist's desire could also involve his own desire for mastery and self-confirmation "to draw attention, consolingly, to his surviving powers"[167] and desire in the sense of drives that must be restrained or excluded. For example, grief and pain of sadness can make the mourner "half in love with easeful death,"[168] to borrow Keats's words from "Ode to a Nightingale". Furthermore, the history of elegy is not one of faith (pagan, christian, or atheistic) but of the problems of responsibility towards another human being and towards one's own self when confronted with a radical loss.[169]

In his Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney (1994), Jahan Ramazani comments that "insofar as the elegy is a mimesis of mourning, psychoanalysis offers a more useful framework" than genre theory.[170] From the psychological stages mentioned earlier – the mirror stage, fort-da episode, and Oedipal resolution – it is becoming clear that there is a significant similarity between the process of mourning and these stages. In his psychoanalytical approach to the genre, Sacks explained the general procedure for the work of mourning and elegy:

> Each procedure or resolution is essentially defensive, requiring a detachment of affection from a prior object followed by a reattachment of the affection elsewhere. At the core of each procedure is the renunciatory experience of loss and acceptance, not just of a substitute, but of the very means and practice of substitution. In each case such an acceptance [castration] is the price of survival; and in each case a successful resolution is not merely deprivatory, but offers a form of compensatory reword [consolation prize].[171]

The work of mourning, as artistic construct, falls within both parameters. Alongside the psychology of an individual's grief, so societies have developed various other means for shaping and aiding the responses and requirements to meet the devastation of loss. Be it Sophocles or Shakespeare, or Tennyson or Plath, or any of the many other examples from literary history, humans have found the need to express mourning – and see it articulated – in literary terms.[172] The elegy which arrive at a consolation does not leave the mourner with consolation and say that the problem is solved. It represents the producing of the expressive monument in words.[173] What elegy give in place of loss is the subject's own loss expressed monumentally.[174] Hence the mourner or elegist must submit to the mediating woven fabric of language, a tissue of substitutions that may cover a preceding lack.[175] To speak of weaving a consolation emphasizes how mourning is an action, a process of work. The elegy has employed crucial images of weaving, of creating a fabric in the place of a void.[176]

The transition from loss to consolation "thus requires a deflection of desire, with the creation of a trope both for the lost object and for the original character of the desire itself."[177] In fact, as late as the time of Aristotle, deflection of desire – castration – was thought to defend the individual against mortality by conserving his psyche, or what Weismann and Freud called it, "the immortal germ-plasm."[178] In The Ethics of Mourning Cliff Spargo, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Bernard Williams, describes a powerful function of elegy as warning without the possibility of agency. In stirring feeling for the mourned subject, and re-imagining the crisis of loss, elegy awakens the "ethical emergency" and protective urges and the ethical imagination of the mourner.[179] Mourning usually "employs a psychological trick of time, treating its retrospective concern for the other as if it were anticipatory or potentially preventive of loss."[180]

The work of mourning is largely designed to defend the individual against, or bar him from, the fulfillment of a premature death by accepting the society's code, with its network of detours and substitutions, and providing figures for what outlasts individual mortality.[181] As many elegists confirm:

> [The work of mourning] is not simply a matter of reconstructing one's barriers against an external menace. Once again, a forced renunciation prevents a regressive attachment to a prior love-object, a potential fixation on the part of the griever whose desire in such cases for literal identification with the dead [or any lost object of love] is another force very much like that of the death wish. Melancholia usually involves a lasting return to the kind of regressive narcissism… often including an identification between the ego and the dead such that the melancholic tends toward self-destruction.[182]

As so often basing his investigation on interdisciplinary evidence, on biology, philosophy, and myth, Freud affirms the dualistic nature of instinctual life, the tension within the human being between constructive and destructive drives. In other words, pleasure is a double force, aspiring, on one hand, to an enhancement of life, to sublimation, on the other, to destructive inertia, to death.[183]

In his epochal, metapsychological essay, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud contends that mourning is, like melancholia, a reaction to loss.[184] Freud describes mourning as the process of "releasing the tie between an individual and the objects (including other people) in the environment into which the person invests emotional significance"; this process involves a great deal of psychic labour and of active labouring, or working, at mourning.[185] Kathleen Woodward provides a useful delineation of Freud's definition of mourning:

> [Mourning] is psychic work which has a precise purpose and goal: to "free" ourselves from the emotional bonds which have tied us to the person we loved so that we may "invest" that energy elsewhere, to "detach" ourselves so that we may be "uninhibited." Mourning is "necessary". It denotes a process which takes place over a long period of time. It is slow… as we simultaneously psychically cling to what has been lost.[186]

The work of mourning is a work of severance; "the ego is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished."[187] The healthy mourner submits to a displacement of his prior attachments and to a disruption of his potential regression to dyadic fantasies, allowing his desire to be governed instead by certain acceptable rules and laws of substitution.[188] In a similar manner, the elegist's recapitulated entry into, and submission to, the very mediations of language that interpose between him and his object of loss or desire presupposes his acceptance of the castrative power of loss.[189]

In his “Mourning and Melancholia,” the two central elements of modern theories of mourning in literature, Freud “notes that mourning and melancholic subjects are identical in the way in which they deal with loss through their reality testing” – in the healthy work of mourning the mourner begins again, reinvesting, replanting love along the way. The melancholic, however, lingers and keeps on testing reality.[190] The task that the work of mourning is said to carry out, as explained by Freud, begins with the notion of reality testing:

> Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed when a substitute is already beckoning at them, this opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through a medium of hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged.[191]

When the detachment of the libido is accomplished, the work of mourning is completed – “the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.” The melancholic, in a sense, knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him. This might suggest “that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.”[192] Melancholia, in opposition to mourning, is a traumatic openness. The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies from all direction, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished – a brutal scenario of almost vampire-like behaviour.[193] Symptoms of a griever's melancholia, or its potential, are staged by Freud as such:

> First there existed an object-choice, the libido had attached itself to a certain person; then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person, this object-relationship was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one, but something different for which various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance, and was abandoned; but the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there, however, in any one of several possible ways, but served simply to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego [among the major constitutions of the ego are conscience, consciousness, and reality-testing], so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty [conscience] like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object becomes transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification. [194]

Identification has been defined by Freud as an internalization of the lost object that resulted in a melancholic fixation on the lost object.[195] As such, the melancholic is not only unable to detach himself (or herself) from the lost object: he / she wants to internalize the dead or the love-object ("as if it were a part / Of thee.")[196]

The total withdrawal of affection from everything outside the self is a prominent symptom of melancholia in Freud's definition, according to him melancholia exhibits a "profounding painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of capacity to love, inhibition of all activity."[197] Furthermore, the melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego itself.[198]

The melancholic, as viewed by Julia Kristeva, is "on the verge of collapsing," living what one could call "the life of the remains";[199] they are the living dead. What is apparent from Kristeva's highly literary descriptions of melancholia "is that she reconfigures a common experience of depressives, that of being a zombie or ghostlike, to intersect with her idea of the abject."[200] Abjection, literally, is a state of misery and degradation. Kristeva notes, what is abject, is what draws one towards an abyss of sorrow, toward the place where meaning collapses. Abjection is one's reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning, identity, system or order caused by the blurring of distinction between self and other or subject and object.[201] Andrew Solomon, like Kristeva, has provides almost gothic tropes of the state of melancholia or depression nowadays:

> With the depression, your vision narrows and begins to close down… The air seems thick and resistant, as though it were full of mushed-up bread. Becoming depressed is like going blind, the darkness at first gradual, then encompassing; it is like going deaf… It is like feeling your clothing slowly turning into wood on your body, a stiffness in the elbows and the knees progressing to a terrible weight and an isolating immobility that will atrophy you and in time destroy you. [202]

What makes things very difficult and complex for the melancholic is, in truth, his / her scepticism. He or she will accept no substitute, and would rather occupy the petrified realm of their pathology than succumb to the occupation of their grief by a string of maudlin tropes of love and loss. The melancholic shrugs off the rather tired clichés of consolation; the comforting pastoral matrix and the adequate solace in the mediations of language.[203] The healthy mourner, on the other hand, submits to a displacement of his prior attachments and accepts substitution rather than that of the melancholic identification. Of course only the object as lost, and not the object itself, enters into the substitutive sign, and the latter is accepted only by a turning away from the actual identity of what was lost. Consolation thus depends on a trope that remains at an essential remove from what it replaces.[204]

As Freud wrote to Binswanger regarding the question of substitution in the case of mourning, "No matter what fills the gab, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else."[205] This idea approaches what Robert Frost has written in his poem "Good Relief":

> No state has found a perfect cure for grief

> In law or gospel or in root or herb.[206]

So, there are no substitutes. There is only "something else," as Freud has admitted. Fradenburg eloquently reflects on the concept of substitution as it pertains to mourning theory:

> If we try to de-essentialize this concept [the concept of substitution], we might focus instead on the problem of how we become attached to – how we develop bonds and relationships with – particulars. What makes grief agonizing is precisely that when someone or something particular has been lost, it cannot recur. Thus in the concept of substitution there continues a defense against the loss of the particular, hence against the advert of new as well as the end of the old. If the particular cannot be repeated, it remains forever lost; and this is why there can be no final closure to mourning. There can only be, alongside of mourning, learning to love new particulars.[207]

"Alongside" here should be interpreted as a metaphor for a kind of cleaving: not separate and parallel, but simultaneously split off from and adhering to one another. "Mourning" and "learning to love new particulars" can never be fully differentiated. That is, "learning to love new particulars" rather than substitution for prior object of love, is a meaningful characterization of the work of mourning and hence the work of the elegy genre. [208]

1.7: Modern Elegy:

> No state has found a perfect cure for grief
> In law or gospel in root or herb.
> — Robert Frost, "Good Relief."

The modern elegy has enormously diversified in theme and attitude compared to its predecessors. Whereas Renaissance, Romantic, and Victorian elegists paid great attention to "death as their prime subject, one finds a distinct tendency in the modern period to broaden the focus to include loss of all kinds as the basic stimulus and concern."[209]

Loss of life, of course, continues to play a central role in the elegiac imagination. But to it have been added losses in cultures and civilizations (as with

T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound); dissolutions of the family and families (as with James Joyce and William Faulkner); the loss of identity (as with Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Hayden).[210] The modern poets violate the genre's traditional norms and transgress its limits. They compine "the elegiac with the anti-elegiac, at once appropriating and resisting the traditional psychology"[211] and structure of the genre. Jahan Ramazani's Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney (1994) is a comprehensive attempt to do for the twentieth century what Sacks had done for the canon. Ranazani argues that:

> The apparently oxymoronic term "modern elegy" suggests both the negation of received codes ("modern") and their perpetuation ("elegy") – a synthesis of modernity and inheritance that is especially fruitful for poets like Hardy, Stevens, Hughes, and Plath, who neither rehash nor neglect literary traditions. They make it new but make it old, rebel against generic norms but reclaim them through rebellion…. In becoming anti-elegiac, the modern elegy more radically violates previous generic norms than did earlier phases of elegy: it becomes anti-consolatory… [anti-pastoral], anti-Romantic and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary.[212]

The modern elegy's characteristic propensity is the melancholic resistance to the resolution of mourning, as seen in Wilfred Owen's "elegies [which are] in no sense consolatory."[213] Ramazani's argument is that twentieth-century elegists' general pessimistic reaction against the genre's consolatory turn can be read as, what Freud had termed, "Melancholic Mourning," to distinguish mourning that is unresolved, violent, and ambivalent.[214] "Melancholic Mourning" conveys the ethical reluctance found, Watkin argues, in the three eras of thanatropism: "the trope as metonymic substitute, the pastoral realm as a location for encountering real loss, and the consolatory paradox of the monument"[215] – elegy. The causal tropes of the pastoral tradition are totally overhauled or repaired in the modern elegy in favour of new and personal tropes of loss. Put it another way, "elegy does not come from pastoral/vegetable world, rather it attacks it." According to modern poets, "[e]legy's generic relation to the pastoral is not generic but parasitic and critical." The assumed, quasi-organic, model of continuum from the pastoral to the elegy typically assumed within elegy studies is a false imposition.[216]

In a sense, "modern elegy takes up the pastoral again to counteract" the traditional mechanisms elegy has made on the pastoral.[217] The pastoral elegy in modern poetry insists neither on the figure of replacement identified by Sacks, nor the gesture of protest identified by Ramazani.[218] Jeffrey Thomson, in '"Everything Blooming Bows Down in the Rain": Nature and the Work of Mourning in Contemporary Elegy,' finds:

> a form of elegy that grieves deeply and fully and finds commensurate consolation in nature but in the form of a figured replacement. These elegies make powerful use of nature and present the natural world as a participant in suffering, going so far as to unite the personal and the natural with metaphors of loss and sorrow. However, there is no sense in their work that nature replaces grief or even alleviates it in some way.[219]

Bereft of traditional consolations like belief in eternal life or faith in restorative nature (pastoral realm), and of dismissing or repudiating the considerable reparative powers of elegy, modern poets appear to speak into a void.[220] Grief, according to the modern poets, if it is truly worthy of the name, has no compensation, as the opening epigraph demonstrates. Literary critics tend to "read modern elegy as a poetics of melancholia, a despondent and dispirited body of verse that refuses all forms of substitution, transcendence, or redemption."[221]

Most of the scholars who have fashioned the literary critical discourse on the modern elegy – from Celeste Schenck and Daniel Albright to Ramazani – treat anti-elegy as a symptom of twentieth century modernity, recognizing the elegy's self-reflexive doubts about the efficacy of literary rhetorical conventions (the consolatory powers of the figurative language) for redeeming loss as "indicative of a broader cultural cynicism about socio-political, religious, philosophical, and psychological regimes of consolation."[222] Therefore, the modern elegy may reject the ordinary progression of the successful, healthy work of mourning, in which the bereaved moves from disconsolation and distress, to gradual detachment from the lost object, to "a mode of coping dependent on symbolic compensations for loss effectively bring about psychic resolution or resignation in the aggrieved party."[223] Modern mourners have moved instead from the work of mourning to the work of sheer suffering that Benjamin described as "neither tragic revelation nor consolatory grace but rather an image of hopeless image, yet dogged, endurance."[224]

Refusing to relinquish loss, the modern elegy resembles "an open wound" in Freud's disturbing trope of melancholia. Many modern elegists are drunk with loss, as Tennyson seems before repairing his faith and reconciliation or as Milton's mourner initial anger and despondency before coming to his final triumph and artistic creation.[225]

It is a truism that the modern elegy has repudiated the traditional elegy, but its qualifying subplot nevertheless has become increasingly dominant[226] – the persistence of the traditional elegy within the modern elegy. Some of the elegiac topoi, such as the pathetic fallacy, oedipal submission, and poetic inheritance are still used within modern elegy, but this inheritance is not free from the complexities of resistance and revision.[227] So, new elegiac aesthetic has been made: an elegiac practice sets in motion the familiar dynamics of the genre while aborting its traditional orthodox consolatory promise. [228]

1.8: American Elegy:

> What living and buried speech is always vibrating here,
> What howls restrain'd by decorum.
> — Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

The heritage of elegy helps constitute the "work" (both process and artifact) of mourning – a form of psychic labor that is also fundamental to the work of mourning. In their language of loss, elegies seek to apprehend the sheer commonality of human experience. Elegy is a genre that enables fantasies about worlds that cannot yet be reached.[229] Throughout history, elegy is characterized by its reflexive appeal for remembrance and its framing of questions of inheritance and continuity.[230]

The American elegy simultaneously and variously begins to resist, revise, and further recontexualize received implotments of vocation and inheritance from the classical-European tradition. The history of American elegy is difficult to trace because, Cavitch writes:

> [I]t is itself part of the story of Americans' periodic frustrations with both the oppressiveness and the inefficiency of routes and mechanisms of transmission. From Creole resistance to imperial consolidation, to Puritan cries of declension; from opposition to primogeniture and to the matrilineal inheritance of slave status… from linguistic standardization, to geographical instability; from uneven technological advancement, to the invention of a national literature – in relation to all of these conditions, elegy continued to be a highly adaptive discursive resource, not just for mourning the dead but for communicating and managing anxieties in contexts of survival.[231]

To understand the American elegiac practice, one should labor under a multiplicity of aims: "to document the history of American elegiac practices," to interpret the genre and its permutations in relation to the history of colonialism, nationalism, republicanism, and liberalism, "to illuminate the mutually generative relation between certain political and psychoanalytic accounts of mourning," to explore how the repression of loss helps constitute social as well as individual experience of memory and anticipation, and "to evaluate elegiac responses to a specific ethical task – one that prizes resistance to the reduction of grief to grievance."[232] Nevertheless, it should be useful to articulate, as one organizing principle or ethos, the idea that all elegies – indeed all mourning arts – are about the struggle to make the most out of some sign of the inarticulable, the trace of the loss that abides in mostly inaccessible lives of a person.

It is the object relation theory that elaborates fully this inaccessible or the unconscious. But one need not have a psychoanalytic world-view to experience mourning, either one's own or that of others, as the mute agony of incorporation, whereby the dead is kept inside the self, so to speak, in tangles and hollows that figurative language – the literary language – can only strain to reach. This reaching is not only a source of pain (such as overworked muscles experience) but also evidence of a fundamental sort of aspiration, or will, that may manifest itself in creative living.[233]

In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud "did not probe into the relationship between mourning and creativity, but dealt with inhibition in melancholia. However, mourning as well as trauma has negative effects, as is the case with unresolved mournings, but it may also have positive ones that, stimulate creativity" – the psychic pain produced by the loss of a person or an ideal, of something concrete or abstract, can trigger creativity.[234] Plato is among those geniuses whom mourning leads to produce outstanding creative works in the world and in themselves. Nostalgia for the object, remembrance, fantasy, and memories – sources of knowledge, elaboration, and inspiration – play a fundamental role in working through mourning. [235]

Increased immigration, territorial expansion, racial and cultural assimilation, continued secularization and democratization all worked to reduce the authority of traditionalism in American life – thereby challenging elegiac resourcefulness – and to call more and more into doubt the notion that the dead were the moral and economic creditors of the living.[236] By challenging the personal dimension of traditional elegy – avoiding the personalism and occasionalism of the traditional elegy – collective mourning can model an alternative to the massive social disavowals of slavery, Indian removal, and other programs of suppression and dispossession. [237] Such figures as general sorrow, people's grief, country's woe, are common to the poetry of public mourning.[238] It is the profound grief of "a nation for the loss of great public and private virtues."[239] Patriotism and civic duty are cultivated as an alternative to virtuous public action.[240]

Collective grief registers the success of sentimental literature not merely in depicting but even inspiring just that sort of powerful, collective feeling.[241] The commemoration of George Washington – as an object of shared, active mourning – helps illuminate the elegy's own national tradition.[242] The "persistence of relationship," as John Bowlby writes, between the mourner and the mourned may help in “maintaining values and pursuing goals.”[243] To remember Washington, for instant, and to pursue values (such as selflessness) and goals (such as a strongly unified nation) once powerfully associated with him is to pursue the ideals to which the deceased is linked. The glorification of Washington “becomes more, rather than less, conflicted, as his memory gets bound up with and attached to other, more proximate sources of grief” – the deaths of later virtuous presidents, for instance, and the increasing of ever-darkening spectacle or the legacy of slavery.

This notion of idealization and its effects has been further explained by Cavitch:

> The tendency of idealizations to break down is one of the fundamental psychological insights of republican theory and its revolutionary practice. The overthrow not just of kings but of kingship was a remedial approach to the idealization of leaders on other, more modest terms. Republicanism is not a denial of the destructive impulses that persist even in the absence of dynastic succession. Rather it is an opportunity to clear a space among envious and persecutory anxieties for something more closely approximating what Melanie Kleine calls gratitude, that is, a feeling – a civic feeling – that mitigates the resentment of horizontal and vertical dependencies. Sequentially, of course, this liberatory experience of gratitude is subject to its own idealization, which, in turn, helps generate and sustain the compensatory discourse known as patriotism. As an incentive to collective mourning, patriotism redirects destructive impulses beyond certain cultural or ideological barriers, like those of nation-states, and toward groups or classes of persons who not only will not be mourned but also might have to be killed [destroyed].[244]

In Freudian terms, the mourning process encourages the bereaved to decathect libidinal energies from lost loved ones and transfer them to higher ideals: nobility, patriotism, the will of God.[245] In this respect, this process typifies the “push toward transcendence,”[246] characterizing mourning in the Platonic and Christian traditions, minimizing the importance of the mortal body and redirecting attention toward what is abstract, ideal, and eternal.[247]

Slavery was clearly warranted by the Constitution of 1787, "which would not otherwise have been ratified.” This devil's bargain (William LIoyd Garrison called it “a covenant with death”[248]) enabled national patriotic sentiment to take hold and to flourish in the United State, and slavery has never since then ceased to be the defining problem for American self-critical memory – a problem numerous elegists have faced in a wide variety of ways. [249]

One of the striking, but not surprising differences between the English elegy and the American is the latter's loss, rejection, or radically transformative borrowing of the traditional myths and contexts of the genre. Partly because of the obvious geographical and ideological differences, but also because of a strong compulsion toward originality and privacy, American elegists could not easily situate their poems in the familiar pastoral settings or even within the familiar ritual procedure of the genre.[250] The traditional elegiac myths and ceremonies with their generic resources of consolation were regarded with a new level of incredulity or contempt.

Sociologists and psychologists constantly demonstrate the ways in which death has tended to become obscene, meaningless, impersonal as a result of largscale war or genocide. In this situation most elegists have withdrawn further behind masks of irony. Occasionally the mourned subjects might include not only the deceased but also the vanished rituals of grief and consolation themselves.[251] As Seamus Heaney has written in “Funeral Rites,” “We pine for ceremony/customary rhythms.”[252]

For since its origins in a Puritan society marked by the sever repression and rationalization of grief – the experience of loss provides the opportunity for repentance – American culture seems to have had particular difficulty in accommodating genuine mourning. To the American elegy's more overt focus on the isolated self of the griever, one should add its more nakedly expressive style. In fact this is a result of the general departure from constraining conventions and decorums.[253] Originality and freedom of expression creates a sense of alienation from the general acceptable principle of elegy; the sense of loss would not be transformed from the state of individuation to that of publicization which, in turn, could guarantee transcendence and consolation.

American elegies often have a frightening raw and immediate feeling or emotion, as if their speakers were fighting not just for an aesthetically acceptable form of consolation but for their own literal survival. The poems produced by American elegists, were rebellious, as if the poets were unusually resistant to the very submission so crucial to the healthy work of mourning. Hence, the mourner will find it "difficult to achieve consolation but he may tend to oscillate erratically between postures of defiance on the one hand and exaggerated victimization on the other."[254]

There are various ways to approach elegies by U.S. writers. Max Cavitch approach was more overtly and more purposefully nationalizing – because he thought that the best way to approach elegies by U.S. writers was to connect them with national dimensions and attitudes. Admittedly, this presupposes the connection between American elegy, on the one hand, and federal, political, and national power, on the other. The connection "between elegy and legal – specifically constitutional – structures may seem tenuous at first" – the constitution is used as an interpretive key to elegiac poetry in the U.S.[255] As a matter of fact, the American society is composed of different races – African, Asian, and European. That national difference would ultimately cause what is called the "Melancholy of Race."[256] So, the fact (or sentiment) of national difference would count for much in the study of American literature. At the same time, that literature has something important to say about attachment to (or alienation from) specifically American constitutional principles – the principles that legally, as well as symbolically, bind together "we the people."[257]

In other words, it is the specific set of principles represented in what some legal scholars call "the living Constitution" – and not patriotic feeling, or ethnicity, or language, or any of the other conventional attributes of national identity – that, at this late date, holds out possibilities for the meaningfulness and ethical justification of that identity as a way of being in the world and relating to others.[258]

Of course, "[a]nd those others," incorporate "the dead along with the living." This is, significantly, "where elegy comes in, as one of the most popular and flexible forms of mourning art in U.S. culture – a form, moreover, that is much about the living as it is about the dead, as much about relations among the living as about elegists' persistent connections to the dead people for whom they grieve." People often begin to grieve, and sometimes even write elegies, well in advance of a loss – during the illness or senescence of a parent, for example. On occasion, people make fun of their propensity to grieve for imagined or anticipated losses. The U.S. Constitution – its Bill of Rights – is changeable; it undergoes various individual Amendments. The point is that these Amendments could have the potential of being defacement or dismantlement, despite the fact that the Constitution was created to save the nation from disunion and death.[259] The Constitution, championed by Publius – the first and foremost authorial figure of American Constitutional personality – is today the world's longest-lived and most frequently emulated – always embattled but never yet sustaining a fatal blow.

Yet an array of notable figures stands in American mourning literature, from the time of the late eighteenth century Revolutionary War up to the present day, for some of the costs, willing or unwilling incurred, of that constitutional longevity. Many of these figures have names of their own, real, fictional, or pseudonymous: George Washington, Charlotte Temple, Nat Turner, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, Geronimo, and the residents of Robert Hayden's. Others survive only as types: the murdered slave, the martyred leader, the unknown soldier, the executed traitor, the suicidal social isolate, the self-sacrificing hero, the ocean-swallowed emigrant, the tortured prisoner.

The American Constitutional elegies are as much about the political identifications and attachments of the living as they are about the personal sacrifices of the dead. Just as the Constitutional Convention eschewed personal endorsement[260] in favour of the "Unanimous Consent of the States present,"[261] so too did many elegies from the start of the national period incline away from the personalising detail.[262]

Yet the traditional task of the elegist is individuated mourning – to describe (and thus more vividly to remember) the person and the personality of the deceased. And ultimately "that task is not wholly at odds with the principle of constitutional republicanism." After all, among the liberties the Constitution seeks to preserve is the people's freedom to form and avow attachments to one another. Indeed mutual attachment – the full extension of civic feeling within territorial boundaries – is the sine qua non of republican nationalism. The elegist projects into the future a semblance of such determinate construction in the form of a poem, and “thereby helps procure for subsequent generations one of the chief compensations of extended mourning: by encouraging others to maintain an emotional connection with the deceased, the elegist contributes to the preservation of ideals with which the deceased has been strongly associated.”[263]

Cross-racial identifications are central to elegiac practice in antebellum America and beyond – Black elegists and their white counterparts contributed to a complex history of identification and remembrance.[264] No doubt, the Apportionment (or “three-fifth”) Clause and Importation (or “slave trade”) Clause of Article 1 and the Fugitive Salve Clause of Article 4 would have come as no surprise with the various compromises, contradictions, and hypocrisies of slavery law throughout the history of Britain and America. Indeed, the American Constitution had fused slaveholding and non-slaveholding States into one slaveholding republic. Then, a fierce conflict persisted, eventuating in the Civil War. Beyond doubt, these laws and political institutions perpetuate the engine of death caused by that slavery system.[265]

To be sure, the American elegiac history is, in truth, a history of political radicalism like John Brown's (who was a radical abolitionist and was captured and ultimately executed for being charged with treason against Virginia State)[266], but it is also a history of faith in transcendence – a history of the idealization of mourning as well as the struggle for emancipation. Elegies by and for slave community generated sympathy and support for the compative, sometimes violent cause of abolitionism. But they also helped articulate an ethos of renunciation, repeadedly discovering in death an end to otherwise insoluble problems of existence.[267] The question for freedom, the end of discrimination, racism, deprivation, segregation, violence and lynching, could only be achieved after death. As Frances Ellen Watkins Harper put it in her anthologized poem “Bury me in Free Land”

> I ask no monument, proud and high,
> To arrest the gaze of the passerby;
> “All that my yearning spirit craves
> Is – bury me not in a land of slaves!” [268]

The problems suffered by the negroes were not limited to the physical and psychological trauma suffered by slaves but also included the melancholy, shame, and rage of traumatized white and free black populations as well.[269] The nationwide “tragedy of slavery”[270] concerns a state of abjection, pity, shame, and hidden grief. It is a tragedy of national collapse (or national “suicide,”) as Abraham Lincoln prophesied in an 1838 speech.[271] James Madison states that slavery is “the last stage of national humiliation.”[272]

Elegists of antebellum America and beyond have stated this traumatization in their elegiac practice. But, it should always be noted, that those poets “help generate of a feeling of inexorable logic, a sentiment of *inevitability”*[273] – that the overthrow of kings and kingship; putting an end to all shapes of slavery, oppression, and class division, is not only in the past. For that to occur, that project should involve a complex accommodation with violent rebellion.[274] Thomas Jefferson (1984) writes in defense of anarchism:

> If they (the people) remain quiet under such misconceptions it is lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty…. what country can preserve it's [sic] liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?… The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.[275]

The two anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, were executed in 1927. Their condemnation was, for many mourners, parallel to what Jefferson called “the forerunner of death to the public liberty,” and in the hundreds of elegies written on their behalf “a common leitmotif is the redemptive value of proletarian uprising.”[276]

The politics of elegy, on the one hand, “is to counsel submission, not merely to its own generic conventions, but also to socially regimented protocols for grieving and mourning, which commonly entail the suppression or sublimation of unruly affects and impulses.”[277] On the other hand, it is also the work of elegy to activate subjective identifications among mourners that affirm, shift, or revise social alliances, which may include alliances among revolutionaries and anarchists as well as those among patriarchalists and traditionalists. African-American elegy from Wheatley to Langston Hughes to Michael Harper has been a challenge to racial dominance written under the sign of lamentation; those poets have helped to school the genre's practitioners in the publicness of private life, including the political uses of grief.

African-American poets established in their poetics of loss an urgent need – a need of the living rather than of the dead – to be protected and to be given the right for political participation. But nor yet a poet “is ready to relinquish the notion that there is also a need on the part of the dead – their need to be remembered, longed for, explained, vindicated, above all heard”[278]:

> This woman is Black
> so her blood is shed into silence
> This woman is Black
> So her death falls to earth
> like the drippings of birds
> to be washed away with silence and rain.[279]

Notes

The opening epigraph is from Samuel Johnson, The lives of the Most Prominent English Poets with Critical Observations on Their Works, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Claredon Press, 2006 [1767]), 4:183.

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18. Nagy, “Ancient Greek Elegy,” 13, 20, 21.

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22. Ewen L. Bowie, “Early Greek Elegy, Symposium and Public Festival,” Journal of Hellenic Studies 106 (1986): 34.

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25. The opening quotation is from Paul A, Miller, “ 'What's Love Got to Do with It?': The Peculiar Story of Elegy in Rome,” in The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53.

26. Ibid., 46. Miller writes that Roman elegy represents “a world of drunken poets and their angry, often unfaithful mistresses. It is also a world of implicit, or even explicit, erotic violence” (57). This type of elegy depicts “a poetry of irony and transgression, which seeks not to model ideal behaviours but interrogate the heroic by directly juxtaposing it with the violent, the erotic, the demimonde and the debauched”(59). Elegy becomes a site for heartbreak, hallucination, dreamlike situation, all-consuming love affair, and a state of abjection as a result of being a failed lover. All that is “stable in this psychic landscape is the desire of the lover and

its transgressive nature. This is not a respectable love for a respectable matron, but a shameful passion for an irregular mistress held captive by another lover or master" (61). Love has "become a form of personal torture. The poet feels himself divided and torn like a body laid on a cross" (56). Works produced by the canonical Latin elegists regularly invoke "elegy's self-confinement to the minor themes of love and erotic intrigue in opposition to the heroic sweep and political engagement of epic [elegy's anti- genre]" (52). For further explanation, see also Michael Roberts, "Late Roman Elegy", in The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2010).

27. Sacks, The English Elegy, 3.

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Chapter Two

Hayden's Life, Theory, and Symbolic Poetry

2.1: Robert Hayden's life and poetics: An overview:

No defeat is made up entirely of defeat — Since
The world it opens is always a place
formerly
unsuspected. A
world lost
a world unsuspected
beckons to new places.
— William Carlos Williams, “The Descent”

The story of Robert Hayden's (1913-80) life is “a moving one of integrity amid difficulties.”[1] Robert Hayden's mother, a glamorous, charming woman of mixed race, appeared to be white; his father, Asa Sheffey, was a black laborer.[2] Born as Asa Sheffey in a black ghetto in Detroit[3] and abandoned by his parents at eighteen months as a consequence of their failed marriage, he was given to be raised by neighbors – Sue Ellen and William Hayden, who renamed him. In spite of being poor and his eyesight was severely limited from birth, he was able to obtain a college education, and made his living as a college teacher, first at Fisk University and then at the University of Michigan.[4]

Hayden's life was troubled with great suffering, loss, and sadness both in the internal world of his household, “fearing the chronic angers of that house,”[5] and in the external world of his racist society. He “was born into a torn country, a nation divided by social ideologies that espoused the myth of race, that constricted social mobility, that repressed human sexuality, and that stacked human worth [recognition] and work into tiny, narrow boxes.” In contrast to this constrained setting, his writing was an act of resistance, a struggle to defy the ideas that encouraged oppression.[6]

Hayden, like Countee Cullen, had always insisted on being known as a poet who happens to be African American rather than a black poet, and he could be belligerent about it. He resisted the labeling of poets with regard to their ethnic background[7]: according to him, there was “no such thing as black literature. There's good literature and there's bad. And that's all!”[8]

His insistence on being “a poet concerned with humankind as a whole and not a poet functioning as a spokesman for a specific group did, however not prevent him from meticulously researching African American history, in order to write poems that deal with this particular struggle” of lost identity and oppressed minority.[9] This indicates why Hayden admired W.B. Yeats for – as one critic writes – “his ability to create out of the folk culture of his people an art that spoke to all humanity.”[10]

Nevertheless, many poems by the poet “touch on the personal experience of a speaker struggling with questions of identity – questions that often triggered by outside pressure.”[11] According to his poetics, Hayden refutes poetry that only functions as “some kind of emotional or psychic release.”[12] Hayden thinks that poets who focus on poetry as an attempt to transcend neurosis – to find liberation form it through the creative act – and disregard the aesthetic, artistic, and social part of writing “Are unable to throw off … the burden of consciousness.… Art is not escape, but a way of finding order in chaos, a way of confronting life.”[13] To Hayden, poetry makes something happens, because it changes sensibility. Indeed, Hayden describes poetry as an art form that “deal[s] with fundamental human concerns.… Poetry can offer no solutions to our dilemmas nor it intended to, but it can help us understand ourselves at this stage of human evolution. It can make us aware. And it can give us a special kind of joy.”[14]

More importantly, scholars, nevertheless, have stressed the important and complex theme of transformation in Hayden's poetry. Howard Faulkner, for example, defines the poet's main theme as “transformation,” potentially both toward the worse and toward the better, but “At his most affirmative, sustained explicitly by the Baha'i [sic] faith,”[15] so that Hayden retains hope while acknowledging existing horrors,[16] as depicted clearly in most of his major poems like “Words in the Mourning Time.” In a similar vein, John Hatcher, in his book From the Auroral Darkness: The Life and Poetry of Robert Hayden (1984), concludes that “…Hayden's total theoretical paradigm of the poetic process reflects and corresponds to the Baha'i concept of human transformation and the underlying intent of the Romantic theorists.”[17] Indeed, Michael Harper called Hayden “the poet of perfect pitch,” and he noted that Hayden's solution to the desire for spiritual transformation “is to find transcendence *living among the living.”*[18]

Unfortunately, many writers of the 1960s were not open to the depth and breadth of humanity's possibilities as revealed in the poetry of Robert Hayden. Hayden's egalitarianism – the concept of equality – and Baha'i faith were antithetical to the competitive and hostile temperament of many of the younger militant writers of the Black Arts Movement. Because he would not support the political doctrine advocated by the authoritarianism of the black aesthetic,[19] “his artistic philosophy grated upon the limited vision and selfish ideals of a more didactic and antagonistic literary sector.” His poetic stance on artistic individuality and freedom was regarded as an escape (scapegoating) from his political responsibility in the freedom struggle. He became “the primary target for ideological ridicule and the recipient of considerable outrage.”[20]

While his poetry was being praised in Senegal as the centerpiece of international negritude, Hayden was being assailed as the scapegoat of choice for a new generation of African-American poets.[21] At Fisk's First Black Writer's Conference, during the late sixties, Hayden was castigated by Melvin Tolson – the leader of the Conference – and other adherents of Ron Karenga's “black cultural nationalism” precisely because of those so-called apolitical, high modernist, and humanistic values.[22] Tolson led the attack against Hayden by describing him as “the stooge of exploitative capitalists and, all in all, a traitor to his race.”[23] As a result, he was severely rejected and attacked as an “Uncle Tom” by black students and black writers.[24] For the most part, Tolson and his supporters endorsed the prevailing black aesthetic as was succinctly summarized by Karenga when he said, "All art must reflect and support the Black Revolution and any art that does not discuss and contribute to the revolution is invalid. Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution."[25] Put it another way, art should be the voice of political ideology.

Robert Hayden refused to be defined by anything other than the demands of his artistic craft. He refused to be limited or ghettoized by others on account of his race or have his work judged on the basis of its relevance to the black political struggle. His task is, in his words, "to reflect and illuminate the truth of human experience."[26] Hayden early uncovered "the detrimental effect of using poetry as propaganda and courageously withstood the later onslaught of those who wished him to contrive verse as ideological slogan."[27] More pointedly, Hayden affirmed the essential relationship between poetry and man's desire for transcendence: "If there exists a poetry of despair and rejection, there is also a poetry that affirms the humane and spiritual."[28]

As Pontheolla Williams reflects, however, Hayden's "refusal to be categorized as a black poet was not a rejection of his biological inheritance of the black struggle but was rather a refusal to be restricted in subject matter to 'race' or to be identified with… jingoism and propagandistic didacticism."[29] Hayden's repudiation of what has come to be called identity politics should be understood as an intelligent strategy followed by the poet to serve two quintessential goals: (1) "as a passionate defense of the literary aesthetic: poetry fashions a figural reality engendered (but not contained) by the political and the historical,"[30] and (2) after an introductory discussion of the role of outsiders, of history, of change, of transformations, of metamorphoses in Hayden's poetry, Vera M. Kutzinski claims:

> Ultimately, [Hayden's] allegedly apolitical attitude toward poetry emerges not as a weakness but as a strength: rather than making overt political statement and turning his poetry into propaganda, Hayden, in the guise of an inoffensive observer, steadily undermines the ideological foundations of American society to clear a space in which to articulate his own difference. His poetic language does not simply protest or praise; it transfigures and, in the process, establishes its own form of self-knowledge.[31]

In this sense, Hayden is a political in the broadest sense of the term: through his poetry one could reenter the bowels of the slave ship and cleave to memory in the quest to be free.[32] If by *"civilized"* one means "neither an empty courtesy nor a bland neutrality nor an isolation from life in favor of books but a focused compassion and sympathy" toward personal relationships, then, according to Gibbons in his essay "A Man That in His Writing Was Most Wise," Robert Hayden was one of the most civilized poets among the poets.[33] As a result of his belief in the viability of all the major religions, Hayden's literary allegiances were similarly divided:[34]

> One thing – if it's not itself many – that distinguishes Hayden's work, as Rampersad suggests, is its heterogeneity. There are several Haydens, often heard together. There is the modernist Hayden … who is influenced by Pound and Williams; there is the classically literary Hayden, who alludes to the old canon, from Shakespeare through Keats and Hopkins to Yeats and Spender; there is the idiomatic Hayden, who grew up on the streets of Detroit; and there is the musical Hayden, who learned from jazz and blues what Bartok learned from Hungarian folk dances.[35]

In other words, Hayden's poetry was handsomely indebted to what have been called mainstream Eurocentric traditions at the same time it was markedly affected by his African-American heritage.[36] This assimilation of literary traditions is clearly to be found in his later blues elegies – where the genre of the blues and the traditional (or more particularly modern) elegy are linked together – discussed at the end of Chapter Three.

The following section and the next one would be limited to an interpretive discussion of selected poems by Hayden. The study attempts to answer questions such as: what forms of loss that are depicted in Hyades's poetry? What types of consolation that could be found in his elegies and elegiac texts – transcendent consolation, resistant consolation, or a combination of the two? How the theory of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" might be theorized in a work somehow completely figured by the African American experience? And where one could put Hayden's elegiac text; in the modern elegy, or in the traditional elegy (explained within the Section of the work of mourning in the First Chapter), or there should be certain new thought to contain them adequately? Admittedly, the answer to such prevailing questions should not be understood as linear or clear-cut, rather, they would be more contingent.

2.2: Meditative, Symbolic Poems:

Swam from
the ship somehow;
Somehow began the
measured rise.
— Robert Hayden, "The Diver"

The elegy and elegiac mode of writing preponderate in "Hayden's oeuvre, thereby illustrating a poetics of loss at the heart of this writer's life and artistic achievement."[37] For a careful analysis of Hayden's poetry, it would be of great importance, first of all, to understand his elegiac matrix.

The poetics of loss, importantly, is not restricted to the study of elegy, but as well elegiac expression (the poet under study has written both elegies and elegiac texts). Written texts generally concerned with loss appear "to be strongly oriented not only toward commemoration and mourning but as well toward what Gerald Vizenor has called the continuance and survivance" notions[38]. The elegiac mode, John Frow writes, "is a matter of tone – of reflective melancholy or sadness." Frow quotes Morton Bloomfield's view that since the early romantic period, elegy "is not a genre but a mode of approaching reality."[39]

Hayden's texts written in the elegiac mode approach reality with a vision of continuance and survivance – this latter term is compound of the notion of survival through resistance.[40] Elegiac texts, and hence Hayden's, could include land loss, ceremonial loss, language loss, culture loss, loss of the young to drugs, alcohol and suicide. There is also the loss of names; some of the names bestowed by the whites upon African people were not merely entangling but painfully derogatory. William Bright has noted that this pattern seems to group black people with animals (e.g., horse: stallion, mare, colt) rather than with other human groups.[41] It is unusual for ethnic groups to be called by names the group finds offensive, e.g., the persistent use of offensive names as catalogued by Hayden in his "Words in the Morning Time":

> is neither gook nigger honkey wop nor kike
>
> but man
> permitted to be man. (CP, 98).

Native Americans, slaves and other casualties of America's imperial history become increasingly prominent in the literary language of loss from the second half of the eighteenth century till the contemporary era.[42] As such, elegy was part of the long racialized drama of sorrow and resistance that characterized the mourning culture of black Americans.[43] The violence and political upheaval, racial ideology, and unvoiced political rage (grievance) highlight elegy's vicarious mourning of a bereaved collective to gain qualified social as well as ideological acceptance.[44]

Therefore, Hayden and other African-American elegists must struggle to preserve, restore, or recuperate a sense of the severed affiliations from which blacks suffered disproportionality. For many people, and particularly the slaves, "to mourn publically at all was to consecrate ties of feeling and of blood that often lay under the heaviest interdictions."[45] Admittedly, the African-Americans are deprived by their white oppressors to mourn or express their suffering. This point has been intelligently explained by Peter Sacks:

> [T]he act of mourning quite simply included the act of inheritance…The connection between mourning and inheritance has remained a close one throughout history. Most interesting for any reader of the elegy is the fact that… the right to mourn was from earliest times legally connected to the right to inherit.[46]

The African-Americans did not have the right to possess or inherit (this theme of dispossession has been partly explained in the Section of the Meaning of Literary Pastoral) something in their New American World, so they were not acknowledged to continue their rituals of mourning and ceremonies.

In spite of that unjust prohibition, however deeply veiled, “African Americans wrote and published elegies of their own in English, helping to determine the cultural role that mourning would play in the oppositional consciousness of both blacks and whites.”[47] It is worth noting, here, a very special thing about the African-American elegy: despite their production of elegiac expression, African-American elegists employed elegiac conventions and techniques to manage and direct their anger at the injustice of society, the injustice, that is, of their own ungrieved, unacknowledged losses,[48] “mouth of agony shaping a cry it cannot utter” (CP, 113).

Among these conventions and techniques is the concept of departicularization. The lack of particularizing detail in African American elegy, in general, “is a sign of more than mere poetic economy or the universalizing language of mourning.” The indirect expression of the story of slavery, childhood trauma, castration, sectarian conflict, and serial loss is the strategy followed by African American elegists to reflect on their own uncompleted mourning.[49] In addition, departicularization technique enables a form of reflexivity based on a shared experience of deracination and collective traumatized experience of the blacks in general. African American elegists “perform threatened continuity as a form of identity.”[50]

Admittedly, the kinship relations of salves and free blacks were profoundly and repeatedly disrupted via kidnapping and transportation. “Social death” or “natal alienation,” as described by the sociologist Orlando Patterson, means that all of a slave's social relations, such as might exist with parents, children, siblings, spouses, follow workers,[51] for example, “were never recognized as legitimate or binding.”[52] Torn away from all claims and obligations, the black person becomes what Patterson calls “a genealogical isolate”:

> Formally isolated in social relations with those who lived, also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of ancestors.… Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious

> community of memory …. Unlike other persons, doing so meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen or patrollers, and his heritage.[53]

As a result, African American elegists discovered possibilities for managing the unmitigated alienation, marginalization, and privation of slavery and the ungrievable – because largely unknown – losses.[54] Therefore, one of the salient themes of antislavery elegy is the curtailment of mourning, either through direct suppression or as a consequence of general privation.[55]

The elegy as a transmissible cultural heritage and as a site for the development of the African-American genealogical imagination instead of genealogical ties, could help constitute an African-American poetic genealogy.[56] The extravagant idea, here, "is that the telos of American elegy is not consolation for the deaths of others, but fulfillment, rather, of a specifically political, shared happiness that loss misnames."[57] Louise Fradenburg had developed a properly political reading of the elegy, of theories of elegy, and of elegiac theory as an explicitly utopian project:

> If we can grieve for our particular losses, and admit futurity to our interpretation, we can perhaps begin to outline an alternative to the hermeneutics of transcendence. In doing so we could perhaps recognize that the seeking of community in the form of undifferentiated unions or of unions predicated on identity can never be anything other than a defense against loss; we could also consider the possibility that historical community might be re-imagined as the promise of relationship between irreducible particularities.[58]

Even when driven violently toward a humiliated and powerless solitude typical of most African-Americans' lives, grief may bring "to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility."[59] Figuring elegy within this particular framework, Hayden was able to articulate a more nuanced and culturally grounded understanding of the elegy and elegiac poetry "as a medium, an instrument for social and political change."[60] By transgressing religious, literary, and cultural norms, Hayden's poetics of loss "braves the world's intractability, thus articulating the negotiation of loss within a dynamic context of interpersonal, textual, and social transformation."[61]

Gwendolyn Brooks, most noted among the reviewers, rightly distinguished Hayden's technique of departicularization (discussed above) from the "bare-fight boys," poets who pour out raw emotion, their "wounds like faucets above his page."[62] She designates Hayden as a type of poet who "finds life always interesting, sometimes appalling, sometimes appealing, but consistently amenable to a clarifying enchantment via the powers of Art," a poet who has a "reverence for the word of Art."[63]

"The Diver," which would serve as a methodological paradigm for interpreting subsequent elegies, is a highly symbolic elegy which most critics consider very crucial to Hayden's major themes and elegiac tropes (descent and ascent). The elegy is quite ambiguous and, "consequently, there are various opinions as to what exactly is being represented by this highly imagistic piece, but it is clear to every serious reader that it prefigures the spiritual journey [particularly that of an African-American person]."

On a literal level, the elegy presents a first-person description by a scuba diver of his descent, his near-fatal experience with nitrogen narcosis ("rapture of the deep"), and his "measured rise" to the surface. Symbolically, the work has been variously interpreted as implying a death wish, as depicting a sublimated desire for sexual union with a person of another color, as implying a desire to escape from racial prejudice through subterfuge, or simply as a figural treatment of a personal depression. This elegy, importantly, "has been deemed influenced by or having parallels to Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium," Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, and Hayden's own "Veracruz."[64]

Most scholars –like Hatcher, Wilburn Williams, and Pavlic – agree that the diver's decision to rise from the underwater depths is a positive thing, a return to life, a decision like that of the persona in "Veracruz" to overcome death drive and participate in reality.[65] The diver's descent is a conscious act, a matter of deliberate choice, a strong longing for death. The appeal to death here "is paradoxically felt as a profound intensification of life. Death takes, or at least seems to promise to take" the man to the very core of life.[66] In this way, the poem recalls Keatsian fascination for death as a vitalizing transcendence. Hayden's diver's longing to be united with "those hidden ones," his passion to "have/done with self and /every dinning/ vain complexity" (CP, 4), "can be satisfied only if he tears away the mask that sustains his life."[67]

The knotty and puzzled climax of the elegy brings an overwhelming extremity of feeling to the critical moment that finds the diver poised between life and death. After the bitter (yet necessary) confrontation with the labyrinthine and potentially annihilating swirl of contradictory instincts, perceptions, and the frightening under water realm of "lost images/fadingly remembered"(CP, 3), the diver rises liberated, consoled and confirmed. He "somehow" begins the "measured rise," "no nearer to winning the object of his quest but presumably possessed of a deeper, more disciplined capacity for experience." ("Measured" is decidedly meant to make the reader aware of the poet's subordination to the rules of his poetics of loss).[68]

In the majority of Hayden's works of mourning, there is a necessary negotiation between transcendent consolation and resistant consolation. Thus, Hayden negotiates "a precarious yet vital balance between, on the one hand, acknowledging a desire for transcendence and, on the other, subverting that possibility for atemporal solace and subordinating it to the poem's ongoing engagement with the wayward course of human action."[69] The consolatory concept in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts can be found in his mystical view of Baha'u'llah. Many scholars have noted that the traditional Christian consolation in the English elegy – the elevation of the deceased to an afterlife more desirable than life on earth – is a consolation that has virtually disappeared from postcolonial[70] poetic consciousness (especially for the African-Americans, who find in that religious doctrine a deep racial prejudice).

The reconcilement of “anger and grief through an institutional theology that posits continued life in a transcendent realm (as exhibited in elegies by Milton, Donne, and Tennyson, for example) has diminished considerably as such religious consolation has become increasingly problematic.” Problematic as well as is the traditional Orphic consolation.[71]

In his elegies and elegiac texts about losses both personal and public, Hayden writes “against conventional Western mourning practices (that celebrate transcendent spiritual remedies to affliction and suffering) in order to shape his own private grief into an aesthetic form of oppositional cultural work and a linguistic mode of social resistance.”[72] According to Hayden, then, the process of reconciliation and transformation as depicted in the Baha'i Writings becomes increasingly important unifying theme in his poetry of loss. While the Baha'i Writings “exhort one to 'turn away from thyself,' to focus on the essentially spiritual nature of life, they also ordain that faith be expressed in deeds – knowledge and faith – through working daily in the physical world.”[73] These concepts thus parallel the vision (underwater) and return, descent and ascent of the diver. Importantly the prophet Baha'u'llah argues that: “Men who suffer not attain no perfection.” He further adds.

> The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering… Just as the plow furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment.[74]

Yet, “complete detachment” is not enough to lead a meaningful life. In “the Diver,” for instance, the speaker says that he strives against the conflicting desires to live and to die.[75] Hayden often accentuates images of such a tension (between a desire for transcendence and an acknowledgment of historical contingency) with the technique of chiaroscuro – “auroral dark”; “languid frenzy”; “brightness/so bright that it was darkness”; “covenant of timelessness and time”; “morning and mourning” – “oxymora that underscore the knife edge… that drives his work's tenacious (if paradoxical) commitments to aesthetics, politics, and human conditions.”[76]

A similar struggle marks the attempts of the old man to fly again in the poem “For a Young Artist”: After many painful attempts, he succeeds:[77] “the angle of ascent/achieved” (CP, 133). And while, the poet denotes, “that flight itself has not yet been achieved, the angle of that ascent has been.”[78] Rising, whether from the bottom of the sea to its surface or from the earth to the sky, depends upon the struggle to establish the proper balance between the contradictory feelings.[79] The diver, then, “somehow, though… began the “measured rise,” finding in order the means whereby to contain his chaotic, opposing feelings.”[80]

Symbolically, the diver's descent is representative of the descent of man into slavery and his “measured rise” to freedom and emancipation of body and spirit[81]:

I yearned to
find those hidden
ones, to fling aside
the mask and call to them,
yield to rapturous
whisperings, have
done with self and
every dining
vain complexity.
(CP, 4).

In this regard, Hayden's “process does not surrender entirely to secluded indeterminacy. Hayden's poems seek to share the deeply sought. His is a solitary poetics of communion.” Such a poetics, Pavlic quotes Michael Harper, “is political.”[82] From the diver's depth, the “measured rise” “becomes a satellite's scope on American culture.”[83] John Hatcher has explained carefully this process of representation:

> The effect of this structure is a dramatic progression from the subtle indirection… to the intimate, personal groping journey of the persona as he descends into mourning and searches for his 'true voice,' his human[lost] identity.
>
> He wends back up in a 'measured rise' empowered from within by free will, his 'courage leonine,' and assisted from without by Bahá'u'lláh's 'transilluminating word,' just as the Afro-American people and mankind in general are similarly empowered and impelled.[84]

Importantly, “The Diver” is the poetic preface to Hayden's best work, from A Ballad of Remembrance to American Journal.[85] Melancholically driven, the persona “plunges beneath the street-level reality in search of an immediate and secluded sense of freedom.” The underwater spaces “mitigate aboveground forces – rational, racist, positivist – which distort consciousness and confine African-American experiences of space and self within abstract [“Monsters of abstraction” (CP, 84)], normative structures.”[86]

In “Latin-American poetry,” Octavio Paz discusses the pitfalls of abandonment, renunciation, capitulation, and withdrawal. He argues the need to remain actively in contact with social and historical concerns because abandonment alone “can only withdraw into itself… [and the] dangers attendant upon [it] are irresponsible song or silence.”[87] Seen from this angle, Hayden's method of a deeper engagement through withdrawal set forth in “The Diver” offers a combination of Paz’s modes[88] – detachment and engagement. Evincing the costs and dangers of the descendental path, Hayden wrote a hauntingly confessional letter to Harper:

> The diver had to admit that he couldn’t surface again alone, without help…. Certainly, for me, an admission of almost complete defeat…. Well, this sounds like melodrama, sure enough, but it's ice-cold reality of which I speak. [89]

Unfortunately, this “ice-cold reality” demonstrates “the alignment of white supremacist above-ground and the slippery slopes of descendental process”[90] (by the blacks), which is a real and past-present danger. Historically, the American State encourages the formation of political identities founded on injury and is in fact invested in maintaining that injured status[91] or, according to Hatcher, forming what is called “unfinished self” (CP,71) – which alludes forcefully to all the Afro-American problems with identity and the conundrums which are a natural ingredient in man's existence.[92] For contemporary political discourse, political health (as in freedom or liberty) is paradoxically defined through and relies on injury and illness[93] – it is really the "bitter juices of justice, law, human rights, and peace."[94]

The subject of injury (denigration and segregation) is under the dirty bondage of racism. In many ways the question of race, what Gunnar Myrdal called the American dilemma in 1944, continues to present the central site of national grief till today.[95] That grief is more complicated one, because the barrier between who is mourning and what is being mourned for is dissolved.[96] Since the opening decades of the 20th century, it has become increasingly more urgent to consider how mourning might establish shared forms of cultural memory, cultural trauma, and then, fostering the aims of social justice and collective shared happiness.[97] In a fashion similar to his notion of sustained individual mourning, Jacques Derrida offers an account of cultural loss:

> something that one does not know… not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this being – there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge.[98]

Here, mourning has emerged as a way to address different forms of oppression, violence, enslavement, and marginalization. Concerning African-Americans, that non-object of loss is primarily the slave's denied abstract status as person without absolute differentiation or racial discrimination.[99]

As Eric Smith writes, "Elegy is specifically about what is missing and also about what is more certainly known to have been formerly possessed."[100] Indeed, Priscila Uppal writes, "We mourn what we wish we had not lost and what we wish we could have".[101] This configuration, already explored in terms of its relevance to families and to nationalist, regionalist, and local identities, is undoubtedly relevant to elegies for cultural losses and displacements. Then, what consolation can be offered, for example, for cultural losses that may be irretrievable? For many African-American elegists, "mourning cultural losses is a matter not only of grief but of cultural survival."[102]

The psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan has theorized the role of narratives of victimizations to national identity as a people's “chosen trauma” – a historical wound – made to serve as a source of group identity. Volkan writes:

> As injured self – and internalized object –images pass from generation to generation, the chosen trauma they carry assumes new functions, new tasks. The historical truth about the event is no longer of psychological moment for the large group; what is important is the sense of being linked together by the shared chosen trauma, which usually becomes highly mythologized…. [T] ransgenrational transmission of chosen trauma provoke[s] complicated tasks of mourning and/or reversing humiliation; since all are carriers of unconscious psychological process of past generations, chosen traumas bind group members together more powerful [than chosen glories].[103]

As such, the collective mourning is often fundamental in the formation of group identity. And the recursive or echoic quality of poetic language of mourning can, indeed, foster the sense of simultaneous community.[104] A chosen trauma – or collective trauma – reflects the existence of “perennial mourning” within society, whether it is actively experienced or hidden under the heavy interdictions.[105] According to psychoanalytical studies, a “loss may be traumatic in its own right, especially when it is sudden and unexpected, but the combination of loss with actual trauma associated with the mourner's helplessness, shame, humiliation, and survival guilt seriously complicates the mourning process.”[106]

Consequently, the ethnic and ethical mourning taking place in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts demands the necessity to rethink the relationship between Freud's “Mourning and Melancholia.”

Freud's “Mourning and Melancholia” (1915) supplies the groundwork in searching for a theoretical vocabulary for the experience of loss and the sense of destruction.[107] With regard to Freud's definition that mourning is the reaction to “the loss of a loved one, or… some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”[108] The “and so on” suggests that the list of possible substitutes for the loss of a loved object is open-ended. According to Freud, successful mourning necessitates detaching one's self from the lost object and eventually reattaching affection elsewhere. For Freud, mourning entails the detachment and withdrawal of libido from that lost object or ideal. The healthy work of mourning does not "impels the ego to give up the object," but also the subject attempts to reinstate the death sentence "by disparaging the object, denigrating it, even as it were, by slaying it"[109] once more. Melancholia, by contrast, is pathological. In other words, the melancholic cannot "get over" his loss, cannot work out his loss in order to invest in new objects.

Concerning African Americans (and other groups of color), the lost abstraction is the ideal of whiteness. Because such ideals – as being fully assimilated into the "melting pot" of America – remain unattainable, processes of assimilation and integration are "suspended, conflicted, and unresolved. The irresolution of this process places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework."[110] For the most cases, the Afro-American subject – marginal man – desires to assimilate into mainstream American culture at any cost. The marginal man "faithfully subscribes to the ideals of assimilation only through an elaborate self-denial of the daily acts of institutionalized racism directed against him."[111] At the same time, indeed, the marginal man finds it "difficult to admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he [or she] aspires to join a racist society."[112] Caught in this conflicting contradiction, the marginal man must necessarily become a split subject – one who exhibits a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time he "displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals."[113]

When an Afro-American leaves his country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, he or she must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract. These include homeland, family, language, ancestors, identity, property, status in the community, and so on. The history of hypocritical juridical exclusions of African Americans reveals a social structure that prevent the immigrant to find closure to these losses by investing in new objects – in the American Dream, for example. If the libido is not refreshed by the investment in new objects, new communities, and new ideals, then the melancholia that ensues from this condition can be transferred to the subsequent generations[114]–“transgenerational transmission of trauma,”[115] to borrow a phrase from Vamik Volkan. At the same time, the hope of assimilation and integration can also be transferred to the coming generation.

Here, assimilation might be said to characterize a “process involving not just mourning or melancholia but that intergenerational negotiation between mourning and melancholia. Configured as such, this notion begins to depathologize melancholia by situating it as… the outcome of the mourning process that underwrites”[116] cultural losses and displacements. This continuum between mourning and melancholia allows to understand “the negotiation of racial melancholia as conflict rather than damage.” In their studies on racial melancholia, David L. Eng and Shinhee Han are “dissatisfied with the assumption that the minority subjectivities are permanently damaged – forever injured and incapable of ever being whole.”[117] Instead, the focus here is on the melancholic's absolute refusal to relinquish the other at any costs.

Racial melancholia, in this regard, is a structure of feeling, a structure of everyday life, and part of daily existence and survival.[118] This melancholic process is to be seen as one way in which socially disparaged objects – racially and sexually deprivileged others – live on in the psychic realm. This behavior proceeds from an attitude of revolt on the part of the ego. It displays the ego's melancholic (withdrawal) yet militant refusal (engagement) to allow certain objects to disappear into oblivion. The militant refusal on the part of the ego – better yet, a series of egos – to let go – is at the heart of “melancholia's productive political potentials. Paradoxically, in this instance, the ego's deathdrive may be the very precondition for survival, the beginning of a strategy for living and living on.”[119] The threat of ambivalence, anger, and rage that characterized the preservation of the lost object should not be seen as a “result of some ontological tendency on the part of the melancholic”; rather “it is a social threat.”[120] The following diagram draws in more precise terms the differences between melancholia and racial melancholia:

Melancholia	Racial Melancholia
disease (pathology)	depathologized
loss that affects one-person psychology	loss that affects social group identity
despair	hope for fulfillment and redemption across generations
turning from outside to inside (intrapsychic), which threatens to erase the political bases of melancholia by rendering the social invisible	turning from inside to outside (intersubjective), hence having political bases
damage, and, hence destructive; the erasure of the psychic identity in addition to, in certain cases, the physical suicide	necessary conflict, and, hence productive
inhibits activism	encourages political activism
pathology, a self-absorbed mood	a mechanism that (re) constructs Identity
passive static remembrance	active mourning and memory creation
it is the ego that holds sway	the loved object (not the ego) holds sway
loss can be nihilistic, complete alienation from the outside world	loss can become productive, ethical and political project

diagram mine

According to Ann Parry, Gillian Rose, in his Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation (1996), rejected “everlasting melancholia” in the face of cultural suffering “because it provided no ground for learning, growth and knowledge.”[121] As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian outline in their introduction to Loss: The politics of Mourning (2003):

> Indeed the politics of mourning might be described as that creative process mediating a hopeful or hopeless relationship between loss and history… To impute to loss a creative instead of a negative quality may initially seem counterintuitive…[but] we might say that as soon as the question “What is lost?” is posed, it invariably slips into the question “What remains?”… This attention to remains generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.[122]

The rejection of “everlasting melancholia” for a politics of mourning that advocates action and social transformation is preferred by Hayden, who tries to “restore and recreate memories and ties to present, past, and future generations, rather than to give in to despair.”[123] The decline of traditional mourning rituals and elegiac consolation – the conventional Orpheus-Eurydice and the Freudian work of mourning model – “in secularized Western societies might very well reflect the inadequacies of institutions, including the traditional elegy, to provide adequate means to mourn the losses of identity.”[124] These conventions, indeed, are complicated by the needs of modern post-colonial mourners and cultural and historical circumstances.[125]

Thus, the modern experience of loss, according to Hayden, is no longer that of a conventional elegy – what is missing and is sure to have been formerly possessed is a loved one who has died. Instead, “suffering is inherently political and ethical for Hayden.”[126] Hayden's great determination for hopeful balance, as in his symbolic elegy “The Diver,” “engenders what may be the most impossible (and essential) work of mourning: to accept the want of deliverance from worldly suffering – [the melancholic acceptance of death as a redemptive, transcendent consolation] – and yet relinquish such wished-for consolation, “somehow began the/measured rise” into the half-light of human time.”[127] The melancholic withdrawal is curtailed by the poet's determination to be engaged in life, accepting the struggle as a means of ethical responsibility for freedom and emancipation.

The motif of Keatsian fascination for death as a vitalizing transcendence and then turning back toward life is also apparent in “Veracruz.”[128] In this elegy, the speaker himself “senses the appeal of death as he looks out across the tranquil expanse of sea, so beauteous and serene compared to the 'flyblown' village.” Feeling the transcendent reality which lies behind the “striptease” of reality, the speaker is tempted to leap from the boat to join that veiled reality. “Veracruz,” once again, reiterates the diver's manifesto to observe the intersection of (or the internal struggle between) consciousness and experience[129]:

> Leap now
> and cease from error.
> Escape. Or shoreward turn,
> accepting all –
> the losses and farewells,
> the long warfare with self,
> with God. (CP, 20).

Appropriately, the speaker in certain critical moment makes his crucial decision – to turn shoreward and struggle with his faith and with the dull facade of reality, or to attempt to elude that arduous journey by escaping. The persona, like Hayden, chooses life and struggle, an act of faith itself, from a Baha'i perspective[130]: "Men who suffer not, attain no perfection."

Throughout his poetry Hayden presents a chronology of Afro-American people bereft of identity and heritage – genealogical isolates (explained above) – struggling for transcendence, partially through pastoral remembrance of their homeland but primarily through the ascent toward a new and broader understanding of their humanity. The personae delineate a yearning for a lost or subverted identity and a struggle towards faith and meaning of identity.[131]

Dennis Gendron has often observed, in tandem with other critics, that "cycles of depression, sterility and self-doubt… bedeviled this man [Hayden] and poet" and that Hayden's emotional and psychological suffering, his "feeling of futility," deeply inflect the subject of his poetry.[132] "The Peacock Room" is one of Hayden's finest poems on the elegiac theme of transience[133]:

Triste metaphor.
Hiroshima Watts My Lai.
Thus history scorns
the vision chambered in gold
and Spanish leather, lyric space;
rebukes, yet cannot give the lie
to what is havened here.
(CP,118).

This poem and "Veracruz," though essentially contemplative, portray complete sequence of emotions, from exposition to falling action. They are among the prime examples of the internal pattern of consolation and reconciliation which form the mental plot structures. Structured around this pattern of consolation (philosophical consolation), these are at once some of the most complex and important poems Hayden wrote.[134] After entering the extravagantly ornate museum room, the poet reflects on the enigmatic question, "What is art? /What is life? /What the Peacock

Room?"(CP, 119). The speaker, when in the room, is briefly sheltered from the external world by its "Exotic, fin de siècle, unreal/and beautiful" (118) environment that takes him into a pastoral beautiful era. For a while, then, the speaker feels secure from the different macrocosmic terrors.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker was caught in recollection of Betsy Graves Reyneau, who had celebrated her twelfth birthday in that lavishly ornamented room. At the end of this stanza, the speaker feels the irony of this "lyric space," this "Triste metaphor," which in spite of its obliviousness to the sad progress of man outside the museum room walls, it never completely hide the sad reality of human life.[135] The speaker quickly recalls Reyneau's passing. He grotesquely imagines her bodily remains:

> her eyeless, old – Med School
> cadaver, flesh-object
>   pickled in formaldehyde,
> who was artist, compassionate,
> clear-eyed. Who was beloved friend.
>   No more. No more
> (CP,119).

This ubi sunt coincides "with all these various associations" – both the aspects of life and death – and leads into the ultimate enigmatic theme: "What is art that it should endure while these subtle, lofty human qualities disappear?" while the room yet remains?[136]

"The Peacock Room" poignantly "embodies these tensions between the poet's desire to praise the timelessness of art – "the vision chambered in gold" – and his concomitant awareness that the "lyric space" of artistic autonomy turns upon the work's apprehension" of unspeakable suffering. The elegy complements the transience and tragic joy evoked by other poems that convey the crucial theme of the poet's crafting of "an intricate counterpoise among personal and public, transcendent and contingent resolutions to the hard facts of loss"[137]: "Locus," "Night-Blooming Cereus," "Theme and Variation," "October," and "Monet's "Waterlilies."

In a 1973 interview, Hayden remarks that the “peacocks lead me into this pain, and they also help me get away from it.”[138] Through such striking (if disturbing) contrasts, Hayden permits the elegy's anguish for transcendence (via the imaginative world of the artistic room), yet modifies that desire, “foregrounding the theme of contingency by means of a subtle juxtaposition of two images”: the redeeming “Rose-leaves” and ruined “ashes.” These ashes are carried along “toward/a bronze Bodhisattva's ancient smile” (CP, 119), which insinuates “unflinching compassion for the world of human suffering rather an ascetic wish for eternal release from social conflict and temporality.”[139] This magnificent elegy alludes once again to the Baha'i consolation of an ever-advancing civilization, and a progressive revelation which structures all history and ultimately shears away the veils of irony and mourning.[140]

The theme of contingency, admittedly, plays a crucial role in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts. In his nostalgic elegy “O Daedalus Fly Away Home” Hayden translates his personal grief into public mourning through a dexterous and qualified acknowledgement of a wish for transcendent consolation within a context of social suffering: “weaving a wish and a weariness together/ to make two wings”(CP,55).

Literally, this elegiac poem portrays a slave's nostalgia for his homeland; Africa. Symbolically, the poem employs an image of flight, which would become a figurative expression of a spiritual transcendence and detachment.[141] Here, Africa is Deadalus's Athens, the biblical Eden, the blissful place which the Africans have all been ostracized and can only (and cannot but) recall[142]:

> Drifting night in the wind pines;
> night is a laughing, night is a longing.
>   Pretty Malinda, come to me.
> Night is a mourning juju man
> weaving a wish and a weariness together
>   to make two wings.
>   O fly away home fly away
> (CP,55; Hayden's italics).

This poem shows the altered (or split) identity of an African-American, who is caught between two (double consciousness) experiences: all the Americans of African descent know this place – America – as home while at the same time knowing that this claim to belonging here – the New World – continues to be contested. Dramatically, this represent Du Bois's concept of the two halves of the "one dark body." Double consciousness delineates "the psychic constitution of African Americans who are at home neither in Africa, where [they] are foreigners, nor in the United States, which declined to assimilate [them] in its melting pot."[143] Undoubtedly, this situation of alienation might either lead its members to the state of easeful death – renunciation – as in "Monody":

> Better the heart should yield and fall and sleep
> In unremembered earth where blowing grass is deep,
> And strive no more in battle dubious and hard –
> Against a foe unworthy of the sword.[144]

Or that the members might be so hopeful that they by determination will emerge victorious over it:

> This grief will perish,
> It will pass
> Like hail blown over
> Summer grass.[145]

Elegies often achieve their most profound and beautiful moments at crisis points in that labor of shaping and articulating sorrow, praise, and consolation – the three fundamental formulaic modes of expression integral to grief, mourning, and the genre's rhetorical dimensions. Eminent scholars in the field of elegy – like Sacks and Ramazani differentiate the premodern (traditional) elegy from the modern poem "with respect to various iterations of psychoanalytic resistance-theory."[146] The general paradigm of elegy – premodern or modern – represents "the genre's struggle either toward or against consolation": the premodern elegy attains positive solace, and, hence exhibits the characteristics of the successful work of mourning, while the modern elegiac poem thwarts, reconstructs, qualifies, or at least complicates resolutions and closures to grief expression and mourning.[147] The modern elegy, thus, represents adequately the features of the poetics of melancholia, a despondent and dispirited body of verse that refuses all forms of substitution, transcendence, redemption or compensation. Ramazani, arguably, demonstrates that "the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss."[148]

If it is hold true that Hayden's theory of consolation is not solely a transcendent (traditional) nor a resistant (modern) one – it is really a negotiation of both – what, then, is distinctively modern about Robert Hayden's elegies? First of all, Hayden repudiates the modern elegy's "melancholic mourning" – endless, violent, ambivalent, and irresolvable mourning. Instead, he adapts his compensatory balance between transcendent and resistant or appositional resolutions to address certain issues in regard to secular, political, and social contexts as a call for cultural critique and political and social activism. This political engagement of Hayden's subject matter is, according to Howard, "a truly modern predicament."[149]

Therefore, "suffering is inherently political and ethical"[150] in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts. Hayden excels as a "symbolist poet struggling with the facts of history,"[151] as in his "Elegies for Paradise Valley." In this sequence of eight ballad-like poem, Hayden reflects on his early years in the Detroit ghetto (ironically called Paradise Valley), where he was born. Hayden describes a brutal scene he has seen from a window on a "wasteland infested with race rituals including those cultural carcinogens which, as Ellison's Invisible Man observed, promote certain phases of blindness"[152]:

> My shared bedroom's window
> opened on alley stench.
> A junkie died in maggots there.
> I saw his body shoved into a van.
> I saw the hatred for our kind
> glistening like tears
> in the policemen's eyes.
>
> (CP, 163; italics mine).

The persona and his people (race) must struggle to survive in dwellings not their own, “Rats fighting in their walls” (CP, 164), or, more inclusively, that the Black populace – any group of color – is viewed by the rest of citizenry (the white ghetto landlords) as “an unwanted nuisance in the walls of the city edifice.”[153] The sequence, thus, focuses on the sense of being alien in society as “misfits, asocial, anti-social, outcasts:”[154]

> I knew myself (precocious
> in the ways of guilt
> and secret pain).
> (CP, 170).

This sense of “guilt/and secret pain” yields clear insight into the complexity of the compensatory notion in regard to the African Americans (particularly the elegists). Max Cavitch explains:

> The notion that the articulation of loss may lead to consolation and redress is at once a secular and a religious notion. Both law and theology sustain it, and elegy has made abundant use of both discourses even as in the modern era the foundations of faith in worldly and other worldly justice alike have been radically unsettled. Perhaps no modern constituency has been so isolated from the mechanisms of legal and spiritual redress as American slaves, who had no legal standing as persons (except when accused of crime), whom opportunities for the preservation and transmission of African belief system were substantially curtailed, and whose confidence in the operations of divine justice was constantly undermined by the hypocrisy of Christian slave holders. Outside the laws and often beyond the reach of religious solace, largely illiterate and commonly muzzled (literally or figuratively), the slave's complaint, the articulation of his grievance, and the expression of his woe have been among the most heavily suppressed and violently circumscribed in modern history.[155]

For many African-American writers, even the most intimate grief had long seemed inextricable from racial experience.[156] Demonstrating that his bereavement is inextricable from racial experience, Michael Harper angrily recalls how whites have suppressed and denied the grief of African Americans: he alludes to the grief of another melancholic father, Du Bois, to whom a Cornell student wrote, asking on behalf of the class:

> “Will you please tell us
> whether or not it is true
> that negroes
> are not able to cry?” [157]

The denial of a collective history of mourning deprives African-Americans, like other racial and ethnic minorities, of their humanity and dignity, and of a source of group identity.[158]

While Hayden has lived in a time of somehow relative freedom of speech and grief expression, vestiges of the prohibition against depicting unrepresentable subject matter (as in the phenomena of lynching) have led the poet and other writers and artists to seek alternate aesthetic strategies to insist on historical losses and the suffering of the blacks. In defiance of restrictions against using art to signify certain categories of hidden or forbidden subject matter, Hayden “tears away the rhetorical veil that falls over episodes too terrible to recount… employing a poetics of indeterminacy that both tempers and intensifies the truth with its rhetorical power.”[159]

Hayden employs “innovative modes of signification to unveil and expose race-based violence in the United States.” In “Night, Death, Mississippi” and “Figure of Time” Hayden uses the trope of the veil – as a sign of mourning according to Du Bois – both to obscure and reveal in delicate tones of lament the horrifying act of lynching that ultimately solidifies the protest nature of his lynch poems. Each work of Hayden critiques institutionalized violence by figuring hate crime as an expression of a culturally precipitated – motivated – historical reality. Each piece tests conventional limits by “both exposing and estranging customarily veiled topics, inviting the reader to simultaneously bear witness and respond critically.”[160]

Instead of an emotional outcry, the narrative voice in “Figure” is “retrained and ironically muted in tone.” From the dispassionate detail the reader infers the violence that has occurred – the roped wrists, the “Stripes/Of blood like tribal markings," the jeans "torn at the groin," the body itself set angularly, motionless.[161] The narrator, then, goes on describing the chain of torture:

> And the chain, we observe the chain –
> The kind a farmer might have had use for or a man with
> a vicious dog. We have seen its like in hardware
> stories; it is cheap but strong
>
> And it serves and except for the doubled length of it lashing him to the
> torture tree, he would slump to his knees, in
> total subsidence fall.[162]

The poet does not need to tell his reader the emotion he feels or what one should feel; he does not need to explain the inhumanity and injustice which produced such a travesty. Skillfully, the reader infers the violence and the mentality that equates a human being with a "vicious dog."[163] Nevertheless, "only the historical reference, in conjunction with cultural knowledge, can contextualize the poetic expression so that it becomes a politically engaged work of art." The lack of racial tags creates a situation in which the unmistakable depiction of a violent incident comes to signify broader realities of the human condition. This strategy of negative representation, or producing meaning by not signifying, differentiates Hayden's aesthetics from those of earlier high modernist writers, who have followed an essentializing approach to blackness.[164] As the poet explains, "a poem should have silences," and "a poem should have drama, should have tension," because the mere historical cliché mutes the tension.[165] Indeed, "a poem imposes a silence audible as a laugh, a sigh, a groan."[166]

While the persona's race is not indicated, the simile "Stripes/Of blood like tribal markings" evokes both an African origin as well as the Antebellum era, "at that time Stripes being a common word for lashes." In his depiction of the tortured black as "metaphor of a place, a time" Hayden establishes racism as a fundamental moral issue of contemporary America.[167] The poem concludes with "the speaker's sudden awareness, or comforting recollection as a Baha'i, that all the horrors and sorrows he has chronicled or encountered are but signs or figures of this time" in which dramatic transformation and recovery will be ushered in:[168]

The anguish of those multitudes
is in his eyes, his suffering transilluminates
an era's suffering. [169]

As in most of his elegies and elegiac texts, Hayden uses his perspective of Bahá'u'lláh as the consolation to sufferers and the light bringer for the world.[170] This consolatory note is only one side of Hayden's approach to the complexities of human time; he "limns a double bind: suffering engenders the poet's desire for solace as well as a concomitant and persistent awareness of the social conditions that warrant vigilance and correction." He posits an ironic "anticonsolatory" consolation within the specific conflicts and contexts of human time.[171] This difficult paradox "emerges from the productive tension between his personal quest to surpass racial, cultural, and social differences and his artistic commitment to remaining engaged, through his work crafted autonomy,"[172] with the complexities of human time. Across the spectrum of his poems that counter transcendental resolutions to loss – "articulating solace (however qualified or negated) within and against interpersonal, cultural, and historical contexts rather than with positing any firm belief that loss may be compensated by the intervention of immutable transcendent values"[173] – are elegies such as "Full Moon," "A Plague of Starlings," "Killing the Calves," "Electrical Storm," and "The Return."

As a result of his unique experience of loss – which represents his race's experience of loss and suffering – Hayden's elegies address primarily the most intractable work of mourning (a negotiation between mourning and melancholia) that necessitate varying degrees of resistance against consolation. Through such qualification of the work of mourning, Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts "articulate brave… repudiations of the dominant social order, political ideology, and historical consciousness characteristic of twentieth century American culture."[174] According to Hayden's poetics of loss, loss and the experience of suffering engenders or creates a desire for transcendental solace, but at the same time, that loss might become "a catalyst for persistent ethical activism."[175]

Written in response to widely publicized murder, “Night, Death, Mississippi”(1966) mourns the 1964 deaths of the Freedom Riders Goodman, but it also mourns the many lynchings never publicized because whites were not among the victims.[176] In this most horrifying elegy, Hayden once again mutes the clichéd scenes of historical brutality, but to drastically different effect. From the diver's point of view, the descent into the brutal description of a white family ritual of lynching “leaves the white supremacist world above intact.”[177]

The poem is written paradoxically from the perspective of a white family long engaged in the practice of lynching. In the first section, a beastly grandfather vicariously enjoys his son's murder of a man, then participates in the aftermath of the act of lynching.[178] Grown too old to participate in the lynching rituals, the old man reflects on his nostalgic feelings, wishing he could be party to the lynching[179]:

> Time was. Time was.
> White robes like moonlight
> In the sweetgum dark.
> Unbucked that one then
> and him squealing bloody Jesus
> as we cut it off.
>
> (CP, 15).

Here, white masculinity affirms itself through the emasculation and castration of African-American men, “Unbucked” as if animals. pronominal reference like “that one” and “it” further “elide the humanity of this particular victim.”[180] The black man – through the old man's perspective – is a snared buck and a baited bear.

The horrifying descriptions given in the poem; “He hawks and spits, /fevered as by groinfire” (15), and “Unbucked that one,” of course, openly define the subject's driving sadism.[181] In dehumanized logic, the lyncher analyzes the thrill (the climax of sexual pleasure) he experiences from this debased act of prejudice and degradation[182]:

Christ, it was better
than hunting bear
which don't know why
you want him dead.

(CP,16).

The act of emasculation, portrayed as "unbucking, denotes stealing his phallus, the metonymic (strangely fetishized) representation of his human power as a man. The old man's virility, indicated by his neologic groinfire fever, indicates a destructive force."[183] Importantly, Phyllis Klotman describes the process of castration as:

> An initiation ritual in reverse, a warning that white society would not allow, in fact forbade, the passage – of the Afro-American from boy to man. (Slaves went from boy to 'uncle,' These two states of being representing the only stages through which the black male was allowed to pass…). On the other hand, participation in the lynching was patent proof of the initiation into manhood of the lyncher, or a rejuvenation of potency in some ill-starred impotent, who was often able to display tangible evidence of having participated in the orgy.[184]

The invocation to Christ by the old savage man in the poem ironically recall the crucifixion, and the whole tone of this brutal experience implies that this sanctioned perversity – whether in Christianity or in the American Constitution – is a reversal of affirmative conviction of religion and a clear index to the depth of the diver's descent into the darkness of oppression. Returning home at night after mutilating Black men, this rural grandfather jovially relates to the mother how it went[185]:

Then we beat them, he said,
beat them till our arms was tired
and the big old chains
messy and red.

(CP, 16).

For these white oppressors "lynching is a ritual, an integral part of their domestic and social structures – structures preserved through continual exercises in racist violence."[186] Rather than threaten love and connection, racial hatred here encodes and sustains the bonds between “kith and kin”; between community and family respectively.[187]

No doubt, members of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s who attacked Hayden's work – because he insisted upon distinguishing his aesthetic practice, his poetry, from overt political engagement – “would find it offensive that he devotes such vivid realization to this violent and ugly man, not to a condemnation of lynching or to a contrastingly admirable figure, probably black.”[188] Only in three italicized choral lines does Hayden give direct expression to his bitter grief and sadness:

O Jesus burning on the lily cross

O night, raw head and bloodybones night

O night betrayed by darkness not its own
(16).

Thus, the affect of the poem is lodged in its fabric of perspectives; there is a contrast between the old lyncher's mourning for the lost pastime of his murderous youth “Time was, Time was,” and “Hayden's implicit mourning for hundreds of African-Americans unjustly maimed and slain.”[189]

The ambiguous style, combining multiple perspectives, and modes of unspoken communication, “mimics the avoidance urge of those called to witness such atrocities.” The poem, then, as representation as well as refusal to represent, becomes a political statement about a historically specific U.S. phenomenon and a meditation on the perpetuation of human violence. The work also serves as a call to witness, relying on the human impulse to fill that lack of overt expression of victimization and oppression. The aesthetic impulse becomes “infused with a sense of longing and yearning that may or may not be spiritual in nature.”[190]

As a lover of modern art in all its forms, Hayden would have been familiar with these aesthetic strategies of negative representation via silence, absence, and linguistic devaluation and dehumanization. The loss or lack in Haydn's violent terms participates in trauma discourse, at the same time, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once.[191] More importantly, it was Hayden's aim to portray a hidden crime – ritual execution outside the legal system – from the perspective of the white oppressor himself. Such strategy would serve more powerful than overt political descriptions of atrocities and traumas.

This technique of a more deep or implicit way of mourning the blacks' suffering via juxtaposing different points of view – mostly through the mouth of the hypocritical white oppressor – reaches its fullest realization in such poems as “Runagate Runagate” and, most especially, in “Middle Passage.”

Notes

The opening verse lines are from William Carlos Williams, "The Descent," Critical Guide to Poetry for Students, ed. Philip K. Jason. eNotes. com, Inc. 2002. <http://www.enotes.com/topics/descent/depth#in-depth-the-poem> (accessed July 22, 2016).

1. David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After (England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 606.

2. W.D. Snodgrass, "Robert Hayden: The Man in the Middle," in Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry, ed. Laurence Goldstein and Robert Chrisman (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 223.

3. Hayden grew up in an area in Detroit that no longer exists. It was called Black Bottom, a term that identified a section of fertile farmland of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century Detroit. As the automobile industry expanded, black laborers crowded into this space and it became a fertile field for African-American artists, educators, and politicians to till their talents. It became the main black section of the city, and Paradise Valley became the cultural center, the blues and jazz clubs were located; see Melba Joyce Boyd, "Poetry from Detroit's Black Bottom: The Tension Between Belief and Ideology in the Work of Robert Hayden," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 207; original italics.

4. Perkins, Modernism and After, 606.

5. Robert Hayden, Collected Poems, ed. Frederick Glaysher (New York, Liveright, 1985, 41. All subsequent references to Hayden's poems are from this edition; except for the publication of few poems in periodicals, this text is the only source for most of the poems. The page numbers are indicated within the text parenthetically.

6. Boyd, 207.

7. Nassim W. Balestrini, "Robert Hayden (1913-1980): Artistic Integrity and Religious Belief," in Religion in African-American Culture, ed. Winfried Herget and Alfred Hornung, vol. 83 (Winter Heidelberg: Universität sverlag, 2006), 195.

8. Quoted in Julius Lester, "Words in the Mourning Time," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 67.

9. Balestrini, 195.

10. Quoted in Balestrini, 195.

11. Balestrini, 199-200.

12. Robert Hayden, collected Prose, ed. Frederick Glaysher (New York: Liveright, 1985), 141.

13. Quoted in Balestrini, 204.

14. Robert Hayden, quoted in Balestrini, 206-207.

15. During his childhood and adolescence, Robert Hayden was "a member of a Baptist Church in Detroit and participated in church activities which appealed to his enthusiasm for art. Interestingly enough, the Detroit ghetto called "Paradise Valley" in which Hayden grew up was not a uniformly Baptist neighborhood, but an ethically and denominationally mixed environment. Aware of the idiosyncrasies of people stemming from various cultures, the budding poet resented criticism of his own individuality as an artist during the 1930s when many people considered poetry a tool in achieving, for instance, communist goals. During his studies as an English major at the University of Michigan, Hayden heard about the Baha'i Faith which teaches the oneness of God, religion – recognizes the viability of all the major religions – and mankind. In 1943, Hayden decided to become a Baha'i, as he felt that the Baha'i Faith confirms many of his beliefs and gave him a new perspective on his work as a poet." On Hayden's religious background and choice, in the early 1940s, to follow the Baha'i Faith, see Balestrini, 195-217; John Hatcher also writes that the Baha'i Faith confirmed Hayden's already established belief in the oneness of mankind and the essential spiritual nature of man's existence (John Hatcher, From

the Auroral Darkness: The Life and Poetry of Robert Hayden (Oxford: George Roland, 1984), 68). Williams also comments on Hayden's decision to "become a Baha'i, he said, for several reasons: the belief in progressive revelation (i.e., revelation that is not limited historically to the appearance of a unique prophet, but rather is augmented by the insights of a succession of great religious figures, the latest of whom was Baha'u'llah); the belief that the Baha'i world order could effect that relationship between religious thought and scientific discovery necessary to a unified physical and metaphysical outlook; and, most important the belief in the transcendentalist principle of universal brotherhood. The Baha'i religion, as a basic principle, recognizes no bounds of race, creed, or color and, unlike communism, offers the added comfort of a religious sanction." Pontheolla T. Williams, Robert Hayden: A Critical Analysis of His Poetry (Urbana: University of Illinois P, 1987), 26.

16. Cited in Balestrini, 208-209.

17. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 246.

18.Michael S. Harper, "A Symbolist Poet Struggling with Historical Fact," rev. of Angle of Ascent, by Robert Hayden, New York Times Book Review, February 22, 1976,34,35; italics in original.

19. The term Black Aesthetic, most frequently "used in reference to African American literature, was coined during 1960s, but represents an artistic movement in African-American literary history that dates back to writers of the 19th century. The Black Aesthetic is iconic because it has given "value" to artistic elements that are unique to the African American experience, leading to the canonization of writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright. "Black Aesthetic" delineates the elements and the recurring tropes within African American literature that distinguish it from other racial aesthetics. Broadly speaking, the Black Aesthetic is characterized by the following elements: (1) the black writer speaks directly to a black audience; (2) the work contains a call for revolution; (3) the work emphasizes the rejection of Western ideology as a way to encourage African Americans to reject Western ideology and to embrace their Africanness; (4) the work rejects the notion of art for art's sake and instead privileges art that serves a social and political function; and (5) the work incorporates African American musical styles and folk culture (i.e., black vernacular, blues, jazz)." (Lakisha Odium, "Black Aesthetic," in Icons of African American Literature: The Black Literary World, ed. Yolanda Williams (Greenwood; Santo Barbara, 2001), 36). The advocates of this movement subvert the misconception that black art is lower than white art and instead make both equivalent (37). "Race pride was seen as essential to uplifting the black race – emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and socially – and accurate and favorable depictions of the folk were seen as essential to establishing a Black Aesthetic" (37- 38). Poets such as Georgia Douglass, Countee Cullen, and Claude Makay used their poetry to bring issues about racial identity, segregation, class, and the many other injustices that plagued the black community to the forefront (38).

20. Boyd, 213.

21. Brian Conniff, "Answering The Waste Land: Robert Hayden and the Rise of the African-American Poetic Sequence," in Robert Hayden: Bloom's Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House publishers, 2005), 156.

22. W. Scott Howard, "Resistance, Sacrifice, and Historicity in the Elegies of Robert Hayden," in Reading the Middle Generation Anew: culture, community, and form in twentieth-century American Poetry, ed. Eric Haralson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 133.

23. Cited in Conniff, in Bloom, 156.

24. Lester, 66.

25. Ron Karenga, "Black cultural Nationalism," in the Black Aesthetic, ed. Addison Gayle Jr. (New York): Doubleday, 1971), 33.

26. Quoted in Lester, 67-68; See also Calvin Hernton, "Shining ["Runagate Runagate"]," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 336.

27. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 252.

28. Quoted in Hatcher, 252.

29. Williams, A Critical Analysis, 31.

30. Howard, “Resistance,” 134.

31. Vera M. Kutzinski, “Changing Permanences: Historical and Literary Revisionism in Robert Hayden's “Middle Passage,”” in Bloom, 120; italics in original.

32. Boyd, 215.

33. Reginald Gibbsons, “A Man That in his Writing Was Most Wise,“ in Goldstein and Chrisman, 216.

34. W.D. Snodgrass, “Robert Hayden: The Man in the Middle,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 223.

35. Harryette Mullen Stephen Yenser, “Theme and Variations on Robert Hayden's Poetry,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 233-234.

36. Ibid., 242.

37. Howard, “Resistance,” 134.

38. Arnold Krupat, “'That the People Might Live': Notes Toward A Study of Native American Elegy,” in Weisman, 343; italics in orginal.

39. John Frow, Genre (London: Routedge, 2006), 132.

40. Ibid., 347.

41. Cavitch, American Elegy, 38.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 180.

44. Ibid., 51.

45. Ibid., 18.

46. Sacks, The English Elegy, 37; italics in original.

47. Cavitch, American Elegy, 180.

48. Ibid., 190.

49. Ibid., 184; italics mine.

50. Ibid., 185.

51. Cited in Cavitch, American Elegy, 185-186.

52. Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 6.

53. Ibid., 5.

54. Cavitch, American Elegy, 187.

55. Ibid., 215.

56. Ibid., 194.

57. Ibid., 24.

58. Louise O. Fradenburg, “ 'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry,” Exemplaria 2, no. 1(1990): 182-83; italics in original

59. Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London: verso, 2004), 22.

60. Hayden, Collected Prose, 11.

61. Howard, “Resistance,” 135.

62.Gwendolyn Brooks, rev. of Selected Poems, by Robert Hayden, Negro Digest (October, 1966), 51.

63. Ibid.

64. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 145.

65. Ibid., 147.

66. Wilburn Williams, Jr., “Covenant of Timelessness and Time: Symbolism and History in Robert Hayden's Angle of Ascent,” in Bloom, 69.

67 Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Howard, “Resistance”, 135.

70. The experience of colonialism has significant effects on personal and collective identity:

> A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being … A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation …. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality. (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989),8-9)

71. Uppal, The Contemporary Canadian Elegy, 11-12.

72. Howard, “Resistance”, 135.

73. Quoted in Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 147-48.

74. 'Abdu'l-Baha in The Divine Art Of Living: Selections from Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and '*Abdu'l*-Bahá', compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1960), 89, 90.

75. Constance J. Post, “Image and Idea in the Poetry of Robert Hayden,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 202.

76. Howard, “Resistance”, 136.

77. Post, 202.

78. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 207.

79. Post, 202.

80. Ibid.

81. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 147.

82. Edward M. Pavlic, Crossroads Modernism: Descent and Emergence in African-American Literary Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 231.

83. Edward M. Pavlic, “ “something patterned, wild, and free”: Robert Hayden's Angles of Descent and the Democratic Unconscious, ” in Bloom, 252.

84. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 207; italics mine.

85. Pavlic, Descent and Emergence, 146.

86. Ibid., 95.

87. Quoted in Pavlic, 250.

88. Pavlic, 250.

89. Xavier Nicholas, ed., “Robert Hayden and Michael Harper: A Literary Friendship,” in Callaloo 17 (1994): 997; italics mine.

90. Pavlic, Descent and Emergence, 173.

91. Cheng, Melancholy of Race, 105.

92. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 168.

93. Cheng, Melancholy of Race, 105.

94. Eliot Katez, qtd in Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 266.

95. Cheng, Melancholy of Race, 170.

96. Ibid, 169.

97. Clewell, Mourning, 14.

98. Quoted in Clewell, Mourning, 14.

99. Keith D. Leonard, Fettered Genius: The African American Bardic Poet from Slavery to Civil Rights (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 20.

100. Smith, Mourning Tongues, 2.

101. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 263.

102. Ibid., 189.

103. Vamik Volkan, “Large-Group Identity and Chosen Trauma,” in Psychoanalysis Downunder6<http://www.psychoanalysis.asn.au/downunder/backissues/6/427/large_group_vv> (accessed November 30, 2015). See also Erikson Kai, A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community (New York: Norton, 1994), 28; italics mine.

104. Jahan Ramazani, “Nationalism, Transnationalism, And the Poetry of Mourning,” in Weisman, 605.

105. Vamik D. Volkan, “Not letting go: from individual perennial mourners to societies with entitlement ideologies,” in On Freud's, 107.

106. Ibid., 96.

107. David Johnson, “Theorizing the Loss of Land: Griqua Land Claims in Southern Africa, 1874 -1998,” in Loss: The Politics of Mourning, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, Afterword by Judith Butler (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 281.

108. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 19.

109. Cited in Cheng, Melancholy of Race, 104.

110. David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.” in Loss, 345.

111. Ibid., 348.

112.Stanley Sue and Derald W. Sue, “Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health,” Amerasia Journal 1, no. 2 (July 1971): 42.

113. Eng and Han, 348-49

114. Ibid., 352,353.

115. Volkan, “Not letting go”, 106.

116. Eng and Han, 353; italics in original.

117 Ibid., 363; italics in original.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 365.

120. Ibid.; italics in original.

121. Ann Parry, “'to give . . . death a place': Rejecting the, 'ineffability' of the Holocaust: the Work of Gillian Rose and Anne Michaels,” Journal of European Studies 30. 120 (2000): 365.

122. Eng and Kazanjian, 2.

123. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 195.

124. Ibid., 264.

125. Ibid., 191.

126. Howard, “Resistance” 141.

127. Ibid., 146.

128. Jim Murphy, “Here Only the Sea is Real”: Robert Hayden's Postmodern Passages,” Melus 27 no. 4 [Winter 2002], https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-97331220/here-only-the-sea-is-real-robert-hayden-s-postmodern [accessed June17, 2015].

129. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 135.

130. Ibid., 136.

131. Ibid., 126,127.

132. Dennis Gendron, “Robert Hayden: A View of His Life and Development as a Poet” (Ph. D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1975), 11-12.

133. Howard, “Resistance,” 137; see also Keith D. Leonard, Fettered Genius: the African American Bardic Poet form Slavery to Civil Rights (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 183-85.

134. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 264, 265.

135. Ibid., 186.

136. Ibid., 187.

137. Howard, “Resistance” 137.

138. John O' Brien, ed., Interviews with Black Writers (New York: liveright, 1973), 122.

139. Howard, “Resistance, ” 138.

140. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 187.

141. Ibid., 140.

142. Harryette Mullen and Stephen Yenser, “Theme and Variations on Robert Hayden's Poetry,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 239.

143. Ibid., 245.

144. Robert Hayden, Heart-Shape in the Dust (Detroit, Michigan: The Falcon Press, 1940), 33.

145. Ibid., 34.

146 Howard, “Resistance,” 139.

147. Ibid.

148. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, xi.

149. Howard, “Resistance,” 139.

150. Ibid., 141.

151. Harper, “ A Symbolist Poet,” 9.

152. Robert B. Stepto, “After Modernism, After Hibernation: Michael Harper, Robert Hayden, and Jay Wright,” in Bloom, 56.

153. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 211.

154. Ibid., 213.

155. Cavitch, American Elegy, 202.

156. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 256.

157. Quoted in Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 259.

158. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 259.

159. Sara Wyman, “Beyond the Veil: Indeterminacy and Iconoclasm in the Art of Robert of Hayden, Janet Kozachek, and Tom Feelings,” the Comparatist 36 [May 2012], http://www.questia.com/read/lGl-289620886/beyond-the-veil-indeterminacy-and-inconclasm-inthe(accessedJune17,2015).

160. Ibid.

161. Cited by Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 120.

162. Robert Hayden, Figure of Time (Nashville, Tennessee: Hemphill Press, 1955),12.

163. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 120.

164. Wyman, “Beyond the Veil.”

165. Quoted in Pavlic, 238.

166. Robert Hayden, “ 'How It Strikes a Contemporary,' ” in Written in Water, Written in Stone, ed. Martin, Lammon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1996),13.

167. Robert Chrisman, “Robert Hayden: The Transition years, 1946-1948,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 152; italics in original.

168. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 121.

169. Quoted in Hatcher, 121.

170. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 122.

171. Howard, “Resistance,” 142.

172. Ibid., 141.

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid., 142.

175. Ibid.

176. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 172.

177. Pavlic, 239-40.

178. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 172.

179. Ibid., 173.

180. Ibid.

181.W.D. Snodgrass, “Robert Hayden: The Man in the Middle,” in Goldstein and Chrisman,226.

182. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 152.

183. Wyman, “Beyond the Veil.”

184. Phyllis R. Klotman, “ 'Tearing a Hold in History': Lynching as Theme and Motif,” Black Literature Forum 19.2(1985): 56.

185. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 152.

186. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 173.

187. Pavlic, 240.

188. Snodgrass, “Robert Hayden,” 226.

189. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 173.

190. Wyman, “Beyond the Veil.”

191. Ibid. See also Lewis Turco, “Angle of Ascent: The Poetry of Robert Hayden.” in Bloom.

Chapter Three

Historical Poems and Blues Elegies

3.1: Historical Poems:

> I have been dead and now am summoned from
> the dead; nameless, and my christening
> has come; a mourner and a longtime seeker,
> no more a mourner but a seeker still.
> — Robert Hayden, Sojourner Truth (italics in original)

The crux of this chapter complements Vera Kutzinski's assertion that, for Hayden, “identity, or selfhood, is a matter of history and historicity” because his work – the historical poetry in particular – seeks not to escape from the past, but to revise the “linguistic surfaces” of the text of history, thereby achieving a historical and poetic truth that “emerges from… the limbo of [the poet's] ever-transfiguring poetic imagination.”[1] By now it is worth differentiating two important concepts at work within Hayden's texts; history and figural historicity.

Hayden's poetry often engages with the matter of historical personages (as Cinquez, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Nat Turner), historical events, and historical documentation, “which together establish his grounding in and commitment to history, strictly defined.” History (as such) conditions Hayden's poems, which, in turn, constitute their own means of figurative confrontation with the known world in order to “form a contiguous reality, or what is called figural historicity.”[2] Perhaps one of the most crucial functions of Hayden's elegies perform is a corrective one: “to memorialize and revitalize those sources of identity that have been shunned, ignored, or even suppressed.” African American elegists have felt dissatisfied not only with the alienating and marginalizing “invisible death” of American culture, but also by the growing numbers of people who might be said to comprise new communities of invisible grievers. Thus, the production of elegies and elegiac exchanges could offer an important strategy against cultural losses and displacements.[3]

The production of an elegy "serves as a vehicle for the transformation of loss into gain, absence into presence, sorrow into solace, and also of the past into the wished-for present or future." Since at least the early decades of the seventeenth century, the Anglo-American elegy and elegiac poem has frequently "situated resistant consolation within secular contexts as a mechanism for delivering political and social criticism, and consequently becomes increasingly implicated in the philosophy of human time."[4] If cultural memories can actually be created through the performance of elegy, these new sites of mourning can counterbalance the official histories that have silenced or erased these memories or created gaps between cultural generations.[5] Here, mourning itself becomes the consolation in such cultural losses. As Paul Antze and Michael Lambek argue in Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory (1996):

> [M]emories are never simply records of the past, but are interpretive reconstructions that bear the imprint… [of] social contexts of recall and commemoration. When memories recall acts of violence against individuals or entire groups, they carry additional burdens – as indictments or confessions, or as emblems of a victimized identity.[6]

Throughout his history poems, Hayden commemorates the heroic past of the Afro-Americans, showing the stark irony of America as a symbol of liberty and freedom and the condition of the Afro-Americans – the victims of injustice and racism who fight for the same land which denies them freedom.[7] "To a Young Negro Poet," for example, exhorts the poet to his lofty purposes; to chronicle the history of his people, to become the voice of "Inarticulate millions," and to create a comforting song "With hope and the new tomorrow in it."[8] The history poems, according to the poet, are articulations of the significance of history in the survival and ascendancy of a people. "We Have Not Forgotten" is, among many other poems, a tribute to the Afro-American forebears who paved the way for future hope and redemption[9]:

> These are the vital flesh and blood
> Of any strength we have; these are the soil
> From which our souls' strict meaning came – where grew
> The roots of all our dreams of freedom's wide
> And legendary spring.[10]

This piece, written in 1940, would serve as a sort of preface to the commemoration and mourning of Black heroes and heroines.

In "Answering 'The Waste Land': Robert Hayden and the Rise of the African American Poetic Sequence," Brian Coniff states that "recent criticism has remained oblivious to one of the most remarkable developments in contemporary literature: the rise, in part out of Hayden's poetry, of the African American poetic sequence."[11] According to Coniff, Hayden's poetry eventually plays a major role in the emergence and development of what he has called "posttraditional" poetry. This poetry, Coniff argues:

> [I]s largely informed by its author's paradoxical stance toward literary tradition. The posttraditional poet is certainly conscious – in fact, often intensely conscious – of tradition. At the same time, though, he or she manages, in one way or another, to view any distinctly literary tradition as historically contingent. Most often, the posttraditional poet uses thise [sic] sense of contingency to construct from disparate sources a personal heritage – provisionally, heterogeneously, willfully – in order to address some perceived historical crisis or… some immediate social need.[12]

Put it another way, Hayden is aware, for example, of the conventions of the traditional elegy ("literary tradition") with its emphasis on transcendental consolation, at the same time, he would find it impossible to accept this tradition as it is to address the modern mourners' needs and the problems of social conditions. This means that he neither repudiate the traditional elegy with its transcendental solace nor accept the modern elegy with its emphasis on resistant consolation; it remains a matter of contingency. Therefore, from disparate literary sources – modern or classical – the poet constructs his own personal heritage.

Beyond doubt, the result is Hayden's most complex work of mourning. Hayden's critique of "normative mourning engenders a rather paradoxical solace: the given poem allows for (yet also undermines) a hope for transcendence, positing instead the resistance to consolation"[13] as a call for the ongoing work of ethical involvement and political engagement. In this way, his poetics of loss "does make something happen." Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts fashion "an instrument for social and political change"[14] in keeping with his reflections on the worldly work of poetry.

Hayden's "Middle Passage" – the longest poem that would remain his most significant contribution to the development of posttraditional poetry – "draw[s] upon African American history and link vivid scenes of brutality to an ongoing struggle for a greater humanity that might eclipse boundaries of race, class, gender, religion, and politics."[15] In this poem Hayden develops an experimental poetics of loss that could examine racism, directly and specifically, by telling an episode of its history in a number of contending voices and different perspectives. It anticipates his later "Negro history" poems, including "Runagate Runagate," "The Ballad of Nat Turner," "Frederick Douglass," "A Ballad of Remembrance," "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz," "John Brown," and "Words in the Mourning Time" – in this latter one he explores, often in brutal detail the psychology and consequences of racism and xenophobia.[16] Throughout this poetry, as William Meredith has put it "there is scarcely a line of his which is not identifiable as an experience of Black America."[17]

In his elegies and elegiac texts Hayden attempts to examine the history and culture of his own people. He does this partially to determine, no doubt, the sources of lost identity and unconscious longings which he as Afro-American has unwittingly inherited, and partially to suggest nobility of that displaced cultural heritage. His poems are an attempt to redeem that lost identity by recalling the transition from tribal warrior to slave, to Afro-American.[18] From this view the poems present a sequence of heroes (Cinquez, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Malcolm X), who in their suffering and trauma would symbolize the collective object of loss of the African American race. Figuratively, the history-based poems become a symbol of human progress and transformation towards an ever-more expansive understanding of the identity and purpose of humankind.[19] Hayden stated that his interest in Afro-American history began as a young poet with the forthright desire to render an accurate account:

> I've always been interested in Afro-American history, and when I was a young poet, since I knew that our history had been misrepresented, I wanted to contribute toward an understanding of what our past had really been like. I set out to correct the misconceptions and to destroy some of the stereotypes and clichés which surround Negro history.[20]

“Middle Passage” is Hayden's intended purpose “to write a poem that would give the lie to bigots who had distorted the Afro-American's history.” Hayden attempts to present the values, both positive and negative, of the slavery era and the Afro-American's historic condition, depicting his race dislodgment and displacement from their mother country to an alien land.[21]

“Middle Passage,” Harper argues, recalls “the schizoid past's brutalities.”[22] The story of the Amistad mutiny provided Hayden with a narrative framework within which he could include accounts of cruelty, profound horrors, sickness, madness, fire, rape, suicide, and other cruelties from various sources[23]:

> “That there was hardly room 'tween – decks for half
> the sweltering cattle stowed spoon-fashion there;
> that some went mad of thirst and tore their flesh
> and sucked the blood:
>
> “That Crew and Captain lusted with the comeliest
> of the savage girls kept naked in the cabins.
> (CP, 49 -50).

Rather than making direct statements of oppression and various forms of loss and trauma, Hayden's poetic genius – he adapts the most sophisticated traditions of twentieth-century Western poetry – enabled him to gain more affective effect upon his reader. Hayden provided a vision of less personal, more historically grounded kind of schizophrenia: the various moral duplicities and ironies in mainstream American culture that sustained the slave trade. In his many accounts of the white slavers aboard the Amistad ship Hayden "discovered a labyrinth of hypocrisy and rationalization so intricate that, to account for it with any degree of accuracy, he needed to master a more complex and ironic interplay of contending voices." [24]

The reader does not hear the voice of the African captives or their leader Cinquez; any indictment of the slavers comes from the reader's reaction to the powerful irony of the accusations of the slavers themselves.[25]

> We find it paradoxical indeed
> that you whose wealth, whose tree of liberty
> are rooted in the labor of your slaves
> should suffer the august John Quincy Adams
> to speak with so much passion of the right
> of cattle slaves to kill their lawful masters
> and with his Roman rhetoric weave a hero's
> garland for Cinquez. I tell you that
> we are determined to return to Cuba
> with our slaves and there see justice done. Cinquez
> or let us say "The Prince" – Cinquez shall die. (53).

It is with this slavers' speech "Middle Passage" enters a maze of moral contradictions and hypocrisies. What is lawful is not necessarily justful. The Christian and lawful Montez and Ruiz, the two Spanish slavers who claimed possession of the Amistad and its passengers, have trouble understanding how some American members of the antislavery movement "fail to recognize their right to what they consider their own property."[26] They focus stark astonishment primarily on the coroner John Quincy Adams, who has taken up the cause of the Amistad slaves and will eventually argue for their freedom. To the Spanish slavers he seems to have been transported from the Roman Empire, rhetorically extravagant and oblivious to the practical demands of their very modern business[27] – ironically he is unaware of the economic realities of slavery in America.

The American thought, throughout history, is built on such deep racial prejudice and ambivalence between, Coniff argues, “the slaves' perception of the United States… as “mirage or myth” and these strangely 'civilized' events that occur… [on] the “actual shore”; between the talk of liberty in the free states and the “roots” of this liberty in slave labor.” [28] Therefore, the slavers' speeches “document the fabric of a society, ostensibly founded on principles of freedom and justice, actually interwoven with threads of racism and injustice”[29]:

Shuttles in the rocking loom of history,
the dark ships move, the dark ships move,
their bright ironical names
like jests of kindness on a murderer's mouth. (51).

Indeed, the Christian element in the poem also seethes with irony. Hayden refers to a hymn entitled “Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me/ Over Life's Tempestuous Sea”(48), which he weaves between the poem's segments as an ironic refrain.[30] Thereby, the poet juxtaposes

> [R]eligous sentiments with details of horrible events and immoral carnage aboard slave ships, in order to emphasize the perverted application of Christian doctrine to human inhumanity. God exists neither as a source of hope for the enslaved nor as a divine “Pilot” for seagoing Christians, but merely as an excuse to justify cruel exploitation for one group of human beings by another. [31]

The poet not only depicts the cruelties and miseries of the blacks on the ship, but he also explains the problems of assimilation and integration on the “actual shore” of the New land. He laments via allusion his forebears victimization and exploitation:

Deep in the festering hold thy father lies,
of his bones New England pews are made,
those are altar lights that were his eyes. (51).

The poet alludes to the song Ariel sings to Ferdinand in Shakespeare's The Tempest:

> Full fathom five thy father lies,
> Of his bones are coral made:
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange. [32]

This allusion establishes an ironic relationship with Shakespeare's theme of death and resurrection. Hayden explains that there was some connection between the sea change Shakespeare describes and "the change from human beings into things – objects, suffered by the enslaved Africans – the idea that slavery was a kind of death."[33] Admittedly, Hayden's description echoes the song ironically; the passage in his treatment becomes a land-change rather than a sea-change; a lament rather than a consolation. The black slave, as natural man, has been dehumanized and destroyed by the white oppressor.[34] The variously narrated segments of the poem stress again and again the agony and horror during the voyage:

> A charnel stench, effluvium of living death
> spreads outward from the hold,
> where the living and the dead, the horribly dying,
> lie interlocked, lie foul with blood and excrement. (51).

Furthermore, the so many traumas and suffering that the blacks undergone were not limited only to the voyage through the Atlantic Ocean "voyage through death" (48), but also "the life of slavery to be experienced by the survivors will be a living death, a death in life,"[35] "to life upon these shores" – shores of oppression, alienation, and victimization. Intentionally, the poet alludes to Morgan le Fay to include the suggestion of "morganatic" as a description of the problems of assimilation and integration in the New World. The Morganatic reference is used by the poet to explain the real condition of the blacks in the adapted land. When a royal marriage is happened to one of unequal rank, "no share of regal wealth goes to the partner of lower rank. Certainly, “life upon these shores” completes coupling of master and slave, to the benefit of the former and the detriment of the latter”[36] – a counter-balancing of beauty and tragedy:

> Plough through thrashing glister toward
> fata morgana's lucent melting shore,
> weave toward New World littorals that are
> mirage and myth and actual shore. (51).

From the diver's point of view, the Middle Passage in itself is a descent into suffering and pain:

> Middle passage:
> Voyage through death
> to life upon these shores. (48)

Once again, like the diver, the black person is altered between two ultimate decisions: either to end all forms of struggle and suffering via renunciation and committing suicide, or, like Cinquez, choose life and struggle for the ideal of freedom and emancipation. As might be expected, this latter choice would not satisfy many of the extremists.[37]

Life, according to Hayden's philosophy, is a struggle, which needs balance between faith and action, transcendence and engagement, sacred and secular, personal and social or political. These preoccupations of life are, indeed, his preoccupations of poetry and poetics. Thus, Hayden often writes the elegy as a vehicle for personal and political resistance in which struggle and violence functions as “a sign of the poem's dual responsibility: to invoke the sacred while underscoring the secular, social contexts through… which the poem's expression of grief may intervene (as a work of mourning) in the entanglement among personal recollection, cultural memory, and official historical discourse.”[38]

Despite the many fragments of “Middle Passage” that show oppression, victimization, and exploitation, the poem's dominant narrative voice implies and emphasizes the human instinctive drive for freedom which is subsequently personified in Cinquez:

> But, oh, the living look at you
> with human eyes whose suffering accuses you,
> whose hatred reaches through the swill of dark
> to strike you like a leper's claw.
>
> You cannot stare that hatred down
> or chain the fear that stalks the watches
>
> And breathes on you its fetid scorching breath;
> cannot kill the deep immortal human wish,
> the timeless will. (CP, 52; Hayden's italics)

Cinquez is symbolized by the poet as a figure of survivance and continuance. The poem ends with a prophetic voice capable of resurrecting the suppressed past, and beyond, the present[39]:

> Cinquez its deathless primaveral image,
> life that transfigures many lives.(54)

And so, the poem ends with a note on triumph: the image of Cinquez aspires to the status of an individual life, which can transfigure many other lives through prophetic action. As David L. Eng and Shinhee Han write, for groups of colour “suspended assimilation into mainstream culture may involve more than severe personal consequences; ultimately, it also constitutes the foundation for a type of national melancholia, a national haunting, with negative social effects.”[40] The black abolitionist John Brown is among those who carry out such melancholic haunting, and then, eventually attempting a bloody purge for the lost ideal of emancipation.

“John Brown” is a biographical sketch; it portrays a character, who in his deluded, mystical calling attempts a bloody and vengeful war against injustice and segregation.[41] Hayden had been fascinated by John Brown's life and legacy from an early life. He was so cautious and hesitant to write a heroic poem on John Brown, because, according to Ellen Sharp, it “was difficult for him to come to terms with the enigmas and paradoxes in the character of John Brown, and he could not stomach the violence and bloodshed of Brown's activities in Kansas."[42] The poet seems to have been especially moved by the interpretation of Brown as a God-driven man, consumed by an ideal.[43] Through the persona of Brown, Hayden wants to establish the idea that evil seems fundamental to human society, though one can react to it in a variety of ways – with noble restraint or by overt warfare against injustice. Clearly Hayden's contention all along has been that the most effective response to injustice is not violence, not to bleed society or return evil for evil, but to elevate oneself through education and personal metamorphosis and transformation, through love, and through God's guidance in history in the teachings of His Manifestations.[44]

Brown had experienced different forms of oppression and trauma. Alluding to his own son killed at Harper's Ferry, Brown then observes:

> a son martyred
> there: I am tested I am trued
> made worthy of my servitude.
>
> Oh the crimes of this guilty
> guilty land:
> let Kansas bleed
> (CP, 150).

Brown follows this observation with a justification for the bloodshed; he is a representative figure who serves as the collective voice of his race's unspeakable grievances:

> the cries of my people the cries
> of their oppressors harrowed
> hacked – poison meat for Satan's
> maw.
> I slew no man but blessed
> the Chosen, who, in the name
> of justice killed at my command. (50).

Brown's sense of guilt, anger, internalized shame leads him to protest against the bourgeois social and political stability. Of course, his political activism would be a source of disgust and hatred for the whites, and redemption and emancipation for the blacks:

> Fury of truth: fury
> of righteousness
> become
>   angelic evil
> demonic good?
>   My hands
> are bloody who never wished
> to kill wished only to obey
> The Higher Law. (151).

In the elegy Hayden, once again, "witnesses violence in order to signify the transcendent realm that hinges on the contingent dimension of human time" "Fire harvest: harvest fire" (CP, 152). On the one hand, Hayden's "John Brown" gives voice to private and public grief for the victims of the abolitionist's rampages, and, in reply, conveys a wish for transcendent consolation, that is, for an eternal release from human conflict and restraint[45]: "I have failed:/Come, Death, breathe life/into my Cause, O Death" (152). On the other hand, the elegy does not rest here: Hayden swiftly moves his text from Brown's wish for death – complete despair in the earthly world – to a more active engagement in the historical discourse of life. This singular juxtaposition of an expressed desire for spiritual release – or "fire harvest" – together with a persistent, compassionate return to the world of interminable conflict "harvest fire" shines with brilliant complexity and warmth throughout Robert Hayden's poetics of loss. [46]

Hayden, importantly, is a symbolist poet struggling with the agonies of history. Hence, "mourning, memorialization, nationalism – the political uses of mourning are everywhere to be seen"[47] in his poetry. Since the momentary and then everlasting construction of Edwin Lutyens's Cenotaph in 1919, it has been "a major site of collective mourning for the British war dead and thus for cementing and perpetuating national identity." In addition to such empty tombs, the modern nation makes prolific use of communal mourning for public figures.[48] As a child growing up in the United States, Ramazani states that in American society "public support for private mourning of loved ones was often lacking or was even discouraged."[49]

Elegies, admittedly, can play a role in nationalist identification with dead political leaders and heroes. Because the collective sense "of loss, trauma, or victimization is often instrumental in founding and fostering the nation-state, public elegies for national paragons sometimes play an ideological role comparable to that of the war memorial or political obituary."[50] The twinning relation between elegy and nationalism (or dissident, alternative nationalism) is more clearly uncovered by Laurence Lipking:

> [G]rievances are often the mark of the nation. Too many theories of nationhood prefer to forget this disturbing historical fact. The imagined community united by bonds of sympathy and interest makes a more satisfying picture than people bound together by bitter memories and common hatreds…. If recent history teaches any lesson about the rise and fall of nations – in the Balkans, for instance – it seems to be the amazing power of old resentments to endure and be revived, even after the ideals have died. Nor is it only losers who feel aggrieved: the Serbs and Afrikaners are martyrs in their stories. poets help to keep these memories alive, with elegies as well as epics that identify great wrongs and beautiful victims. [51]

Therefore, the subgenre of public elegy is more central and vital to African-American poetry of mourning.[52] While examples of elegiac apotheosis may seem merely traditional for white male poets of the twentieth century, Hayden, Baraka, and Walker transform the convention into a mode of resistance and social activism. The poetics of heroism, often eschewed by poets of "the dominant culture as a banal exercise in nostalgia, is potentially radicalized when appropriated by such 'black hearts' in mourning."[53]

Black poets write many elegies for slain leaders of the civil rights and black power movements. After the assassination of Malcolm X, for example, dozens of African-American poets, including Hayden, wrote fine public elegies in his memory. Such poems, written in a collective, eulogistic mode, depict the bereavement not as a private but as a representative response, articulating the "people's" (CP,88) loss on behalf of other members of black community.[54] The communal, ritualized "commemoration and group mourning of traumatic loss has often played a role in ethnic or national identity, to vastly different effects at different times."[55]

Robert Hayden's elegy for Malcolm X, "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz," mourns a militant African American leader, who had to "strike through the mask!" (CP,88) in order to come to a true sense of himself, a private process of spiritual transformation with obvious and exemplary social, political, and spiritual implications because of his status as a Civil Rights leader.[56] Thus, the leader's and the poet's black (dissident) nationalism contests official US nationalism[57]:

> He X'd his name, became his people's anger,
> exhorted them to vengeance for their past;
> rebuked, admonished them,
>
> their scourger who
> would shame them, drive them from
> the lush ice gardens of their servitude.
>
> (CP,88).

This public elegy, like the preceding one, combines the theme of identity with the issue of violence by portraying a character who struggles for insight, identity and the proper course of action in a time of violence and mourning. [58] The Baha'i poet expresses his doubts about Malcolm X's espousal of violence, about what he sees as the affirmation of "prideful anger" and a "racist Allah" (87).

For Hayden, Malcolm X all too briefly lived his potential: near the time of his death, he "became/ much more than there was time for him to be" (89). Hayden tries to convey that African-American responses to Malcolm X and other public black figures are far from monolithic, that the public elegy is for African-American poets a complex site. In this oscillating "discursive field, dissent vies with encomium [or commendation] and skepticism jostles with celebration."[59]

Hayden claims that Malcolm X's final metamorphosis is the most perfect one, since he recognized “Allah the raceless in whose blazing Oneness all/were one.”[60] Therefore, he can be regarded as an example of transformation and reconciliation for his race. The persona is transformed from a man who is ensnared by the “violence of a punished self/struggling to break free”(86) to Malcolm, who exhorts his people to vengeance and becomes their scourger who would drive them out from the gardens of their servitude. Eventually, on pilgrimage to Mecca, he takes up his final name, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, when “transcends his racial point view.”[61] It is this spiritual journey that most interests Hayden in this elegy, referring to Malcolm's move toward traditional Islam in his pilgrimage to Mecca[62]:

> He fell upon his face before
> Allah the raceless in whose blazing Oneness all
> were one. He rose renewed and renamed, became
> much more than there was time for him to be. (89).

Malcolm X, like the diver, obtains his spiritual ascent after penetrating the darkness of shame and slavery. The confrontation, rather than capitulation, with the bitter realities of oppression enabled him to strike through the mask and follow the highest light of perfection and human understanding.

In the succeeding poem, the persona – a former slave – achieved education and dignity within his adoptive homeland by nobly espousing the cause of emancipation and full civil rights for freed men as well as for women. [63] “Frederick Douglass,” unlike “El-Hajj,” “establishes both a literal hero and a model for human transcendence” and reconciliation, through an expression of human virtue far beyond the mere loosening of physical restraint.[64] The elegy thus implies the ultimate goal of human progress:

> When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this
> beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air,
> usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
> when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
> reflex action…
>
> (CP,62).

The poem celebrates not a man who has been, but a man still coming into being. The poet emphasizes that the dead hero is still a vital force. Although the poem commemoratory in nature, “it does not so much elegize a past as prophesy a future. Frederick Douglass, the poet, and all enslaved humanity are united in one generative [reparative] process.”[65] Like Cinquez in “Middle Passage,” Douglass would be a source of aspiration and enlightenment for his race, “primaveral image, /life that transfigures many lives” (54). And when humanity achieves this state, Douglass “shall be remembered for exemplifying that evolved condition”[66]:

> This man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
> beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
> where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
> this man, superb in love and logic, this man
> shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric
> not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
> but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
> fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing. (62).

Therefore, such sites of mourning – lamenting dead heroes and leaders – protest loss and forgetfulness as they create and recreate collective memory in the process. Without shared memory, “healing cannot take place.... [T]he works of mourning performed for the purpose of reconnection and creation are especially crucial for those whose inheritances have been aggressively threatened.”[67] Here mourning itself becomes consolation. Remembering rather than forgetting, reconnection rather than separation, are crucial elements for those who suffered severed affiliations. As Kathleen Woodward argues:

> There are times when we either may not be able to or should not detach ourselves from the pain of loss [as in the case of mourning Black Diasporic slave communities and subsequent Black communities suffering oppression], although the canonical notion of mourning prescribes the opposite, a forgetting. [68]

Although Ramazani expresses “the diminished efficacy and legitimacy of poetic mourning”[69] in the modern era, Hayden's poetry of mourning “reaffirms elegiac mourning as a legitimate form through reorienting its function away from the lament of loss towards the creation of a body of knowledge" and collective valid memory. His elegies serve as a site of change and exchange that eventually replace fear and alienation with love and human connection. [70]

For Hayden, the struggles of others may help other people in their own struggle. In remembering the deaths of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy via elegies and elegiac poetry, he suggests that words in the mourning time may be transformed into a morning time. Through "the Dawn-breaker's transilluminating word," these deaths become the "major means whereby, oh dreadfully, our humanness must be achieved"(CP, 90). The sacrificial deaths of such black figures, when evoked and revived in poetry, would be the means whereby others may effect their own metamorphosis.[71] Hayden's poetry, incessantly, responds to the same essential questions about man's identity, about the function of art, about the relationship of physical experience to spiritual enlightenment, about the progress of history as a process of human metamorphosis, consolation, and transillumination.[72]

While Hayden's elegies "address primarily the intractable work of mourning that necessitates varying degrees of resistance against consolation," [73] his elegies and elegiac poems enact eventually redemptive (but not transcendent) vision – a "voyage through death/to life upon these shores" (48). Because they are the sufferers of permanently severed roots, colonial exploitation, or forced relocation, the Afro-American elegists' grief is unique and therefore consolation is exceedingly problematic.[74] Viewed as a theory of poetics, Hayden's consolatory concept has been adequately explained by Wilburn Williams, Jr.:

> Robert Hayden is a poet whose symbolic imagination is intent on divining the shape of a transcendent order of spirit and grace that might redeem a world bent on its own destruction. His memory, assailed by the discontinuities created by its own fallibility, is equally determined to catch and preserve every shadow and echo of the actual human experience in which our terribleness stands revealed. In poem after poem Hayden deftly balances the conflicting claims of the ideal and the actual. Spiritual enlightenment in his poetry is never the reward of evasion of

> material fact. The realities of imagination and the actualities of history are bound together in an alliance that makes neither thinkable without the other. Robert Hayden's poetry proposes that if it is in the higher order of spirit that the gross actualities of life find their true meaning, it is also true that transcendent realm is meaningful to man only as it is visibly incarnate on the plane of his experience [Hayden is a romantic realist poet]. [75]

Such theory gives testimony to Hayden's living "angle of ascent [not ascent]/ achieved." According to a Baha'i view, "mankind is ordained to advance spiritually and materially by the assistance of divinely guided Prophets, whom Baha'i's term 'Manifestations,' figures such as Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and most recently, Bahá'u'lláh."[76] Hayden conveys the modern age in his poetry as "a time of unleashed energy, incredible change and unfathomed promise, but it is also a time of mourning, the blackest night preceding the dawning." In "Words in the Mourning Time" the symbolic "diver is in the dark recesses of the wrecked ship looking out, often unaware of light and hope, until it breaks through the dark to remind him of divine guidance impelling human history."[77] Therefore, the imminent turmoil is not divine retribution so much as it is the logical consequence of mankind's stubborn adherence to archaic points of view (nationalism, selfishness, prejudices)[78]: "The dust of sedition hath clouded the hearts of men, and blinded their eyes."[79] According to Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, a bewildered humanity can perceive neither the origin nor the destiny of the vast changes currently sweeping the earth:

> A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequence, is at present sweeping the face of the earth. Its driving power is remorselessly gaining in range and momentum. Its cleansing force, however much undetected, is increasing with every passing day. Humanity, gripped in the clutches of its devastating power, is smitten by the evidences of its resistless fury. It can neither perceive its origin, nor prope its significance, or discern its outcome.[80]

Well versed in the Baha'i writings, Robert Hayden was painfully aware of this paradoxical vantage point – the assimilation of destruction and perfection, mourning and morning – from which his poetry reflects this incessant admixture of hope and dread, pain and cure.

In “Words in the Mourning Time” Hayden catalogued images of racial violence in American States “self-destructive, self-betrayed” (CP, 90), the assassinations of benign leaders, the war in Vietnam. The persona in this elegy is, therefore, this Baha'i voice, immersed in the violent conditions of the modern era, “intellectually aware of the ultimately propitious direction of history, but feeling, nevertheless, the legitimacy of grief in this time of mankind's mourning.”[81] Martin King and Robert Kennedy are among the specters of collective grief that America confronts as a consequence of its ambiguous heritage. Hayden portrays the self-destructive nature of the Americans and reveals why they are the victims of their own selves, unable to save their country from the unseen and unspeakable forces attacking them from within and without[82]:

> For King, for Robert Kennedy,
> destroyed by those they could not save,
> for King for Kennedy I mourn.
> And for America, self-destructive, self-betrayed.
> (CP, 90).

Even though a Baha'i and aware of history as a divinely ordained process towards great peace, the speaker cannot ignore suffering, his outrage at violence and injustice, displacement and lost identity, and his grief at the loss of noble representative figures. As it is almost the case in Hayden's work of mourning, the oxymorons – “deathbed childbed age” and the “auroral dark” (90) – imply that the modern age is ushered in happiness after a long period in the dark nights of despair. [83] “Words in the Mourning Time” is, admittedly, a mingling of voices, poetic forms and modalities. But what unifies the ten parts of the poem is “the impassioned voice of the persona who struggles towards catharsis and epiphany.”[84] The voice articulates Hayden's own feelings to an extent. And, just as the life of Malcolm X in the previous poem (“El-Hajj”), this elegy presents an emotional sequence from anguish, guilt and fear to insight and transformation that approximately catches the stages of mourning as explained by G. W. Pigman in Grief and English Renaissance Elegy (1985). Importantly, the stages include (1) numbing, in which the loss is denied or disputed, (2) yearning and searching, (3) despair and disorganization, (4) recovery (acceptance) and reorganization.[85]

Hayden, as a Baha'i poet, always contrasts existing horrors with a vista of a better future. The most important section of the ten-part poem ends with an appeal that expresses Hayden's world view which "includes… the possibility of realizing the individuality of human beings in a divinely guided universe."[86] In the darkness of shame, oppression and apartheid the divine light breaks the dark night of despair, guiding the sufferers to "ascend in a measured rise, to attain an ampler understanding of their unfinished selves" beyond the barriers of time and place[87]:

> Reclaim now, now renew the vision of
> a human world where godliness
> is possible and man
> is neither gook nigger honkey wop nor kike
>
> but man
>
> permitted to be man,
> (CP, 98).

Hayden forcefully rejects violence as a solution to evil and injustice. He insists on the universal equality of mankind that is humanness. Without question Hayden's faith encouraged him to confront the modern upheavals and he explained in "A Certain Vision" how his Baha'i beliefs sustained him in the maelstrom of the modern wasteland[88]:

> We must not be frightened or cajoled
> into accepting evil as deliverance from evil
> We must go on struggling to be human,
> though monsters of abstraction
> police and threaten us.(98)

According to Hayden, the ultimate end of injustice, suffering, and violence will be through the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh Revelation:

I bear Him witness now –
mystery Whose major clues are the heart of man,
the mystery of God:

Bahá'u'lláh:
Logos, poet, cosmic hero, surgeon, architect
of our hope and peace. (99).

3.2: Robert Hayden's Blues Elegies:

These pleasures, Melancholy, give;
And I with thee will choose to live.
– John Milton, "Il Penseroso," final couplet, 1645.

Robert Hayden's poetry is handsomely indebted to what have since been called mainstream Eurocentric traditions (for instant, the elegy tradition) at the same time that it is markedly affected by his African American heritage (blues, jazz, and spirituals).[89] At first glance, the phrase "African-American elegy" might seem to be either a contradiction in terms or a redundancy. A contradiction in terms because "elegy" has been defined as a European form, inherited from the ancient predecessors of the Alexandrian Greeks and the Romans, and passed then on via Spenser and Milton to the English Speaking whites of subsequent periods. And yet a redundancy because African-American poems have often been characterized as what W. E. B. Du Bois[90] called "Sorrow Songs," inevitably elegizing a long history of racial oppression and murder.

African Americans have mastered the elegy from Phillis Wheatley in the eighteenth century to Harlem Renaissance poets like Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes to postwar poets like Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, and Michael Harper.[91] African-American poets have altered the elegy to address issues traditionally excluded from its repertoire, such as racial strife, lynching, castration and urban poverty. Like the sonneteers Margaret Walker and Claude McKay, African-American elegists have revised the Eurocentric genre in their own image. This process of "revisionary appropriation has been gradual but apparent from the start." [92]

African Americans began composing elegies at least as early as 1746, during King George's War.[93] Poetic works by black American poets "articulate, in their own way, that emerging modulation of praise and protest, devotion and dissent, as the poetic elegy forms (and is informed by) changes in artistic craft and social consciousness."[94] African American elegy took its unique form when Phillis Wheatley published her break out poem for George Whitefield. [95] Wheatley, the mother of the African American elegy, uses a "mournful verse" to "sooth the troubles of the mind."[96] In every elegy she "turn[s] the mournful to the chearfull strain" (93), since the aim of her "sympathizing verse" is to "pour the heav'nly nectar of relief" (28, 98). Wheatley's "On the Death of General Wooster," for example, celebrates transcendent spiritual resolution to suffering, even as and, through the utterance of General Wooster's dying wish, "admonishes white slave owners to heed the call for social justice."[97] She ventriloquizes through him a strong social protest against white Americans[98]: "(O deed Ungenerous!) They disgrace/And hold in bondage Afric's blameless race" (149).

Like African-American spirituals, Wheatley's elegies are politically coded in their depiction of this world as the "dark vale" of "mortality's sad scenes" and of death as a much-desired release. When death becomes a release from "the iron hand of pain" and "From bondage freed," the dead person can know that at last "Amid the seats of heav'n a place is free."[99]

The exhortation not to grieve, the assurance of the departed's happiness in Heaven, the promise of posthumous reunion, were general conventions adopted by African American elegists to transcend racial difference.[100] That sense of relief is explicitly stated by Mary's postmortem words preaching her parents in George White's untitled 1810 elegy:

> Grieve not, Ye parents, give your sighing o'er:
> The deep felt cause will soon be felt no more.
> Your daughter lives in pleasures ever new,
> On Zion's hill, where she looks out for you.[101]

These conventions and motifs persist in the twentieth century, but modern elegists have often quarreled with it:

> But death is a slave's freedom
> We seek the freedom of freemen. [102]

The writings of Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Andre Lorde, for example, include far greater numbers of resistant elegies that formulate and underscore both the genre's vitality and its increasing potential to deliver social and political critiques through a "secular poetics of loss that challenges a consolation ground on purportedly universal, sacred, atemporal principles." [103]

Scorning the notion of death as liberation, Hughes insists that the only real freedom is in life: "I do not need my freedom when I'm dead."[104] Hughes writes out of the African American inheritance of jazz, spirituals, and above all, the blues.[105] Hughes finds in the blues, Arnold Rampersad argues, "the tone, the texture, the basic language of the true black modernism."[106]

Writing blues poems about violent and irresolvable grief, Hughes introduces into literary verse a distinctly African American genre of melancholic mourning, or what he terms "despondency" and "hopeless weariness."[107] In "The Weary Blues," for instant, Hughes adapts the stark, ironic, and melancholic form of the blues, creating an indigenous – native – literary equivalent to the modern elegy.[108] In the double context of African-American and European forms of poetic lament, his work can be properly appreciated. Hughes brought into modern poetry a genre that expanded the resources of mourning, anticipating the later blues writers from Sterling Brown to Sherley Anne Williams, and from Auden and Hayden to Allen Ginsberg.[109]

The African-Americans brought with them samples of the oral heritage of slaves songs, hymns, blues, jazz, and spirituals, which are richly varied in theme and mood. Yet all in common have a deep sense of melancholy and sorrow. Indeed, the impression of their sorrowfulness – their apparent reflection of, in Paul Gilroy's words, "the consciousness of the slave as involving an extended act of mourning" – has been hard to dislodge.[110] That heritage would be seen as an index or mirror of the slave bitter conditions of ancestral degradation, inferiority, unreasoning repulsion, and other numerous absurd notions of being ignorant, unkempt, dirty, animal-like, repulsive, half-heathen, brutal, barbarous and degraded.[111]

The blues, jazz, and spirituals could all be termed "elegiac" in the broadest sense of the term, since they are all imbued with grief and sorrow. But whereas spirituals, the special songs Du Bois celebrated as "Sorrow Songs," subdue loss with "heaven's consolatory promise, and whereas the exuberant play of jazz tempers grief, the blues alone is a term synonymous with melancholia."[112] Ramazani, importantly, has drawn a comparison between the genre of the blues and the traditional elegy:

> True, the genres differ in many significant ways, starting with their divergent racial origins. The blues were created by the African-American masses, the elegy was long the property of a European élite. The blues is a musical and oral genre, the elegy a literary form. Blues about death and dying are only a subgenre of the blues, which encompasses many other kinds of loss – lost love, lost friendship, lost work, lost money, lost self-esteem, and so forth…. Still, as poetic forms of lament, the genres have much in common. Both the elegy and the blues are rooted in antiphony, the blues derived from the call-and-response pattern of field hollers and African song, and elegies based on the alternating shepherd songs of pastoral…. And both forms are simultaneously individual and collective, personal and impersonal, articulating sorrow over a specific loss but often depersonalizing it through familiar figures and conventions.[113]

What is still more important is that both the blues and the genre of elegy depend on a comparable psychological work – sadistic outbursts, masochistic misery, elements of pathetic fallacy, suicidal death-drive, violent anger, severe aggression, internalization or externalization of grief; self-destructive melancholia or self-creative mourning – all these characteristics are manipulated within the two genres.[114] Nevertheless, it is most important to note the exclusionist, élite world of the canonical elegy which would not admit the possibility of mourning a man, as in Hughes's "Death of Do Dirty," who has knifed his girlfriend and shot someone else. Figures with moral destructiveness or heinous acts are banished from the world of elegy.[115] Indeed, persons belong to the black race barely admitted to be mourned or grieved upon in the canonical elegy, [116] as it has been made clear in the previous Chapter.

The blues poetry, admittedly, should not be excluded from an account of modern poetic mourning. Blues poetry and the modern elegy are analogous "not only in their repertoire but also in their affective basis." The most recognizable characteristics of melancholia – protracted and unresolved (perennial) mourning, masochistic or even sadistic grief, suicidal longing, suicidal depression, self-reproaching, self-berating and a lowering in self-esteem, unconscious loss, sleeplessness, a loss of interest in the outside world, sudden eruptions of mania – are shared by both the blues and the modern elegy. Although Freud attributes "these symptoms to the individual mourner, contemporaneous blues singers detail the features of a collective affect, rooted in the sociopolitical experience of African Americans."[117] Whereas Freud pathologizes melancholic affect, the great blues singers refuse the insidious distinction between healthy and pathological or abnormal grief. Their blues songs enunciate "anger, despair, grim laughter, and self-punishment, but also recognize the social and racial contexts of such feelings."[118] In contrast to the modern elegy's resistance to consolation and release, the master tropes of the blues are "affirmation, redemption, and transcendence."[119]

Maintaining that the blues are not “intrinsically pessimistic,” Richard Wright argues that “their burden of woe and melancholy is dialectically redeemed… into an almost exultant affirmation.”[120] Although Harry Oster acknowledges that blues songs “emphasize such disturbances as frustration, anger, aggressiveness, sadness, oppression, hunger, sickness, the pangs of the cuckold, and the restlessness of the wanderer,”[121] he concludes that their overall mood is an affirmation, celebration, and purification. Similarly, Houston Baker writes of the “blues affirmation of human identity in the face of dehumanizing circumstances.”[122] Indeed, Baker notes this quality in the blues: “Even as they speak of paralyzing absence and ineradicable desire, their instrumental rhythms [and lyricism] suggest change, movement, action, continuance, unlimited and unending possibility.” [123]

But this appealing, optimistic narrative of secular salvation risks obscuring the enormous injury and deprivation inscribed in the blues. Affirmation is doubtless “one pole of the blues, but negation dogs it at every turn – a duality that is blurred by the rhetoric of dialectical redemption.” [124] In fact, it is “the artistic redemption of blues as both confrontation with and transcendence over brutal social murder and discrimination”[125] and as the reaffirmation of the human spirit. Admittedly, though, there are consolatory, transcendental blues and anti-consolatory, melancholic ones typical of many modern elegies.[126] The blues genre according to Hughes, the most influential figure in the genre, in all its parts – jazz poems, self-elegiac poems, voyage poems, love poems, genealogical poems, carpe diem, and so forth – tends toward both affirmation and self-negation, both consolatory mourning and melancholia. [127]

Generally, the term blues has three broad meanings: “the first describes a mood of depression or sadness often but not exclusively linked with the Afro-American experience; the second refers to any artistic expression of this mood, and the third consists of specific musical and poetic forms of this expression.”[128] These same tropes mentioned previously govern much of the commentary on Hayden's blues poems. Hayden's blues elegies more certainly fit Dorothy H. Lee rather general definition of the genre: “narratives of suffering that convert pain to beauty by shaping it into art.” [129] They also embody Ralph Ellison's classic definition:

> The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger it jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy [sacred solace, for instant] but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. [130]

With the knowledge of three centuries of slavery “with its attendant muses of self-division, self-hatred, stoicism,”[131] Ellison acknowledges in the blues an impulse not only to transcend but to keep the painful memory alive. Coined by bygone slaves and “ingrained with their grim social circumstances, the blues encode the collective trauma of African Americans, naming and mourning individual losses within this context.”[132]

In his blues elegies, Hayden filtered his recollections of Detroit's Paradise Valley through the Afro- American and European artistic traditions in which he schooled himself. Hayden applied the principles of the two traditions – the blues and the elegy – to the concrete circumstances of Afro-Americans in Paradise Valley.[133] Hayden's blues elegies examine the miseries and coping strategies of long-gone Paradise Valley people. Inherent in the blues and elegy – and in Hayden's use of them – is a protest against injustice, violence, and death itself. Hayden's integrative and communitarian impulses led him to appreciate the beauty, gentleness, vividness of life, and intensity of being of Paradise Valley, as well as its violence and ugliness and cruelty.[134] He recalled the “people who retained… a sheltering spiritual beauty and dignity… despite sordid and disheartening circumstances.”[135]

Although the city Hayden's Detroit poems present “is a fallen habitat of poverty, crime and sin, it is also the locus for a potentially harmonious and just community.”[136] Charles Scruggs writes that, even when seeming least likely, the idea of a visionary city is a durable and ongoing tradition within black urban literature. He argues further:

> The city as a symbol of community, of civilization, of home – this image lies beneath the city of brute fact in which blacks in the twentieth century have had to live. This kernel has never been lost. It is one of the aspirations expressed in an ongoing dialogue that the Afro-American community has with itself, a dialogue that sets a city of the imagination, the city that one wants, against the empirical reality of the city that one has. [137]

Hayden's urban poetry is visionary in this sense. His Baha'i belief "in the fundamental oneness of all races, the essential oneness of mankind… [and] the vision of world unity"[138] strongly contributes to his "humanistic worldview."[139] To Hayden, the poet's role "is to affirm the humane, the universal, the potentially divine in the human creature." [140] Despite its harshness, his early wretched life in Detroit introduced him to these possibilities. As Hayden composed elegies about the blues – melancholic memories – in his past, he found sources of sadness and hope. While integrating poetic traditions, he uncovered the foundations of integrated human community.[141]

A blues aesthetic offers strategies for transforming the uncertainty of Detroit's harsh life, ways to contain it, articulate it, and recognize its potential, even as one bemoans its immediate effects. The sadness of a specific blues lyric thus is for Hayden only part of a larger vision of human spirit and society.[142] In a 1972 interview, he observes that the typical effect of the blues is to "make people feel happy-sad."[143]

Two poems in Hayden's Heart-Shape in the Dust (1940) focus on the generic misery of unidentified representative speakers.[144] The racially oriented poems portray the Depression and despair from the point of view of the disenfranchised Negroes.[145] In "Shine, Mister?" economic conditions force the speaker into menial labor[146]; the speaker is a shoe shiner:

> They throw me in jail,
> Put me on the show-up line,
> Slap me in the mouth
> And make me pay a fine. [147]

The unemployment and multiracial problems in Detroit were aggravated by the Depression and unionism, and both phenomena caused blacks to be used in an intrinsically racial hatred and violence. Of about thirty thousand black families in Detroit in 1931, twenty-two thousand were on relief rolls. Referring to this mass Negro unemployment, Hayden's "Shine, Mister?" links the frustration of black life with a blues rhythm to create an effective artistic solace[148]:

Standing on the corner
With these no-job blues;
Leave this hard-luck town
If I had some walkin-shoes. (42).

Even though economic condition, hard luck, and the police thwart every opportunity, the resourceful speaker persists in his attempt to get money: "rent-money, eatin-money" (42). He achieves "control of his sadness by singing and naming his blues, which never shut down the possibility of escape from the condition that inspire them." In "Bacchanale" the speaker is driven to the degradation of drinking and "alcoholic intoxication," to borrow a phrase from Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," after losing his factory job. His plan to "git high" results from his belief in the possibility of earthly joy and his resourceful search for it[149]: "Makes you fergit/The fix you in" (44).

"Those Winter Sundays" and "Homage to the Empress of the Blues," like Langston Hughes's "the Weary Blues," belong to the general tradition of blues writing. The two poems focus on a specific human being, rather than on a nameless representative figure.[150]The former poem conveys the love and hardship of the poet childhood in a portrayal of his foster father's strength and tenderness withered and toughened by a cold and harsh reality. Hayden's imagery is an amazing juxtaposition between negation and affirmation, hard and soft, cold and warm.[151] This poem can be easily imagined as a "graveside medit ation, an elegy,"[152] that describes the poet's deep regret for his own "laggard" appreciation of his foster-father William Hayden. Pa Hayden rises on every Sunday as he does on every day of the week; his “cracked” and aching hands receive no relief on this day of rest. Still “tasting the darkness,” he rises to more coal-work.[153] It is worth quoting this blues elegy in full, as it enables a range of contrasting emotions between the harsh, cold reality of the racial society and the lovely warmth and compassion created by his father's hard work, between the now bitter reality and the pastoral nostalgia for family and shared beautiful memories of his parents:

> Sunday too my father got up early
> And put his clothes on in the blueback cold,
> then with cracked hands that ached
> from labor in the weekday weather
> made banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.
>
> I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
> When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
> and slowly I would rise and dress,
> fearing the chronic angers of that house,
>
> Speaking indifferently to him,
> Who had driven out the cold
> and polished my good shoes as well.
> What did I know, what did I know
> of love's austere and lonely offices?
> (CP,41).

Unable to articulate his love in any other way, he performs two menial tasks, shoveling coal and shining shoes, in the cold and dark to serve his family members. Although he can amend “the home's physical conditions, he cannot, in life, alter the emotional coldness and darkness that prevail there.” The symbolic coldness comes from the city's injustice, racism, and poverty. The chronic pressures of a racist society certainly victimize this old man. This poem sings both William and Robert Hayden's blues. It carefully conveys Robert’s regret about his own part in William's misery and suffering. Lacking the opportunity to serve in return for his father's kindness, Robert finds only in the poem a “way to expiate guilt and contain loss.”[154] According to Hayden's belief, art has the ability to console and enlighten where little else can do.[155]

His "Homage to the Empress of the Blues" describes the cause-effect relationship between communal human suffering and its artistic creation. Emphasizing private and public sources of misery – the injustices of love and of society – the poem blurs the barriers between art and life, artist and audience. In commenting on "Homage," Hayden "links the southern roots of the blues and of the people, with their particularly northern miseries"[156] and traumas. Bessie Smith is a representative figure of her black race, and was, as Hayden remarks, "singing about the uncertainties and sorrows of life as poor Negro people knew them."[157]

In this blues haunted paean Smith's art serves those who suffer from careless love, from domestic insecurity and anxiety, and from hostile environmental and societal forces. Through the power of her song, "she gives dimension, specifity, and palpability to unspoken grief and fear, acts it outs, gives it name."[158] Offering a healing celebration of black life and culture, "Homage" is posited in counterpoint to the racist degradation of black life, permitting the reader to view the complex dimensions of art and identity in black life.[159]

Rather than emphasizing the power of racial emotions, Hayden dwelt instead on the actualities of history and culture, even as these actualities became the haunting place for his flights of imagination, intelligence, and artistic creativity. [160] Hayden came to admit the African-American past as an inexhaustible, primary poetic resource, rather than as a badge of shame, as it sometimes appears in Countee Cullen's Writing. Indeed, Hayden is best known for his historical poems about slavery, racism, and African-American culture.[161]

The historically-based poem "Runagate Runagate," though not strictly a blues elegy, it nevertheless contains certain extracts of blues songs, blues refrains, and blues repetitions. "Runagate Runagate" functions to dramatize the heroics of an escape mission under Harriet Tubman's courageous leadership. It reflects on Tubman's expressway from slavery to freedom.[162] The poem portrays the Underground Railroad, which in the middle 1800s aided slaves to escape north to freedom via a secret network. The poem, rhythmically, captures the mood of frantic flight of a "runagate" (a renegade or escaped slave)[163] :

> Runs falls rises stumbles on from darkness into darkness
> and the darkness thicketed with shapes of terror
> and the hunters pursuing and the hounds persuing
> and the night cold and the night long and the river
> to cross and the jack-much-lanterns beckoning beckoning
> and blackness ahead and when shall I reach that somewhere
> morning and keep on going and never turn back and keep on going
>   Runagate
>   Runagate
>   Runagate
> (CP, 59).

For two hundred and fifty years one of the main actions of resistance and survival for slaves was flight and escape from injustice and violence, which even continued into the twentieth century as a feature of being black in the United States.[164] From the beginning slave holders were plagued by the disease that infected their slaves with the alien desire to run away. From about 1830 until the end of the Civil War an unbroken stream of salves escaped from South via what had come to be known as the Underground Railroad. This metaphor was inspired by the "labyrinthine sundry routs along which many acts of ingenuity, bravery, and sacrifice were transformed into legendary feats of mythological proportions"[165]:

> Some go weeping and some rejoicing
> some in coffins and some in carriages
> some in silks and some in shackles. (59).

Black people during the labyrinthine nature of underground routs adopt certain strategies to hide themselves from the white catcher. For example, Henry "Box" Brown acquired his nickname by having himself sealed in a box and shipped aboard a boat to a northern state. A young mother with her babe in arms got trapped on a bridge between catchers on either side. Rather than being captured, she leaped to death in the ice-cold waters. Leap to Freedom, the first play written by a black person, was based on the legend that grew out of the incident.[166] The "iterations of a preference for death would be misconstrued as evidence merely of black identification with white's hatred and fear of the people they persecuted." Max Cavitch further argues:

> For, while such pathological incorporations undoubtedly occurred… throughout the history of the black, the motive and meaning of the longing for death seem[s]… to have been the opportunity for escape, rest, and safety; they figure suicidality not chiefly as aggression turned inward but as the rejection of depersonalization, the assertion of will, the exercising of choice. Pain, grief, and desperation drove untold numbers of slaves to take their own lives. Some believed that after dying they would return to their homelands. Some were fleeing intolerable punishment and degradation. Some were acting of defiance. Others, like Frederick Douglass… contemplated suicide but kept deciding against it [to carry on the promise of earthly freedom and emancipation].[167]

Framing the poem with lines from African experiential heritage of spirituals and blues, Hayden carefully expresses the dying wish of the blacks to escape the laws of enslavement. "No more auction block for me/ no more driver's lash for me / And before I'll be a slave / I'll be buried in my grave" are lines from one of the songs that whites banned the blacks from singing. [168]

During the height of Underground Railroad activity many states passed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, providing for the capture and punishment of slaves handsome rewards for their return[169]:

> Catch them if you can, but it won't be easy.
> They'll dart underground when you try to catch them,
> Plunge into quicksand, whirlpools, mazes,
> turn into scorpions when you try to catch them. (59).

Terms like "[r]unaways, fugitives, escapees, maroons, and contraband" were a source of "fear and anger in every slaveholder's heart and initiated freelance 'patterollers,' hunters and catchers of Negroes."[170] The flight that informs "Runagate Runagate" is not cowardly running away. The "fugitives" are not fleeing from justice because of sinful acts they have committed. Rather, the flight of the runagate is stimulated by the call of an unimpeachable (unquestionable) quest for freedom. Undoubtedly, the price of that quest may very well mean death, but the consolatory prize is the freedom – the unalterable quest of the African-American person[171]:

> mean mean mean to be free.(61).

Notes

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1. Quoted in Howard, “Resistance,” 135.
2. Howard, “Resistance,”134; italics in original.
3. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 265.
4. Howard, “Resistance,” 139-140.
5. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 193.
6. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, ed., Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory (New York: Routledge, 1996), vii.
7. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 100.
8. Quoted in Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 99.
9. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 99.
10. Robert Hayden, Heart-Shape in the Dust (Detroit, Michigan: The Falcon Press, 1940), 10.
11. Coniff, 157.
12. Ibid., 158.
13. Howard, “Resistance,” 136
14. Hayden, “‘How It Strikes',” 197.
15. Howard, “Resistance,” 133.
16. Coniff, 160.
17. Meredith, foreword to Hayden, Collected Prose, vi.
18. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 138.
19. Ibid., 139.
20. How I Write, 'Robert Hayden, The Poet and his Art: A conversation' (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), 197-8.
21. Pontheolla T. Williams, “A Ballad of Remembrance,” 135.
22. Michael S. Harper, “Remembering Robert Hayden,” Michigan Quarterly Review 21, no.1 (1982): 184.
23. Coniff, 168,169.
24. Ibid., 169.
25. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 139.
26. Coniff, 170.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 171.
29. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 139-40.
30. Fred M. Fetrow, “ “Middle Passage”: Robert Hayden's Anti-Epic,” 39.
31. Ibid., 40.
32. William Shakespeare, The Tempest, Act1, Scene ii, lines 397-405, from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1617.
33. Quoted in Williams, 137.
34. Fetrow, 43.
35. Ibid., 38.
36. Ibid.
37. Snodgrass, 232.
38. Howard, 145-46.
39. Coniff, 175.
40. Eng and Han, 347.
41. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 224.
42. Ellen Sharp, introduction to The Legend of John Brown (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1978), 13.

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43. Howard, 143.

44. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 224.

45. Howard, 144.

46. Ibid,146; see also Melba Joyce Boyd, “Poetry from Detroit's Black Bottom: The Tension Between Belief and Ideology in the Work of Robert Hayden,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 205.

47. Ramazani, “Nationalism,” 602.

48. Ibid., 602-3.

49. Jahan Ramazani, 'Afterword: “When There Are So Many We Shall Have to Mourn”,' in Modernism and Mourning, ed. Patricia Rae (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 295.

50. Ramazani, “Nationalism,” 603.

51. Laurence Lipking, 'The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism,' PMLA 111(1996): 213; italics mine.

52. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 174.

53. Ibid., 175.

54. Ibid., 174.

55. Ramazani, “Nationalism,” 604.

56. Leonard, Fettered Genius, 185.

57. Ramazani, “Nationalism,” 603.

58. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 171.

59. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 175.

60.Constance J. Post, “Image and Idea in the Poetry of Robert Hayden,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 202.

61. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 171.

62. Mullen and Yenser, 240.

63. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 139; see also Judith Carman, “America 1968,” Journal of Singing 68, no.4. [March/April 2012], https://www.questia.com/read1P3-2618531201/america-1968(accessed June 17,2015); Robert Chrisman, “Robert Hayden: The Transition years, 1946-1948,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 136-37; Charles T. Davis, 95-96.

64. Ibid., 141.

65. William, 76.

66. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 141.

67. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 261.

68. Kathleen Woodward, “Late Theory, Late Style: Loss and Renewal in Freud and Barthes,” in Aging and Gender in Literature: Studies in Creativity, ed. Anne M. Wyatt- Brown and Janice Rossen (Charlottesville: University Press Of Virgina, 1993), 96.

69. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 8.

70. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 210.

71. Constance J. Post, “Image and Idea in the Poetry of Robert Hayden,” in Goldstein and Chrisman, 202.

72. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 157-58.

73. Howard, 140.

74. Uppal, Canadian Elegy, 238-39.

75. William, 68.

76. Cited by Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 170.

77. Ibid., 159.

78. Ibid., 160.

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79. Bahá'u'lláh quoted in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2nd rev. edn. 1974), 194.

80. Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i Publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1980), 3.

81. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 161.

82. Boyd, 214.

83. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 173.

84. Ibid, 171.

85. Pigman, Renaissance Elegy, 7, 8.

86. Balestrini, 210.

87. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 179.

88. Pavlić, 221.

89. Mullen and Yenser, 242.

90. Du Bois, the crafty leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), “meticulously documented the egregious abuses and injustices blacks were experiencing in the United States. In an international forum, the United States had once again actively intervented to marginalize the legitimacy of black grievances, and through this omission the country sent a message to the world that black life in America was insignificant. During the postwar period, racial segregation, apartheid, discrimination, terrorism, and disenfranchisement – accompanied by physical and personal violence – were taking an enormous toll on black life, as documented in the NAACP's petition. Even as the world was preparing to repudiate the barbarous acts which have outrage the conscience of mankind, racism for many blacks continued to be seemingly intractable yoke that shaped their daily existence. African American were flogged by Jim and lynching; disenfranchised by poll taxes and white primaries; suffocated by goodwill and white God; and impoverished by charity, when all they wanted was equality – social, political, religious, and economic. For further discussions concerning the physical, personal, and social violence that enter the lives of African American women, men, and children.” Gail Garfield, Through Our Eyes: African American's Experiences of Race, Gender, And Violence (NEW Brunshwick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 59-85.

91. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 135.

92. Ibid., 135-36.

93. Cavitch, American Elegy, 183.

94. Howard, 140.

95. Cavitch, American Elegy, 183.

96. Phillis Wheatley, The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley, ed. John C. Shields (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 20, 27. All further references to Wheatley's poetry are given parenthetically.

97. Howard, 140.

98. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 136.

99. Quoted by Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 136.

100. Cavitch, American Elegy, 184.

101. George White, A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, and African; written by himself and revised by a friend (New York: John C. Totten, 1810), 53.

102. Nikki Giovanni, “The Funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr. ,” Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment (1970; New York: William Morrow and Co.,1979), 56. Quoted in Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 136.

103. Howard, 140.

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104. Langston Hughes, Selected Poems (1959; New York: Vintage – Random House, 1974), 258. Qtd in Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 136.

105. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 138.

106. Arnold Rampersad, “Langston Hughes and Approaches to Modernism in the Harlem Renaissance,” in The Harlem Renaissance: Revaluations, ed. Amritjit Singh, William S. Shiver, and Stanely Brodwin (New York: Garland, 1989), 65.

107. Quoted in Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 135.

108. Ibid., 138.

109. Ibid., 135.

110. Quoted in Cavitch, American Elegy, 181-182. For further explanation see Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double consciousness (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 63.

111. J.R. Oldfield, ed., “Civilization and Black Progress: Selected Writings of Alexander Crummell on the South,” in Colin A. Palmer (gen. ed.), Encyclopedia of African Culture and History 2353-2588, vol. 6 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 2415-2421.

112. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 138-39.

113. Ibid., 139.

114. Sacks, English Elegy, passim.

115. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 157, 156.

116. Ibid., 157.

117. Ibid., 140.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 141; italics in original.

120. Richard Wright, Foreword (1960) to The Meaning of the Blues, ed. Paul Oliver (1963; New York: Collier, 1972), 9.

121. Harry Oster, “The Blues as a Genre,” rpt. In Folklore Genres, ed. Dan Ben-Amos (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 73-74.

122. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 190.

123. Ibid., 8.

124. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 141.

125. R. Baxter Miller, The Art and Imagination of Langston Hughes (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 7.

126. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 142.

127. Ibid., 144.

128. Frank Rashid, “Robert Hayden's Detroit Blues Elegies,” in Bloom,183.

129. Dorothy H. Lee, “Black Voice in Detroit,” Michigan Quarterly Review 25 (1986), 313.

130. Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright's Blues,” in Shadow and Act (New York: Random, 1964), 90.

131. [Imamu Amiri Baraka] LeRoi Jones, Blues People (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1963), 136.

132. Ramazani, Poetry of Mourning, 141 -42.

133. Rashid, 181.

134. Ibid., 182.

135. Hayden, Collected Prose, 141.

136. Rashid, 182.

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137. Charles Scruggs, Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 4-5.

138. Hayden, Prose, 119-20.

139. Williams, Critical Analysis, 8.

140. Hayden, Prose, 119-20.

141. Rashid, 183.

142. Ibid., 184.

143. Hayden, Prose, 144.

144. Rashid, 184.

145. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 97.

146. Rashid, 185.

147. Hayden, Heart-Shape, 42. All subsequent references to poems from this volume will be indicated in the text.

148. Dennis Gendron, "On Heart-Shape in the Dust," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 117.

149. Rashid, 186.

150. Ibid., 188.

151. Boyd, 208.

152. David Huddle, "The Banked Fire" of Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 253.

153. Rashid, 190.

154. Ibid., 191.

155. Arnold Rampersad, afterword to Robert Hayden: Collected Poems, ed. Frederick Glaysher (New York: Liveright, 1996), 211.

156. Rashid, 187.

157. Hayden, Prose, 144-45.

158. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 111.

159. Robert Chrisman, "Robert Hayden: The Transition years, 1946-1948," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 148.

160. Rampersad, afterword, 205.

161. Ibid., 204.

162. Howard Rambsy ll, "Catching Holy Ghosts: The Diverse Manifestations of Black Persona Poetry," African American Review 42, no. 3-4 [Fall-Winter 2008], https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-208881651/catching-holy-ghosts-the-diverse-manifestations-of (accessedJune17, 2015).

163. Hatcher, Auroral Darkness, 154.

164. Calvin Hernton, "Shining [Runagate Runagate]," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 322.

165. Ibid., 322-323.

166. Ibid., 323.

167. Cavitch, American Elegy, 209.

168.Quoted in Hernton, 324.

169. Hernton, 322,323

170. Ibid., 323; italics in original.

171. Ibid., 325,337.

Conclusion

The opposition between normal (traditional) and pathological (modern) mourning has never been a meaningful one in the formation of African American mourning. Hayden's poetry of loss and suffering best exemplifies black mourning's unique calendar of loss and its attendant feelings. The form of mourning addressed in this thesis departs from the paradigmatic theory of loss. The chief reason the mourning-versus-melancholia paradigm falls short is because it fails to visualize the exceedingly perilous life the African-American subjects inhabit. Admittedly, there is a striking difference between black mourning and the mourning-versus-melancholia model of grief.

In the traditional works of elegy, the "normal mourner," as explained theoretically by the canonized study of Peter Sacks, establishes identification with another object in order to overcome his lost object of love. Whereas, the "pathological mourner" is unable to substitute his loss and instead withdraws inward. This withdrawal would cause an intense impoverishment of his ego to certain great extent. Ultimately, then, such state results in an overcoming of the instinct which is responsible for keeping clinging to life. While the traditional elegy exhibits only limited moments or phases of melancholic identifications such as those appeared within the canonical elegies of, for example, Militon's "Lycidas" or Tennyson's In Memoriam, before their ultimate reconciliation and consolation, the modern elegy creates a thorough pathological (inconsolatory) work of mourning.

Inconsolability is a dominant effect in the modern elegy. Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts may share inconsolability with other twentieth-century writers, but to certain different effect. Modern poets employ inconsolable mourning or melancholia to help them resist the old (orthodox) consolations in nature, God, and poetry that became suspect in twentieth century. Hayden's elegies and elegiac poetry, by contrast, use inconsolable mourning for literally survival and continuance.

Therefore, the assumptions of the mourning-versus-melancholia model of loss, and, by extension, the binary configuration of loss as either normal or pathological are called into question if applied to Hayden's work of mourning. Hayden's poetry erased the governing binary of the genre between mourning and melancholy, and instituted instead a different kind of elegy, in which the entire work of mourning is definitively altered. Black mourning as appropriated perfectly by the poet is especially recognized in the insistence that death is ever present, that death is somehow always imminent. Black subjects suffer a death riddled life and so create a distinct form of mourning – nonormative mourning. African-American mourning is characterized by incessant loss. Black mourning expresses past and prospective death. Death is omnipresent. The anticipation of death is figured into the experiences of black life so persistently and the cycles of daily lives were so persistently interrupted by specters of death. Given the persistence of death in black life, the black subject is imbued with an anticipatory sense of loss as intelligently woven in Hayden's "Letter from the South":

With imageries of guilt;
as savage in its threats of death by claustrophobia, death by
Castration, death by division. Death.
(*CP*, 133).

The survivors might confront all this death in the face of shame, humiliation, and stigma in eloquent ways that often imply a fierce political sensibility and a longing for justice.

The violence African Americans encounter is relentless. The violence of silence and omission almost as impossible to endure as the violence of unleashed hatred and outright murder. Their loss is compound: The problems were not only limited to the physical and psychological trauma suffered by the blacks but also included the melancholy and rage upon the fact that their losses and sufferings were not acknowledged. Their losses are deemed unspeakable. They are "disprized" mourners – the bereaved who are denied the rites and rituals, honour, and dignity of public mourning, and whose losses are instead covered or shrouded in silence, shame, and disgrace. The black mourning, therefore, shares a poetics of loss that is distinctly unique. Here, the barrier between the dead and the survivors; mourning and pathological mourning; mourner and mourned or subject and object is dissolved. This means that the lost object is not only external to the self, but also includes the self.

For Hayden's and his race, mourning becomes the new site for consolation; mourning becomes militancy; mourning becomes survival. Mourning, for ostracized groups, is neither solely a private work nor an apolitical feeling, but instead is a collective enterprise and a radical way of asserting group identity. Mourning in this case is seen as a practice that is productive, collective, political, and necessary. Consolation and closure that allow the bereaved to go on are, for black mourners, painfully aborted. The mourners turned to their sorrow as a necessary vehicle of survival. Furthermore, black mourning as manipulated by Hayden offers insights into the political properties of sorrow: how a disenfranchised group mobilizes mourning as a basis for the formation and articulation of group ties, group identity, and rebellious action. Mourning, here is instrumental in forming the ties of feeling, to speak of unspeakable world, and to concretize freedom and meaningful justice. It was through the expression of sorrow and loss that slaves found the effective basis of black life and also found one way of surviving and defying a hypocritical system that deemed them as socially outcast and therefore socially dead.

So, the artistic creation of Hayden's representative mourning serves as a vehicle for social critique and political activism rather than only imaginative or spiritually transcending loss and suffering as it is clear in the work of the traditional elegy. The melancholia of Hayden's is depathologized, hence, it has the productive and necessary tasks to carry out the hope of justice and freedom across generations. Without this melancholia the black mourner would accept the shameful renunciation and the frequent victimization and oppression. It is a way of life; a structure of felling; a way of dealing with all the catastrophes occur in the lives of black people. It is no longer a pathology or self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism that helps ostracized group to reconstruct lost identity. This melancholia serves as a basis for the disenfranchised to form a collective group identity.

Importantly, the mourners manipulated in Hayden's meditative, historical, and blues elegies are not “normal mourners,” since they are inconsolable in their grief, and, moreover, deploy mourning as an instrument of survival; nor are they “pathological mourners,” since they achieve purgation and release in mourning itself and in its artistic creation and political activism.

Thus, Hayden's work of mourning can be adequately described in terms of neither mourning nor melancholia; neither the work of the traditional elegy nor the work of the modern elegy; neither mere transcendent (transformative) consolation nor bitter confrontation or resistant consolation. It is really an ever process of negotiation between all of these elements in order to create an understandable view of human life and social activism via the artistic vantage of his poetry of loss. And the following diagram draws up in more general terms what is mentioned above more clearly:

Modern elegy	Robert Hayden's Elegy	Traditional Elegy
melancholia	A negotiation of both (mourning and melancholia)	successful mourning
resistant consolation		transcendent consolation
all forms of loss	cultural loss	the loss of a person dear or near
a poetics of melancholia	Intractable work of mourning	a poetics of mourning
individual loss	collective , social loss (communal loss)	individual loss
pastoral is there but has lost its meaning	—	pastoral model dominates.

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الخلاصة

يكّون نموذجي الرثاء والاكتئاب الاساسين النظريين والادراكيين الرئيسيين لدراسة غرض الرثاء في الشعر. فمن وجهة النظر التقليدية تتناول القصيدة الرثائية موضوعة الموت بشكلها العام الا انها ايضا تتناول منهجا شعرياً للفقد يتبلور من خلاله مفهومي التسليم والتعويض ازاء الفقيد المحبوب. ولذلك فان المرثية في المنظور التقليدي تخلق نمطاً عادياً ناجحاً للرثاء، في حين ان المرثية الحديثة تخلق نمطاً مرضياً من الرثاء. فقد شهد القرن العشرين منهجاً جديداً في الرثاء تمثل في رفض انماط العزاء التقليدية أو الكلاسيكية كالعالم الرعوي وعناصره العاطفية الزائفة كالعنصر الديني والجمالي. ولذلك اصبحت المرثية في العصر الحديث ذات صفة نافية أو رافضة للعزاء. وقد انتج الشاعر روبرت هايدن نسخته في المرثية الحديثة وفقا الى تلك المقاييس الإدراكية والنفسية، ملوناً اياها بوعيه العرقي الخاص.

ولذلك اكتسب شعر هايدن الرثائي شكلا معقداً جافاً، إذ تكتنف تجربة الفقد هنا قضاياً اكبر من مجرد موت شخص عزيز أو قريب، كفقد التاريخ أو التراث أو الوطن أو اللغة او الثقافة أو على نحو اكثر اهمية، فقد الهوية. ولأشكال الفقد هذه تأثيرات سلبية اكبر كالشعور بالعار والذنب والحقد والغربة والذل والاغتراب الولادي والموت الاجتماعي وفقدان الحقوق والامتهان العام.

تتناول هذه الدراسة شعر روبرت هايدن الرثائي الفريد عبر ثلاثة فصول وخاتمة. إذ ينقسم الفصل الاول الى ثمانية مباحث تختص الاربعة الاولى منها بتقصي الجذور والخلفية التاريخية للقصيدة الرثائية ابتداءً من المرثية الاغريقية والرومانية مروراً بالمرثية الانكليزية القديمة والبسيطة المتأخرة. اما المبحث الخامس فيتناول المبدأ الرئيس في دراسة الرثاء المتمثل بالسياق الرعوي ويركز المبحث السادس على دراسة وتحليل شعرية الفقد في محاولة لإرساء إطار ومنهج عام لتحليل وتفسير أي عمل أدبي رثائي سواء كان يعود للعصر الكلاسيكي أو عصر النهضة رومانتيكياً كان أم فكتورياً، ما قبل حداثوي أو حداثوياً، ما بعد حداثوي أو معاصراً.

أما المبحث السابع فيعطي نظرة عامة حول الاليات النظرية للمرثية الحديثة وسبل اشتغالها التي تناقض الى حد كبير اليات المرثية التقليدية التي تفحصها المبحث السابق. واخيراً يتناول المبحث الثامن اهم القضايا والميول والممارسات والموضوعات الشائعة في شعر الرثاء الامريكي.

أما الفصل الثاني فينقسم إلى مبحثين، كُرس الاول لحياة هايدن وآرائه في الحياة والدين والانسان. كما يضيء هذا المبحث نظرية هايدن الشعرية التي لا بد من تقصيها لما لها من دور في تفسير وتقييم تجربته الرثائية. ويقدم المبحث الثاني تحليلاً معمقاً لخمسٍ من مرثيات هايدن التأملية وقصائده الرثائية.

واخيراً، يختص الفصل الثالث بتحليل خمس مرثيات تاريخية في مبحثه الأول، في حين يتناول مبحثه الثاني المرثيات المميّزة للسود (البلوز – Blues) وذلك باستعراض أهم القضايا والمعاني التي ارتبطت بهذا الجنس من المرثيات وكيف وضّفت من قبل الشاعر لإنتاج مرثية افرو–امريكية جديدة.

أمّا الخاتمة فتلخص أهم ما توصلت إليه الدراسة من نتائج.

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
جامعة القادسية
كلية التربية / قسم اللغة الانكليزية

شعرية الفقد والعزاء في الشعر الرثائي الافرو- امريكي
دراسة في شعر روبرت هايدن

رسالة مقدمة إلى مجلس كلية التربية – جامعة القادسية
كجزء من متطلبات نيل شهادة الماجستير في الأدب الانكليزي

تقدمت بها

نور عبد الكاظم الركابي

بإشراف

أ.م.د سعد نجم الخفاجي

1438 هـ   2017 م

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College of Education
Human Science Uruk Mag

العدد : ٨٠
التاريخ: ١٥ /٢/ ٢٠١٧

إلى// أ.م.د سعد نجم الخفاجي المحترم
الباحثة /نور عبدالكاظم عبد العالي الركابي المحترمة
جامعة القادسية/كلية التربية

مجلة اوروك

م // قبول نشر

تحية طيبه ...

تدارست هيئة التحرير البحث المقدم من قبلكم والموسوم

((Descent and Ascent in Hayden's Symbolic Elegy "The Diver"))

وبعد الاطلاع على آراء المقومين **قررت قبول البحث ونشره** في أعداد المجلة القادمة .

مــع التــقديــر ...

أ.م.د. عدنان كاظم الشيباني
مدير التحرير مجلة اوروك
١٥/٢/٢٠١٧

نسخه منه الى //
- صادر المجلة

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