JACK N. AVERITT COLLEGE of GRADUATE STUDIES GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of

Spring 2020

Maladaptive Grief: Irish and American Experiences of Loss, Mourning, and Trauma

Abby Hey

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Literature in English, North America Commons

Recommended Citation
Hey, Abigail G., "Maladaptive Grief: Irish and American Experiences of Loss, Mourning, and Trauma" (2020). Electronic Theses and Dissertations.

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

MALADAPTIVE GRIEF: IRISH AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES OF LOSS, MOURNING, AND TRAUMA

by

ABIGAIL HEY

(Under the Direction of Dustin Anderson)

ABSTRACT

Literature that responds to loss and expresses mourning, a genre referred to as the elegy, traditionally follows an adaptive pattern in which a mourner reaches consolation and comfort. In modern period, however, mourning transformed into destructive experiences that were notably private. With this phenomenon of greater social and emotional isolation, writers like Sylvia Plath, Samuel Beckett, and Elizabeth Bishop expressed rumination and irresolution. In contrast, before the twentieth century, elegies were not only more consolatory, but there was a greater emphasis on shared feeling, and this communal type of mourning is more often adaptive. By grieving together in the same physical location, by fostering a community of grief, and by practicing empathy with another human being, sentimental grief was more resolved. Through close-reading analyses of various elegiac texts, I unpack how public and private spheres have shifted in the modern period, and I propose how this transition has impacted the grieving process across cultures. By analyzing literature from a transnational perspective, I demonstrate how modern mourners in Ireland and America express their grief maladaptively. Ultimately, while scenes from popular sentimental novels depict individuals coming together to productively mourn in public spheres, modern poetry and drama depict individuals stuck in post-traumatic, destructive, distanced, and inconsolable psychological states.

INDEX WORDS: Grief, Mourning, Trauma, Elegy, Irish, American, Maladaptive, Melancholia, Dissociation, Transnational

MALADAPTIVE GRIEF: IRISH AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES OF LOSS, MOURNING, AND TRAUMA

by

ABIGAIL HEY

A.A., Vance-Granville Community College, 2014

B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2018

M.A., Georgia Southern University, 2020

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

© 2020

ABIGAIL HEY

All Rights Reserved

MALADAPTIVE GRIEF: IRISH AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES OF LOSS, MOURNING, AND TRAUMA

by

ABIGAIL HEY

Major Professor:	Dustin Anderson
Committee:	Caren Town
	Joe Pellegrino

Electronic Version Approved:
May 2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first want to thank Dr. Anderson for sparking my interest in Irish history and culture, for fostering meaningful conversations, for creating multiple experiential learning opportunities where I could discover more about the world and myself, and for your consistent support and guidance as this project coalesced over the years. To Dr. Pellegrino, thank you for your engaging Senior Seminar class on elegies that introduced complexities of grief, for being the most attentive and critical reader I've ever had, for challenging my communication skills, and for always urging me to share my voice and my talents with others. Also, to Dr. Town, thank you for being my mentor since I first became a Literature student, for actively listening to my ideas, and for always asking "so, what?" questions that led to real, impactful conclusions. These professors along with many other mentors at Georgia Southern have offered an enormous amount of support over the years, and I have not only become a better student and scholar, but also a better human being. To all these mentors, friends, and family who have encouraged this growth: I'm so grateful for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS……………………………………………………………………………….2

LIST OF FIGURES…………………………………………………………………………………...4

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION………………………………………………………………………...5

2 MELANCHOLIC GRIEF IN SYLVIA PLATH'S ANTI-ELEGIES…..…………………..15

3 DISOCIATION IN BECKETT'S ABSURD LITERATURE….………………………...27

4 DISTANCED GRIEF IN ELIZABETH BISHOP'S ELEGIAC POETRY………………...40

5 COMMUNAL MOURNING IN SENTIMENTAL NOVELS………………..…………53

6 CONCLUSION…….……………………………………………………………………..68

REFERENCES…………………………………………………………………………………...73

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1: Burial Site Monument in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford ……………………………………70
Figure 2: Statue of a Grieving Irish Woman During a Famine …………………………………..72

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mourning is often a painfully distressing or sad experience, as individuals work through grief and try to come to terms with an absence or fill an emotional void. Some losses take time to recover from, and even "smaller" losses can be challenging to accept, but whether one attempts to adjust to a tangible loss or a complex traumatic event, the goal of a healthy grieving process tends to move toward resolution. Coping mechanisms provide opportunities to understand and work through grief, and with these tools, some are able to acknowledge and accept that a person, place, thing, or ideal is gone, find a new sense of stability, and move on, or at least no longer consistently endure despair. Since the experience of mourning was first recorded, writers have used their work to process losses, work through difficult emotions, and dramatize grief. The genre of literature that describes mourning is called an elegy, and in this genre, writers traditionally have adaptive aims.

Conventionally, an elegy is a type of poem that expresses mourning, and in these poems, writers can react to the loss of a person, a time period, a location, or even an ideal. This genre of poetry is distinct from a eulogy, which is a speech that is often read at a funeral. While the elegy has long been a popular poetic genre, it is difficult to pin down specific components and offer a clear definition. One definition suggests an elegy is "a poem of serious reflection, typically a lament for the dead." An elegy generally includes grief, sorrow, or lament for one's absence, admiration or praise of the lost object or person, and a final expression of comfort. Conventionally, elegies are poems that express grief, and they commonly contain a lament (an expression of sorrow), praise and reverence for the dead (in which the speaker shows admiration for the idealized dead), and a consolation, or "a renewal of hope and joy" (Cuddon). For instance, the dead is not dead, but lives on in another world, and by the end of the poem, the tone is often one of relief and comfort. An elegy does not always include each of these elements. Also, while conventional elegies typically reach a sense of resolution, the grief expressed in some elegies is not

entirely resolved. Elegies have evolved in subject matter, and many novels, plays, and even songs are elegiac, but with all these artistic forms, writers express how humans find comfort and adjust to a reality after loss.

Writers do serious psychological work in elegies, both for themselves and for their readers. Researchers have commented on a number of strategies that a mourner may employ, either consciously or unconsciously, while working through grief, and some have become common knowledge. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's model, for example, popularized the concept of five non-linear stages of grief. In this model, the mourner clings to a preferable reality, experiences anger or frustration, bargains to avoid painful feelings, despairs over what is lost, and finally, faces the truth of her loss, acknowledging her pain yet accepting it with resolve. Similar patterns of grief can be discerned in elegies, like the traditional stages of sorrow, praise, and consolation. This pattern emphasizes a bereavement experience which eventually reaches a resolution that comforts the mourner. Traditional elegies and models of grief therefore suggest that individuals experience definitive emotions and stages after enduring a death, loss, or a traumatic event.

While these conventional models and definitions map out a generic mourning process complete with adaptive coping mechanisms, there are some responses to loss that do not fit this mold quite so easily, and some elegists reflect this complexity in their work. In the modern period, for instance, there is a greater phenomenon of works that avoid and break elegiac conventions, now labelled as "anti-elegies." Whereas the structure of conventional elegies usually includes "grief and sorrow, then praise and admiration of the idealized dead, and finally consolation and solace" (Elegy: Poetic Form), grief may not be as tidy, resolved, and adaptive, and on the page, writers can reflect this privately destructive, traumatic, and maladaptive type of grief. By unpacking some of the connections between the artistic form and psychological experiences of grief, researchers have uncovered not only literary and biographical information about different authors, but also how catharsis can be achieved, why coping is sometimes overwhelming or appears impossible, and how different cultural and social practices of mourning have evolved over time.

Peter Sacks' *The English Elegy* explores the functions and forms of elegiac conventions and provides an interpretive study of the elegy as a genre. In this foundational book, he interrogates how traditional forms of the elegy relate to the experience of loss and the quest for consolation. Sacks defines the elegy as "a poem of mortal loss and consolation" (15). He focuses on the pastoral elegy, which are traditional poems that were written to mourn the death of a loved one through an idyllic lens, often depicting shepherds. In English literature, the word "elegy" first denoted a specific metrical pattern of poetry, and it was not until the 16th century that "elegy" referred to a work's content. After providing some historical background and key features of traditional English elegies, Sacks analyzes work from authors including Spenser, Milton, Jonson, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne, Hardy, and Yeats. He explains the conventional "plot" of elegies (praise, lament, and consolation), suggesting a psychological and structural pattern in which writers adapt to a loss and find closure. Furthermore, Sacks points out crucial features of the genre such as the elegists' drive to draw attention "to his own surviving powers" or their desire for some compensation from the universe or a higher power. Elegists are sometimes focused on the self rather than the dead, Sacks proposes, and people in mourning are driven to fill a void with something else in order to adapt. Other common features include repetition and refrains, sudden outbursts of vengeful anger, and pathetic fallacy. These elements of the elegy, he argues, are not just used for literary design—they emerge as elegists attempt to ritualize grief. Sacks' work explains how the elegy began, how traditions cemented and shifted, and how the aesthetic, intellectual pursuit of writing an elegy is connected to the process of mourning.

Sandra Gilbert also produced important scholarship on elegies in her article titled "Rats' Alley': The Great War, Modernism, and the (Anti)Pastoral Elegy." Unlike Sacks who writes with pastoral and traditional context, Gilbert focuses on the phenomenon of anti-elegies produced in the 20th century. She proposes that during the modern period, the processes of mourning and coping with trauma were permanently changed. Specifically, after World War I, modern mourning experiences shifted to "unhopeful, nihilistic, and anti-elegiac visions," and the "unbelief in the traditional strategies of consolation" pervade literature written during and after this period (Gilbert 182-183). While pastoral

elegies had a more hopeful tone, modern elegies metamorphosed into poems with more nihilistic visions that were far from consolatory. Some pastoral conventions still remained in elegies from this period, such as "reiterated questions," "vengeful anger or cursing," and sometimes the vision of "a procession of mourners," but elegists "struggled to mediate grief through what often appears to be a willed reversion to archaic modalities" (184). Gilbert uses a line from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to describe the bleak atmospheres of grieving experiences at the time: "I think we are in the rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (Eliot 115-116). Methods of mourning for modern poets drastically shifted after the first World War, and Gilbert illustrates how the memory of national trauma can impact how communities mourn.

Jahan Ramazani is another scholar who draws upon the history and psychology of modern mourning. In *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, he demonstrates how the elegy has persisted as a popular poetic form in American, English, and Irish cultures, and he discusses several types of elegies such as the self-elegy, the "female elegy," war poems, the blues, and confessional poetry. Like Gilbert, he notes that individuals in the 20th century endured widespread trauma. Through psychoanalytic, feminist, and historical readings, Ramazani analyzes the various types of elegies that appeared in the modern period, and he explores how modern poets searched for the language of mourning in a time of war-torn countries, tragic deaths, forgotten rituals, and religious doubt. He covers a wide range of poets such as Thomas Hardy, Wilfred Owen, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, and Seamus Heaney. While he interprets many American elegies around in the mid-20th century, his book serves as a cross-cultural study of how modern and contemporary elegies persist as a vital poetic form, as well as how the psychology of grief changed across these cultures. Drawing connections between real world experiences and aesthetic works, Ramazani's scholarship also demonstrates how the genre of the elegy is still shifting. For instance, he highlights comparisons between the elegy and contemporary art that expresses mourning, such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Ramazani's scholarship is important because as he analyzes modern poets,

he is attentive to psychological factors, gender roles, and cultural forces that encourage less adaptive grieving experiences.

Clearly, the modern period marks several important changes in how elegies are written and how humans grieve. On a microscopic scale, individuals were affected by personal circumstances and trauma. In addition, on a macroscopic scale, the English-speaking world faced greater risks to their mortality and endured an intangible loss of a seemingly stable social order, and this had a transnational impact on mourning. I argue that during this widespread cultural and social shift, there is a notable difference in the transition between public and private grieving experiences. Before the twentieth century, elegies were not only more consolatory, but there was a greater emphasis on shared feeling, and this communal type of mourning is more often adaptive. In other words, by grieving together in the same physical location, by fostering a community of grief, and by practicing empathy with another human being, sentimental literature had a great number of scenes, stanzas, and lines that featured people gathered in the same physical space simply sharing emotions and feeling through difficult mourning processes together. Writers aimed to make their readers feel, too. By confronting readers with scenes filled with distress and tenderness, authors played to the emotions of their audiences, encouraged sympathy for difficult plights or social injustices, and in the context of mourning, dramatized shared grieving experiences that modelled a process that reaches a more sympathetic and adaptive resolution. By the last stanza of an elegiac work, emotions were more resolved.

In the modern period, however, mourning metamorphosed into destructive experiences that were notably private. Writers still used elegies to ritualize their grief, but there were much less sentimental exchanges and public grieving communities, and instead, elegists expressed isolated experiences. With this physical and social isolation, mourning was articulated less like a linear movement toward resolution and more like circular narrations of distressed emotions and recurrent recollections of traumatic memories. In some cases, writers avoided acknowledging that they endured a loss at all, sidestepping Kübler-Ross' "acceptance" stage entirely. Other elegies and anti-elegies meditated on dark emotions, depicted psychological ramifications of trauma and loss more abstractly. Ultimately, feeling and

sentiment was not absent from modern elegies, but these works expressed private rumination and irresolution.

From a historical perspective, several aforementioned scholars have explained how immense cultural losses affect the mourning process, but to understand the totality of this transition with the elegy, it is also useful to consider certain sociological concepts about how (and where) people grieve. While the distinction between private and public spaces dates back thousands of years ago, such as with the Greeks who defined the public and political realms, one of the key philosophers who writes about this notion is Jürgen Habermas. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, he lays out this sociological concept of private and public spheres. The public sphere is where free exchange and debate of ideas occurs, or where discussion happens in a public setting. Habermas explains that the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (176). From this public sphere, he suggests a "public authority" develops that dictates the values, ideals, and goals of community or nation. In contrast, he defines the private sphere as the realm of home or family life that is free from governmental and societal influences. In this space, an individual's responsibility is to oneself, or with the other members of one's household. With isolated communication, there is less concern for others and less duties to a greater society.

Habermas acknowledges that in eighteenth-century Europe—a period in which sentimentality still flourished—it became common practice for family and friends to discuss literature, philosophy, and politics in social settings. Once men began engaging in debates outside of the home, the social practices created a public sphere. For example, across the continent and Britain, the spread of coffeehouses created a place where the Western public sphere took shape in the modern period. In these locations, men discussed politics, markets, and other topics that had an impact socially, so current understandings of property, laws, and democratic ideals were crafted in these public spheres. While the spheres delineate spaces of social exchange, the boundary between the public and private spheres are not fixed; instead, they evolve and fluctuate.

Through close-reading analyses of various elegiac texts, I acknowledge that public and private spheres have shifted in the modern period, and I suggest this transition impacts how people grieve. In other words, communication about trauma and the ability to empathize with loss changes in the twentieth century, and modern writers reflect this change in their work by depicting destructive, distanced, and inconsolable grief. The impact of private grief is played out in several texts. By analyzing literature from a transnational perspective, I demonstrate how modern mourners across different cultures express their grief maladaptively and experience a similar shift in how they cope with loss and trauma. Specifically, I analyze elegiac literature from Irish and American writers, and I compare modern grief in the private sphere with sentimental grief in the public sphere. Ultimately, while scenes from popular sentimental novels depict individuals coming together to productively mourn in public spheres, modern poetry and drama depict individuals stuck in post-traumatic, maladaptive states, unable to resolve their complicated emotions.

First, I observe work by Sylvia Plath, an American confessional poet who writes bitter anti-elegies about her father. The poems I examine were written between 1960-1965, and her work reflects the modern tendency to overturn traditional modes of representation, express emerging sensibilities of her time, and reassess how to mourn after horrors of the first World War. Plath's work shows that not all mourners have positive feelings toward the dead. In her anti-elegies, she sometimes expresses ambivalence, or feelings of sorrow mixed with celebratory attitudes toward her father's existence, and she memorializes him wrathfully. While others writing at this time also resist elegiac conventions, Plath's mourning has profound despair alongside uniquely aggressive and unresolved feelings. To unpack this private and destructive grief, I apply Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia, and I argue that Plath moves toward complications of melancholia in her poems. Instead of lamenting her father's absence, she insults him, declares complicated feelings toward him throughout her work, and resists consolation. Conventional elegies summon pathos, empathy, praise, and lamentation in their stanzas, but Plath's grief does not move through tidy, adaptive stages; instead, she portrays her father as various threatening figures and summons feelings of rage. By analyzing her work produced in the confessional

period, a uniquely American movement, I observe how this country transitioned to not only discuss personal encounters with loss, but also how mourning in a private sphere occurred among a community of confessional poets. Overall, I suggest Plath's elegies demonstrate the modern turn from consolatory mourning to the ruminating and isolating experience of melancholia.

Next, I turn to work by an Irish author, Samuel Beckett. Beckett's works fall within various genres, including short stories, poetry, and novels, but in this chapter, I analyze several short plays written around the 1950s to the 1970s. His modern tragicomic drama offers a bleak outlook on human existence. While earlier plays include gallows humor and black comedy, later plays are more minimalist and absurd. Beckett strips down conventional elements of the theatre to dramatize abstract feelings, and this type of expression is useful when analyzing modern elegies because he portrays visceral grieving experiences on the stage. In earlier plays like *Rough for Theatre I* and *II*, Beckett's characters are in derelict environments, struggling to make sense of their physical and psychological landscapes, or cope with overwhelming personal and cultural losses. Similarly, in later plays like *Not I* and *Footfalls*, his characters experience disturbed consciousness, memory, and perception, and he emphasizes a detachment from oneself and one's identity. Drawing on psychoanalytical theory, I demonstrate how Beckett's elegiac drama presents traumatic dissociation. In the context of the elegy, Beckett is a crucial figure because he writes with the context of historical losses that Ireland has endured, and he clearly illustrates the modern transformation of elegy such as the expansion beyond poetry and the expressions of private, maladaptive grief without resolution.

Another writer who expresses psychological responses to loss is Elizabeth Bishop, and I examine several of her elegies in Chapter 4. Bishop writes not far after Plath and Beckett, but toward the end of the modern literary period. In contrast to the confessional style of poets like Plath, Bishop avoided autobiographical material. Biographers note, however, that her poems still have a significant amount of details that trace back to familial and romantic relationships, locations she lived and travelled to, and personal experiences of loss. In Bishop's elegies, she conveys personal grief in a particularly distanced manner. I use psychological framework to suggest that within her poems, the speakers cope with losses

through unconscious defense mechanisms that help them evade painful realities. As they distance themselves from their emotions, her speakers attempt to avert real and distressing emotions after grief. Bishop's work demonstrates how the maladaptive, private grief in the modern period evolved. Her elegiac poems point to an important shift in how individuals grieved towards the end of the twentieth century: the redirection of one's focus, perception, and memories to avoid harmful, anxiety-producing stimuli. Ultimately, further into the modern period, elegiac literature sometimes expressed this distanced type of grief, and what Kübler-Ross dubs the "denial" stage appears to be a familiar experience for mourners at this time.

After unpacking these dark, ruminating experiences relayed in modern literature, I then move to an analysis of two sentimental fiction novels written in the 1840s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *The Black Prophet* by William Carleton. Both novels circulated widely and gained national attention in their respective countries. Also, both novels feature lengthy, emotional scenes of mourning the deaths of marginalized individuals. When women and children slaves are mourned in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe invites readers to feel immense sadness and pity. Stowe focuses on the deaths of individuals who are disempowered within their own country, and she emphasizes their innocence or suffering to draw out readers' emotions and sympathy. Similarly, *The Black Prophet* contains several scenes where an Irish community gathers to memorialize the dead publicly. Carleton, too, focuses on marginalized individuals in this society, for in the famine setting, the sick, poor, and female excess is mourned. My discussion centers on how the highly sentimental mourning of innocent, marginalized characters in these novels encourages individual and societal catharsis—both in the fictional texts and in the real world. The sentimental scenes invite heightened emotions, greater sympathy, and more critical thinking about systemic immoralities like the disenfranchisement of women and slaves. These novels had a direct and profound impact on how Irish and American citizens grieved. In part, this influence is explained by their popularity, but in addition, these authors offered an adaptive, rehabilitative path after loss. Although some critics and readers have criticized the sentimentality in the novel as too exaggerated, sentimental grief

offers a unique process of mourning through empathy with strangers who are victims of social injustices, and through public memorialization.

After synthesizing and demonstrating the importance of this contribution, I draw away from literary analysis to relay a personal experience of mourning in a public sphere. In an experiential-learning study abroad program, I visited a cemetery in Dungarvan, County Waterford where hundreds of victims of the Famine were buried in unmarked. I recount my experience of being in this public sphere, learning about the history of the catastrophic loss of lives that occurred there and exchanging wordless expressions of grief with classmates in an attempt to comprehend the tragedies that occurred. This personal experience validates how being in a physical location of mass tragic deaths fosters greater understanding of mortality and sympathy for victims. By remembering and lamenting even the unnamed dead, the importance of a communal sense of feeling and sentiment is revealed.

Ultimately, I investigate mourning experiences in the twentieth century, specifically focusing on how writers at this time shifted away from acceptance, praise, consolation, and shared grief. These American and Irish writers show that over time, a cross-cultural evolution occurred in which modern literature responded to trauma and loss with melancholia, dissociation, and displacement. Each of the authors attempt to cope with great losses, but many convey serious struggles with adapting to their grief. After analyzing modern grief, I revisit the phenomenon of sentimentality and shared grief in the nineteenth century as a comparative to show where this modern anti-consolatory experience came from, and how the shared sentimentality fosters empathy. Without this phenomenon, twentieth century literature would not have happened in the same way. These developments in Irish and American poems, drama, and novels suggest that a combination of intellect and sentiment (and a balance of coping in private and public spheres) is vital to fully comprehend and cope with loss.

CHAPTER 2

"SUCH A DARK FUNNEL, MY FATHER!": MELANCHOLIC GRIEF IN SYLVIA PLATH'S ANTI-ELEGIES

Unlike traditional elegies with a final consolation, works by Sylvia Plath that mourn the loss of her father resist consolatory attitudes and other elegiac conventions. Where other elegists praise a person, object, or period, Plath resists these parameters of the elegy. Her work demonstrates that the dead do not have to always be cherished and honored, and instead, they may be the subject of unresolved aggression. In Plath's anti-elegies, she not only avoids praise and consolation, but she also uses the genre to express her anger and ambivalence creatively. Poems such as "Full Fathom Five," "Electra on Azalea Path," "The Colossus," "Little Fugue," and "Daddy" were occasioned by the loss of her father. These anti-elegies sometimes curse her father's existence and brand him a "danger," "barnyard," "devil," "vampire," "fascist," and "bastard." Alongside this aggression are feelings of guilt and suicidal ideation, all of which suggests that her grief is both conflicted and unresolved.

Freud's concepts of grief help clarify contemporary understandings of the mourning process. In one essay, Freud differentiates between two specific responses to loss: mourning and melancholia. Both are psychological responses to the experience of losing an object or person (or grief-inducing event). He suggests that a central challenge to overcoming a loss is object-choice, or the emotional energy, attachments, or feelings in that one invested in the lost thing. Mourning and melancholia stem from the "shattering" of the relationship with the lost person, object, or idea (Freud 249). According to Freud, how one reacts following a loss distinguishes mourning from melancholia. When mourning the dead, one adaptively copes with their emotional attachment to the lost person. Those who experience this type of grief may experience sorrow but then displace energy onto a new object and make "a reinvestment in the world" (Cole 191). In an elegy, this reinvestment may materialize as the transition from lament to consolation. In other words, elegists who follow traditional patterns and forms may express this adaptive

mourning process by communicating sorrow and transitioning into expressions of solace and comfort. These consolations take different forms: an appreciation of what still exists, a turn toward one's faith, or a sense of hope for a happier future.

Melancholia, [1] on the other hand, is less adaptive. Freud suggests that melancholic grief arises when one is unable to cope with their emotional investments in the lost person or unable to find a new object, action, or person to invest in (250). Because one is unable to displace certain emotions, unresolved feelings like anger and resentment remain, and aggression is turned toward the person's own self. Freud contends that the person experiences an ego loss, or "loss of self," rather than an object-loss, and he notes that a person with this type of grief experiences a "narcissistic identification with the object [that] then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis" (Freud 249). Consequently, instead of working through grief and displacing emotional energy onto a new object or person, a melancholic person trades "object love" for identification with the dead and fixates on how the event has impacted his or her self. In the context of the elegy, melancholic grief may unfold in anti-elegies that avoid conventional praise or resolution. These poems may express unresolved feelings of guilt, convey a desire for self-punishment, and maladaptively work through trauma, loss, and grief. In fact, according to Freud, a deep self-hatred underlies melancholia which in extreme cases may result in suicide (252). Finally, though "adjustment to loss is made over time" with mourning, Freud suggests a melancholic person cannot work through their grief due to these unresolved ambivalent feelings (Cole 191).

Freud's ideas help explain the antagonistic and aggressive diction in modern anti-elegies like those written by Plath. Many elegies conventionally lament and praise the dead before moving on to consolation, but literary movements in the twentieth century have challenged and defied these traditions. Jahan Ramazani suggests this pushback of traditions especially impacted Plath and other poets who were a part of a literary movement called confessionalism. This style of writing emerged in 1950s and 60s America and dealt with subject matter that was traditionally avoided in American poetry, such as personal feelings and experiences surrounding relationships, death, or trauma. Often, these subjects are discussed autobiographically. Expressions of grief in these works were not only more personal, but also more

private and melancholic. Ramazani suggests “modern elegists who most influenced Plath demonstrate that the dead can be not only revered but openly resisted in elegies” (1143). While not all rage and aggression in elegies may be explained by melancholia, many American women poets like Plath “have been more willing to use the genre to exorcize, slough, divorce, defame, even annihilate the dead” (Ramazani 1143). Plath’s work attempts to make the experience of grief more bearable by ritualizing it into language, but her emotions are hostile and her grief is irresolvable.

Biographers trace Plath’s grief to the traumatic death of her father during childhood. Her father, Otto Plath, died after refusing to seek medical care for an illness. He eventually saw a doctor years after contracting the illness and was diagnosed with untreated diabetes. An infection in his foot was identified as gangrene, and though his foot was amputated, he died shortly after (Ramazani 1147). Unlike other anti-elegies which lament the dead soon after a loss, Plath writes years after the death of her father. During this period of writing, “changing moods of elegiac poetry … [shifted] from a typical grief experience open to receiving compensatory consolation, to a melancholic grief that is unresolved, more ambivalent, acerbic, and resistant to consolation” (Cole 200). Plath followed suit, shunning the elegy’s association with love, summoning violent anger at her father, and expressing complicated bereavement. Her anti-elegies suggest that her father’s death was a traumatic event, and she voices unresolved emotions through melancholic language, tones, and literary devices. The level of aggression within her anti-elegies becomes more intense when examining her work chronologically.

On top of the difficulties present with melancholia, the nature of confessional poetry complicates how readers understand Plath’s grief. Plath recounts personal experiences or trauma that were often previously understood as taboo (Schetrumpf 117). While confessional poetry “must be understood through biographical, literary, and historical reference” (Schetrumpf 118), the speaker of a poem is assumed to be distinct from the author. Yet Plath’s anti-elegies—like other confessional poems—are manifestations of something that is real in her life, so readers cannot divorce Plath from her work.

Though Plath’s early work is not as hostile as her final assault, “Daddy,” in which she condemns her father as “the black man who / Bit my pretty red heart in two,” earlier anti-elegies still demonstrate a

progression toward complications of melancholia (55-56). For example, “Full Fathom Five,” the first anti-elegy for her father, contains negative feelings and avoids consolation. While she does not verbally assault her father, she protects herself behind a cold tone and diction. In this poem, she describes an old, god-like man of immense proportions who rises from an ocean tide, and she urges that this location should be avoided because the father’s “dangers are many” (16). Plath describes her father as a god of the sea who is enormous and timeless, perhaps suggesting divinity. However, his “spread hair” is “miles long,” and contains “the old myth of origins / Unimaginable” (Plath 10-11), so his reach is dangerously vast and not able to be measured. Her father holds power over her with the knowledge of her origins. This confusion about origination suggests a loss of identity associated with melancholia (Cole 117). The father’s hair is also described as a “dragnet,” or a net drawn through a river to catch fish and other animals, so his presence threatens to trap unwary passersby or envelop Plath herself. Consequently, Plath’s father is portrayed as an antagonist who is metaphorically as all-encompassing, unfathomable, and threatening as her grief.

Along with this hostile language, Plath uses enjambed lines that jar meaning and emphasize the unsettling nature of her grief and the sense of separation she feels from her father. Most stanzas interrupt phrases and meaning. For instance, this powerful father-figure which can only “surface seldom” should be “steered clear / Of, not fathomed” (Plath 13-14). Through enjambment, Plath underscores her “[struggle] with a paternal discourse that is unresponsive and indecipherable, in contrast to the soothing voices and inspirited texts that once granted elegists access to the dead” (Ramazani 1145). Instead of fostering a connection with the dead through her poetry, she is unable to access positive memories of his existence, understand complicated emotions concerning his character, or process the loss. Additionally, the title of the poem comes from Ariel’s song in Shakespeare’s “The Tempest.” In its original context, Ferdinand mistakenly believes his father has drowned during a storm in a shipwreck, and Ariel tells the son that his father lies five fathoms, or thirty feet, below the surface of the sea. Plath’s father is not “six feet under”; he is irretrievably lost in the ocean, and with this distance, she cannot confront or process her feelings

surrounding his loss. Plath therefore manipulates the poem's structure and connotations to construct a cryptic anti-elegy that harbors unsympathetic and detached feelings toward her father.

The speaker and descriptions in "Full Fathom Five" clearly mirror Plath's personal circumstances. To the enormous father-figure, the speaker acknowledges, "I / Cannot look much" at him, and "your form suffers / Some strange injury / And seems to die" (16-19). This injury and death mirror her father's illness and demise, as she references her father's infection. Additionally, Plath directly addresses her father in the final stanza when the speaker says, "Father, this thick air is murderous" (Plath 44). Plath expresses a painful lack of resolution in her final stanza. Throughout the poem, she associates the sea with death and the land with life, so this "murderous" air on land suggests painful, destructive experiences in her life along with unresolved grief for her father. She concludes with "I would breathe water," again proposing an attraction to self-punishment and dying (45). Donald Capps asserts that punishment is a feature of melancholia and in contrast to typical mourning, for "while in mourning a loss may be profoundly painful, it is experienced as a normal part of life rather than as punishment" (qtd. in Cole 191). Thus, while mourning may be resolved over time, Plath discloses important features of melancholia in this anti-elegy: a lack of resolution and a sense of self-punishment.

"Electra on Azalea Path" also maps Plath's struggle with melancholic grief, but she more overtly expresses her conflicting feelings of blame, guilt, and a loss of self. In this anti-elegy, she has hibernated over a long period, hiding from her father or the fact that he has died. Skeptical of her origins, her father's death, and her relationship to this loss, she imagines that she was "God-fathered into the world from my mother's belly" as if Otto Plath did not die at all or exist to begin with (Plath 7). She avoids acknowledgment that he has died and that he was her father. These feelings coincide with features of melancholia, for those experiencing this grieving response opt for "disassociation, irresolution … and skepticism toward the dead and death itself" (Cole 196). In this hibernation, she was "small as a doll in my dress of innocence" and "lay dreaming your epic," both doubting the reality of her father's death and constructing his legendary existence (Plath 11-12). However, after twenty years, she wakes from the

innocent slumber when she sees her father's name on a tombstone and is forced to confront the painful reality of irretrievable loss.

In this poem, Plath shuns elegiac tradition and mocks the association of sympathy with flowers. "No flower / breaks the soil" on her father's cramped tombstone, but there is "artificial red sage," "plastic evergreens," and "ersatz petals" that drip a "bloody dye" (Plath 20-21). Although traditional elegies sometimes use flowers as a consoling and redemptive symbol, Plath's flowers are artificial and offer no consolation. Ramazani connects this irresolution to melancholia. He remarks, "for this melancholic daughter, no substitute for the father, including his name, flowers, or an elegy, can heal the wound of loss" (1146). Therefore, by twisting conventions of the elegy, Plath expresses how she is unable to find consolation and work through her grief due to lingering ambivalent feelings. This hopelessness is equally conveyed by the rhyme scheme. Only the first and last lines of each stanza rhyme, and while the last stanza begins with "breath," the last line of the stanza ends with "death." Conventional elegies often contain a consolation near the end of the poem, so readers may expect the author to express hope or assert that her life will continue beyond grief, but Plath is still apprehensive and psychologically grappling with complicated, unresolved emotions.

Moreover, Plath describes her experiences with guilt and self-punishment in "Electra on Azalea Path." She suggests the speaker is responsible for his death, and she desires to be forgiven. The speaker is intimidated by her father and advises him to consider leniency, requesting: "O pardon the one who knocks for pardon at / Your gate, father—your hound-bitch, daughter, friend" (Plath 44-45). As a "hound-bitch," the daughter persistently pursues forgiveness as if she were a hunting dog on a never-ending quest to resolve her grief. Donald Capps' views on melancholia concur with Plath's expression. Attempting to explain Freud's essay on melancholia, Capps says that melancholic individuals experience ambivalence or aggression because they feel guilt alongside a belief that the object or deceased person is at fault (13). Capps elaborates:

> "The feeling of abandonment is more painful than the feeling, in grief, of bereavement, … so the reproachful feelings he has toward the lost object are turned against himself.

> The lost object is not relinquished and released, as in grief, but is internalized, becoming an aspect of the ego, so that the ego itself becomes the cause of reproach and delusions of future punishment." (13-14)

Similar to Capps' articulation, Plath blames her father yet experiences additional guilt herself. Though "It was the gangrene that ate you to the bone," and Plath's father may have not died had he sought treatment, she soon revises this assertion, lamenting in the final stanza, "It was my love that did us both to death" (38). Instead of seeking consolation like conventional elegies, Plath is unable to convey personal solace because she is subject to the complications of melancholia. Her "reproachful feelings" are turned toward the self, and she expresses her own culpability. She also attempts to punish herself for this destructive, illicit love, inserting a surreal image of self-destruction in this anti-elegy for her father: "I am the ghost of an infamous suicide / My own blue razor rusting at my throat" (32-33). Plath, instead of her father, is imaginatively punished and killed. Because she cannot relinquish the "lost object" and resolve her grief, she wades through ambivalent feelings, diverts these harsh feelings inward, and her guilt develops into a fantasy of self-punishment.

"The Colossus" features similarly conflicting emotions of love and resentment, and the poem also expresses grief melancholically. Plath takes a more heated and intense tone, imagining her father with enormous proportions, much like the god-like figure stretching across the ocean in "Full Fathom Five." But in this metaphor, her father is a huge, shattered statue. Because her father's absence looms so largely, constructing him as a literal monument may be an attempt to reconstruct his presence. While she has taken care of this statue for thirty years, she also mocks his supposed grandeur and inability to speak. Plath scorns the giant statue, using neologisms like "mule-bray" and "pig-grunt" to describe the noises coming from his mouth and taunting, "Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle" (6). As he can only mutter noises, the speaker's father cannot have the status of an oracle, yet she still "[crawls] like an ant in mourning" to mend her father's broken pieces (12). Again, Plath dramatizes an irresolvable bereavement in which she cherishes her father but "experiences the loss of the object with considerable ambivalence" (Capps 13). Torn between mocking her father and communicating with him, the daughter

cannot resolve her grief, so she is trapped within his ruins. This more conspicuous aggression and projection of hostility demonstrates Plath's descent into melancholic grief.

In Plath's next anti-elegy, "Little Fugue," melancholia again unfolds. Ramazani suggests that the word "fugue" in the title alludes to a musical technique with two separate voices that recur throughout the composition as well as the form of a temporary amnesia. He observes that she "numbly recycles a small set of images" (1149). Like the musical fugue, her feelings associated with grief are recycled again and again, and like the psychological fugue, she recounts memories similar to a person experiencing temporary amnesia after a traumatic event. Plath still mocks her father, aptly choosing "wag" to describe the action of the "yew's black fingers" and comparing this to her father's fingers which "had the noses of weasels" (1, 11). Yet instead of representing her father as a larger, metaphorical object, she is overwhelmed by confusing, disjointed images. By listing random, incongruous imagery such as the personified tree, a "blind pianist," and "a briefcase of tangerines," Plath suggests a dreamlike state where she cannot progress through mourning. While traditional elegies allow speakers to address the mourned person and form a sense of communication, there is a sense of deafness in this anti-elegy, and the speaker's senses are confused. As the clouds "go over," emphasizing Plath's hazy and unresolved grief, "the deaf and dumb / Signal the blind, and are ignored" (3-4). Despite their efforts to communicate, these characters lack the senses necessary to make contact. Also, she "sees" her father's voice instead of hearing it, and this synesthesia and miscommunication only intensifies instead of resolving. In Plath's melancholic grief, the lines of communication with her father are severed, and she cannot recognize her reality or communicate with others, much less move on from her loss. A path toward resolution is symbolically dark and unclear, and she is trapped in a "dark funnel" of melancholia where opportunities for consolation grow slimmer with time (22). [2]

Plath's final anti-elegy for her father, "Daddy," portrays him as more demonic than ever before. Assorted insults are scattered throughout each stanza, as she verbally assaults her father and describes him as various adversaries. She first acknowledges apprehension for her father when she says she has lived inside him, a metaphorical shoe, like the child's nursery rhyme but more fearful, as she was

"Barely daring to breathe or Achoo" (5). Plath references her father's gangrene by comparing him to a "Ghastly statue with one gray toe" (9), which echoes the earlier representation of him in "The Colossus." Yet instead of characterizing herself as a meek "ant in mourning" like in this previously published anti-elegy, Plath more equally matches the antagonism of her father in "Daddy" (12). Plath suggests she is a victim of her father's tyranny though does not avoid confrontation, and as she slanders his character, she echoes the "spontaneous agitation" typical of melancholia (Parker et al. 745). For example, she compares her father to a monstrous German Nazi, citing his "neat mustache" and his "Aryan eye, bright blue" (44). In contrast, the speaker frames herself as a victim who is "[chuffed] off like a Jew" (32). Plath uses these images of Nazism to express her personal mourning, adopting the persona of a Jew who has suffered but triumphed over despicable experiences.

In contrast to earlier anti-elegies with formal and distantly antagonistic tones, the speaker in "Daddy" is more childlike and repetitive. This evokes an image of a child with "an unresolved conflict in the oedipal stage," or the stage in one's psychosocial development where he individuates himself from a parental authority figure, which is Freud's argued source for melancholia (Cole 194). As the speaker of the poem stammers "Ich, ich, ich, ich, / I could hardly speak" (27-28), Plath again reveals ambivalent feelings, as she is overwhelmed with emotion and unable to speak in front of the father. In contrast, she associates her father with "the language obscene," similar to the earlier "barnyard" noises from her that were mocked in "The Colossus" (30). Her father thus incites immense frustration and anger, and this aggression shows a transition to complications of melancholia. Plath refuses to comply with elegiac conventions and instead heatedly mourns her father while evoking a childlike character that is developmentally arrested and psychologically fixated on the memory of a traumatic loss that occurred in childhood.

Instead of achieving a sense solace or offering a consolation, Plath sadistically expresses vengeance in her grief. Scorn is aimed at the father instead of implied, as she speaks in first-person in each stanza, addresses him directly, and uses the rhetorical apostrophe to summon his existence for a brutal attack. However, despite the more violent tone and imagery directed outward instead of toward the

self, Plath still expresses melancholia in this anti-elegy. For example, like her earlier anti-elegies, she conveys feelings of guilt for causing her father's death. The speaker says, "Daddy, I have had to kill you. / You died before I had time" (6-7). Here, she also suggests a desire to defeat him in her consciousness and eliminate the painful feelings of melancholic grief, though she is still unable to imaginatively kill him. Plath additionally shuns the elegiac tradition of a procession or chorus of mourners in the final stanza. Instead of parading out of love, the villagers "never liked" the father, and she notes that they "are dancing and stamping on you" (82-83). Without wishing him well beyond the grave or declaring a hope for his resurrection, villagers grieve destructively alongside the speaker and more harshly resist a resolution.

Furthermore, Plath ends with "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through," which may be interpreted as a claim of resolution and autonomy, but it may also have a reversed meaning (80). In these final lines, Plath stresses her desire to be finished with her destructive father and her equally destructive grief. However, while she may be "through" with the poem and with attempts of reconciliation, she also expresses a sense of defeat as if she is "through" with her life. Ramazani contends, "The father of 'The Colossus' and 'Little Fugue' could not be totalized or internalized, so in 'Daddy' the daughter tries expelling what she has been unable to ingest, pulverizing what she has been unable to put together" (Ramazani 1152). With the context of earlier anti-elegies, Plath increased aggression becomes more evident, yet this unleashed aggression is maladaptive and self-destructive in the end.

Through several literary devices and rhetorical strategies, Plath ultimately conveys melancholic grief in the anti-elegies for her father. She directs guilt and punishment toward herself and moves toward complications of melancholia in final assaults against her father, which are more murderous and unrelenting. In her work, Plath did not identify with typical pastoral conventions of the elegy, nor did she entertain praise and consolation. Instead, she constructs a series of anti-elegies that communicate her inability to work through "typical" mourning. In fact, after Plath read Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," she wrote in a journal that Freud's ideas about melancholia were "[a]n almost exact description of my feelings and reasons for suicide: a transferred murderous impulse" (Plath 279). In other

words, after enduring trauma in her childhood and the loss of her father, she felt alarmingly violent compulsions and unsettled emotions. Plath's identification with this type of mourning joins other modern American poets who resist traditional expressions of grief. For the melancholic person, a "funnel" of grief is not only "dark" because of the trauma of loss, as they must overcome sadistic feelings and relentless emotional turmoil. By resisting the parameters of the elegy, Plath helps others understand the repetitive, dissociative, and unresolved feelings that do exist and sometimes accompany grief.

Notes

1. Melancholia was published in the DSM-IV as a subtype of clinical depression. While the following edition of the DSM eliminates a melancholic type of depression, several doctors and researchers have clarified symptoms and made a case for its classification as a distinct disorder.

2. Plath's most recent elegies, "Little Fugue" and "Daddy," were published posthumously in *Ariel* after she took her own life.

CHAPTER 3

"I WAS NOT THERE": DISSOCIATIVE RESPONSES TO TRAUMA IN BECKETT'S ABSURD DRAMA

When an audience views a play, there are certain conventions that are typically expected, such as a logical plot, an authorial objective, a problem or conflict, the characters' search for an answer, and a basis in real-life observations and values. Spectators are kept in suspense by wondering how characters find a resolution or proceed toward a definite end. Yet absurdist plays overturn these conventions. Components of theater are deconstructed: actions seem irrational, characters become less human or change into entirely different creatures, speech is interrupted, fragmented, or repetitive, and the playwright conjures up an atmosphere that seems devoid of logic and reason. In this genre, the chaos encourages the audience to not wonder how the action will proceed closer to a definitive end, but rather how the next action will inform their understanding. Although some spectators may find the absurdity confusing, audiences are still thoughtful, interested, or struck with a recognizable emotion after watching an absurd play. Clearly, irrational does not equal without meaning, as the theater of the absurd can prompt others to recognize common human experiences of our age and question order and meaning around them.

Writers of this genre can play out psychological and emotional processes on a physical stage. Samuel Beckett, for example, wrote several short absurd plays that explore complicated responses to loss, such as *Rough for Theatre I* and *II*, *Not I*, and *Footfalls*. After enduring various trauma, the characters in these plays cope with losses of order, reason, a sense of self, and a sense of connection to or understanding of the environment around them. Although the literature of mourning, or elegies, typically refers to poems in which speakers cope with a loss, these plays are elegiac in that characters cope with more abstract losses after enduring a traumatic event.

Typically, both drama and elegies progress toward a resolution. Most descriptions of the conventional features of an elegy suggest that writers aim to work through mourning adaptively, and especially in poetry, the traditional elegy moves toward a "renewal of hope and joy" (Cuddon). Writers of

elegiac poems can confront losses, work through grief, praise the dead, lament their absence, and finally, emphasize eventual comfort and a resolution (15). While drama does not have a straightforward pattern or plot, critics such as Martin Esslin point out a similar movement to resolve a central issue before the play is completed. He suggests that "in conventional drama, … at the end, all conflicts are tidily resolved" (13). Despite conventional elegies and drama that feature this process of adjusting to or resolving a loss, not every mourner progresses through mappable stages or arrives at a sense of comfort in the end.

Beckett participates in a modern movement that pushes against the conventional resolution of loss that we expect in elegies and drama. His characters have repetitive, melancholic existences, and when reading his work chronologically, there is an escalation of dissociation. In other words, characters progressively distance themselves from their environment, memories, emotions, and components of the self. Beckett first explores depersonalization in *Rough for Theatre I* and *II*, while later plays like *Not I* and *Footfalls* feature a progressive removal of body parts and a severance from reality.

Dissociation refers to the feeling of detachment from physical or emotional experiences. A dissociative person does not lose a sense of reality as in psychosis, but rather subconsciously responds to an event by distancing his or her self from reality. Pierre Janet, a French psychologist and philosopher, is most often credited with authoring the concept of dissociation. Janet suggested that dissociation was a mental or cognitive deficit, but later scholarship proposes dissociation as a psychological defense. This psychological response is common among people who have endured trauma. The fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders considers core features of dissociative disorders to include symptoms such as depersonalization (a feeling of being detached from one's mind or body), derealization (a feeling of altered perception of the world so that it seems unreal), and amnesia (episodic memory loss) (DSM-IV). The revised DSM-5 expands on this definition, proposing that an individual experiencing dissociation has a disruption of identity "characterized by two or more distinct personality states, [and] involves marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency" (DSM-5). Overall, one's consciousness, memory, and perception are disturbed, objects and people feel unreal, and there is a sense of detachment from oneself and one's identity. In Beckett's literature, these psychological phenomena are

widespread, and he uses the absurdist theater to play out these difficult feelings after loss and trauma, especially the emotional experiences that seem unreal and abstract.

Rough for Theatre I is a one-act play that Beckett first wrote in French in the late 1950s, and the work follows two characters with disabilities that meet on a derelict street corner in “ruins.” A blind beggar, known as A, sits on a stool playing the fiddle, hoping to collect change from passersby, when a man called B approaches him in a wheelchair. They discuss people who were once in their lives, and B proposes that in the interest of survival, they could become partners, uniting sight and mobility. The blind man is tempted by the man’s other suggestion to acquire baked beans, and he begins to excitedly ask him about their surroundings, questioning, “What does it all look like now?” (Beckett 62). B, however, does not answer with certainty, strikes him with a pole, and becomes concerned that he will never see anyone again. As the blind man presses for further details, the man in the wheelchair begins to threaten him, but A grabs the man’s pole from his hands and the action freezes ambiguously on a final tableau. In this play, Beckett dramatizes effects of dissociation, especially depersonalization, for while the characters are portrayed less abstractly than later plays, they remain distanced from their selves, their environment, and their memories.

The men provide little personal history and no explicit explanation why their environment is in ruins, but there are signs that men have endured trauma. In the past, they associated with others, such as the blind fiddler’s relationship with “Dora” who “took [him] by the hand” and scorned him for “the days he hadn’t earned enough” (Beckett 62). However, he refers to her as “my woman,” pauses, and revises this to “a woman,” indicating that she is now distant from him. Similarly, B recalls having past women who helped him “get … out of the chair in the evening and back into it in the morning and to push me as far as the corner when I went out of my mind” (Beckett 62). B had the company and comfort of others in the past, but now, when he sees A, he is taken aback at the sound of his music and the sight of another human, glad that he was not a “dream” or a “vision” (Beckett 61). Both men now live in a lonely, destitute state with an environment characterized by decay, collapse, and disintegration. At one point, A laments, “Sometimes I hear steps. Voices. I say to myself, they are coming back, some are coming back,

to try to settle again, or look for something they had left behind, or to look for someone they had left behind" (Beckett 63). Yet B finds this idea incredulous, which implies that there has been a catastrophic event in the community that has caused people to leave, or worse, die off. Beckett therefore emphasizes even in the setting that there have been overwhelming and traumatic personal and cultural losses in their lives, for they no longer have any company and focus only on survival.

Both characters cope with these losses in a dissociative and depersonalized state. For example, the characters' disabilities dramatize components of traumatic dissociation, such as the inability to recognize and interact with one's environment. These men are unable to navigate the world like sighted or abled individuals, which mirrors dissociative experiences that include disturbances in perception and the "disruption of sensory motor functioning" and (DSM-5). A, for instance, is confused about his surroundings and cannot identify objects due to his blindness. He expresses frequent concern for understanding the setting around him, lamenting, "When I set out I don't know, and when I get here I don't know, and while I am here I don't know, whether it is day or night" (Beckett 62). Although he is uncertain of his surroundings because he is literally blind, his experience also figuratively speaks to the disorientation often felt during dissociation. Likewise, B is unable to walk and has one leg that "went bad and was removed" (Beckett 66), which compares to a lack of motor abilities one may experience after trauma (DSM-5). His physical impairment also suggests a missing component of the self—similar to depersonalized feelings of being detached from one's body. The audience can therefore deduce similarities between an absence of body parts or abilities and the disorienting psychological reactions to trauma.

In addition, the men's perceptions of themselves and their environment is skewed. Frequently, A and B express anxiety about interpreting situations correctly, identifying features around them, and using their senses appropriately. A, for instance, requests that B describe the natural world several times, asking what the trees look like, if it is day or night, and if there is any light, but B responds with uncertainty: "Day, if you like" (Beckett 62). Similarly, B faces challenges recognizing core components of himself. At one point, he asks A, "What does my soul look like?" (Beckett 65). Both men have a "marked

discontinuity" in perception and rely on each other to discern various things. Other than sight, they face issues in using other senses. B, for example, questions if the blind beggar has any sense of smell, and he responds, "It's the same stink everywhere," which suggests challenges in perception other than his blindness. They also express confusion regarding sound:

B: How long are you going to stay like that?

A: I can stay for hours listening to all the sounds. [They listen.]

B: What sounds?

A: I don't know what they are. [They listen.]

B: I can see it. [Pause.] I can— (Beckett 67)

While A is fixated on interpreting the noises around him, B experiences synesthesia, mixing sight and sound. Both men ultimately experience disturbances in their perception, which suggests that there is a cognitive disconnection after their trauma that leaves them feeling distant from their environment and the self.

The men live in a state of despondency and attempt to navigate the ruins left behind as partners, but they do not find comfort or consolation together. Something distressing has happened to them on a personal and cultural level, yet they either avoid the topic or cannot remember, for any discussion about the past and acknowledgement of a traumatic event is both painful and cut short. Feeling lost, melancholic, and removed from their selves and their environment, they are greatly affected by this trauma. Their experiences mirror the sky around them that seems to have gotten "stuck, one sunless day, in the heart of winter," (Beckett 66), as A and B are stuck in processes of mourning and cope with trauma by remaining distanced from their losses. One's abilities may complement the other's disability, but it is clear that these men cannot transcend their shortcomings and resolve grief in this way because at the end of the play, Beckett implies the possibility of a physical altercation. It is unclear if A will throw the pole away or use it to harm B, yet even if they do not physically harm each other, they cannot effectively recognize one another in a dissociative state. Overall, Beckett examines how grief works in the company

of another equally traumatized individual and suggests that partnership does not help individuals progress adaptively through mourning.

Rough for Theatre II was written a few years later in 1960, and in this one act play, Beckett shifts the perspective of mourning to two men who audit another man's grief. Bertrand (A), a practical and organized man, and Morvan (B), a hot-tempered man, are bureaucrats in an apartment on the sixth floor. They examine Croker (C), who stands center stage in front of an open window. As Croker stands motionless with his back to the audience, Beckett implies that he is considering throwing himself out of this window. Identical tables, lamps, and chairs are positioned symmetrically in the room, and Bertrand and Morvan carry out an investigation on "the temperament, character, and past life of this potential suicide, who never [moves or] speaks … in an apparent attempt to help him decide whether he should or should not take his own life" (Knowlson 456). The auditors are indifferent as they assess Croker's life, more focused on the lights around them that flicker on and off, and in the end, they condemn him to jump. Yet when Bertrand goes to the window to inspect him, he notices something that causes him to remove his handkerchief and bring it to Croker's face.

Like *Rough for Theatre I,* this play is unclear about the specific nature of the man's trauma, but there are signs that he has endured difficult events in the past and continues to struggle with loss. Bertrand and Morvan provide potential reasons for Croker to be pushed this far, like his estranged wife's "five or six miscarriages," his inability to send a letter to an "anonymous admiratrix," and his "literary aspirations" that have been "incompletely stifled" (Beckett 62). Moreover, he experiences several physical and psychological ailments that the auditors explain in an exhaustive list:

> "sick headaches … eye trouble … irrational fear of vipers … ear trouble … pathological horror of songbirds … throat trouble … need for affection … inner void … congenital timidity … nose trouble … morbid sensitivity to the opinion of others." (Beckett 76).

Clearly, Croker has experienced various hardships that mirror several modern struggles regarding the "futility and pointlessness of human effort, the same impossibility of human communication, [and a] fundamentally tragic view of human existence" (Esslin 5). Although Croker does not mourn a specific

loss or death, he copes with more abstract trauma like the loss of reason, order, and understanding of himself and his environment.

Morvan, Bertrand, and Croker convey several aspects of traumatic dissociative experiences. Memory, for instance, plays a crucial role in dissociation, as one of the features for a clinical diagnosis includes "recurrent gaps in the recall of everyday events … that are inconsistent with ordinary forgetting" (DSM-5). Although Croker never speaks, the other two men explain that "he remembered only the calamities," suggesting a fixation on trauma and an inability to recall certain events (Beckett 74). The auditors face similar challenges in memory. On several occasions, they acknowledge that they cannot recall information. Morvan mentions to Bertrand at one point, "You forget that this is not his home. He's only here to take care of the cat." In an irritated response, Bertand exclaims, "I forget! I forget! And he, does he not forget? [With passion.] But that's what saves us!" (Beckett 43). A mirrored conversation occurs later when Morvan explains to Bertrand that he had forgotten that Croker's watch was a gift, and again, Bertrand exclaims, "I forget, I forget! And he, does he not—at least he kept it." (Beckett 75). This repeated phrase suggests an impaired ability to recall everyday events, as the characters endure repetitive conversations and have clear gaps in their memories.

The lights flickering throughout the play also signal further psychological disconnections and disruptions. Repeatedly, Bertrand's lamp "goes out" and "on again," which frustrates and scares him (Beckett 77). As Morvan continues to describe Croker's psychological and physical ailments, specifically his "morbid sensitivity" to others' opinions, the light within the lamp turns off. Morvan suggests, "Must be a faulty connexion," which symbolically mirrors dissociation, especially the psychological discontinuity in consciousness, senses, or perception (DSM-5). Unlike *Rough for Theatre I*, in which both characters are understandably human, the characters in these plays are more abstract, and Bertrand and Morvan are more akin to representations of personal judgements of mourning. In other words, the men indifferently conduct an examination of his life, like a representation of Croker's thoughts which recount memories of the events that have led up to his breaking point. Therefore, as the lights flicker on and off, they symbolize the psychological disturbances and disruptions after experiencing trauma. Whether Croker

resolves his "inexhaustible reservoir of sorrow" is unclear, as the expression at the end may indicate that he is crying, smiling, or died during this process of auditing (Beckett 74).

Written several years later in 1972, *Not I* is a short dramatic monologue that is set in total darkness besides one beam of light that illuminates a woman's disembodied mouth about eight feet above the stage. In some performances, a shadowy figure called the Auditor is positioned downstage and moves briefly four times throughout the play. With fragmented and hurried speech, the Mouth utters phrases which tell how a woman, now around the age of seventy, was born prematurely, was abandoned by her parents, and has had a loveless, mechanical, and silent existence—save for the occasional outburst. Refusing to identify herself as the subject, the Mouth explains that the woman has endured an unspecified traumatic experience, and after she wandered in a field "looking aimlessly for cowslips," the event triggered her to begin this chaotic outburst of speech (Beckett 216). While the Mouth speaks, there is a persistent buzzing in her skull and a light which similarly torments her. In this play, Beckett portrays a traumatic response that is stripped down to an incoherent voice, divorced entirely from the body. Although spectators may anticipate more naturalistic characters, plot, and setting on the stage, Beckett indicated that he hoped the play would "work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect," as his abstract drama intentionally creates an isolated emotional experience ("Beckett to Jessica Tandy").

The Mouth is in both literal and figurative darkness, removed from its environment and without a normal degree of awareness. It is in an altered state of mind where it cannot interact with its surroundings, engage with certain senses, or have full cognitive and motor function. While it is capable of speech, the Mouth suggests a disturbance in thought-functioning when it mentions a flaw in "the machine … so disconnected … never got the message … powerless to respond […] like numbed" (Beckett 218). Additionally, it expresses repeated anxiety about this cognitive condition, interrupting the narrative multiple times to begin a thought about "the brain." At one point, the Mouth explains that the brain wants the mouth to stop, but it is not in full control. It discloses, "can't stop the stream … and the whole brain begging … something begging in the brain … begging the mouth to stop … pause a moment … if only for a moment … and no response … as if it hadn't heard … or couldn't" (220). Like all the Mouth's

speech, these phrases are spoken in fragments between ellipses, which suggests further disturbances in psychological processes. Its emphasis on lacking agency indicates that the communication between the brain and the ability of speech is severed.

This disconnection from cognitive functions mirrors the descriptions of dissociative disorders in the DSM-5. The manual characterizes dissociative disorders with "marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency, accompanied by related alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and sensory motor functioning" (DSM-5). Beyond the Mouth's challenges with cognition and perception, senses are jumbled and disturbed. The persistent buzzing interrupts her stream of consciousness periodically. At one point, the Mouth cuts off her thoughts with "but— … what? … the buzzing? … yes … all the time the buzzing … so-called … in the ears … though of course actually … not in the ears at all … in the skull … dull roar in the skull" (Beckett 217). Shortly after, she notes a "sudden flash" of light that "torments" her. The Mouth is aware of sounds and noises, but it has only a semblance of senses and cannot function effectively. Beckett therefore connects this abstract character to psychological responses that disturb human senses and feel ungrounded from reality.

Furthermore, the Mouth expresses anxiety surrounding the traumatic event and avoids personal pronouns. From the beginning, Beckett emphasizes that these impersonal pronouns point to dissociation from the trauma and the self, as the title, *Not I*, suggests that the entirety of the events described in the play happened to someone else. The stage directions instruct that the Mouth has a "vehement refusal to relinquish third person" (Beckett 215), and throughout the fast-paced monologue, there is no concession that the Mouth experienced these events. Every time she gets closer to describing the trauma that occurred "in that early April morning light," the Mouth pauses and exclaims, "what? … no! … who? … she!" (216). Another pause follows as she "recovers" and resumes uttering what happened to "her" in the third person. During her final repetition of these desperate exclamations, Mouth repeats "she! … SHE!" implying that the actor increases her volume (223). The Mouth thus becomes more distressed at the thought of acknowledging the trauma and its own identity. It never finishes identifying what happened in the fields in April and continues to divorce itself from the narrative. By emphasizing that the events of the

woman's life are wholly foreign, the Mouth is temporarily paralyzed, dissociated, and removed from the trauma.

In addition, the Mouth represses the memory of trauma and cannot recall important or everyday information. According to recent scholarship, memory loss is a critical component of dissociation, particularly with dissociative identity disorder in the DSM-5, as amnesia is a criterion for a diagnosis. This edition acknowledges that in a dissociative state, one loses memory of both important and everyday information. There are multiple instances when the Mouth cannot recall past experiences, recollect common knowledge, or completely access information about past trauma and relay this to the audience. For example, she believes that she is "coming up to sixty" years old but interjects "what? … seventy? … good God! … coming up to seventy" (216). Later on in the play, she repeats this lapse in knowledge of her age, so she has a repetitive gap in memory. Basic information is inaccessible or incomplete, mirroring the disturbance of memory processes that occurs in a dissociative state. Although Beckett's play is absurd and may seem to some like a drastic move away from reality, he strips down the theater to a disjointed, traumatized mouth to more accurately represent psychological experiences that feel unreal.

Footfalls is another short abstract narrative that Beckett wrote in 1975. The play has four parts, and in each part, a bell sounds and lights fade to reveal a ghost-like woman, May. This woman walks nine paces back and forth along an illuminated strip of light. With a "low and slow" mechanical voice, May asks her mother if she needs tending, and the mother responds but cannot be seen (Beckett 237). In the second part, the mother, still unseen, explains some of May's backstory: she has suffered a kind of trauma, referred to only as "it," and she has spent her life obsessively pacing without venturing outside. In the third and fourth sections, May tells stories that mirror parts of her own existence, such as a female who walks up and down a church and a girl named Amy speaking to her mother, Mrs. Winter. Like *Not I*, this play explores a woman's response to trauma, her rote actions, and her fragmented, unresolved, and circular speech.

May is stuck in a repetitive, dissociative state and is unable to name her trauma. In one exchange, her mother asks if she will ever stop spinning in melancholic grief:

V: Will you never have done … revolving it all?

M: [halting] It all?

V: It all. [Pause.] In your poor mind. [Pause.] It all. [Pause.] It all. (238-239)

Instead answering or even acknowledging the question, May "resumes pacing." This fixation on repetitive actions helps her avoid confrontation with the memory of her trauma. Moreover, some critics suggest that May has even created the mother's character and voice in her mind, as the mother can never be seen. Interpreting her character as part of May's consciousness is also plausible because near the end of the play, May repeats the question about "it all" and voices both her own and her mother's dialogue. Even this projection of May's mind finds the trauma distant and unnamable. The mother recalls that as a young girl, May "[tried] to tell how it was. It all. It all …" but she can only refer to the trauma with this pronoun (240). Dissociated from the trauma, May circumvents any emotional turmoil that might result from fully recollecting traumatic experiences.

While the mother and May recall some elements of her past, she tells events as if they happened to someone else. In the last section, for example, she describes a young girl named Amy who paces in a church: "A little later, when she was quite forgotten, she began to— [Pause.] A little later, when as though she had never been, it had never been, she began to walk" (Beckett 240). May prefaces this section with the word "Sequel," suggesting that these descriptions are not of another subject, but rather a continuation of her narrative. Like May, Amy speaks to her mother, Mrs. Winter. During their conversation, Amy expresses dissociation from her physical environment, for when Mrs. Winter asks her if she observed anything "at Evensong," the girl responds, "I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there" (241). Beckett suggests multiple layers of traumatic association. May describes this story in the third person, and she asserts that she was not physically present despite Mrs. Winter's assertion that she heard the girl's voice. Amy, an anagram of May, also sounds like a pun on "A me," implying that this story concerns a version of May. Beckett therefore emphasizes a disconnection from normal mental processes and memories regarding her past.

Additionally, like the Mouth in *Not I*, there is a sense of disembodiment throughout the play. The stage directions describe May as having "disheveled grey hair, [and a] worn grey wrap hiding feet, trailing" (Beckett 236). Beckett portrays May as not wholly there, like a spirit. Physical traits are intentionally obscured on the stage to emphasize a disconnection with the body and self. May's "low and slow" voice, frequent pauses, and soft repetitive treads stress this apparition-like impression. In some ways, there is an even greater removal from the self than *Not I*, for May's mother is only a disembodied voice. Additionally, while May has a body, she disappears entirely by the end of the play, as the stage directions explain that the lights "fade out," and when they fade up again, there is "No trace of May" (242).

Compared to previous short plays by Beckett, *Footfall*s is the most severed from reality. While earlier plays showcase dehumanization and depersonalization after trauma and loss, later plays feature disembodied figures, parts, and ghosts that are both figuratively and literally disconnected from the self and the environment. *Rough for Theatre I and II* include characters who—although are not always portrayed as whole—are still recognizably human on the stage. *Not I*, with only the voice of a petrified mouth, is entirely disconnected from the self and reality, and *Footfalls* depicts an even more incomprehensible reality after trauma, for by the end of the play, audiences are left wondering if May and her mother ever existed to begin with. While earlier plays showcase the dehumanization of grief, later plays feature disembodied figures that are both figuratively and literally disconnected from the self and the environment.

Beckett's absurd elements of the theater do not mean that events are without reason. In fact, Esslin suggests absurd drama conveys greater truth and meaning:

> "Not only do all these plays make sense, though perhaps not obvious conventional sense, they also give expression to some of the basic issues and problems of our age, in a uniquely efficient and meaningful manner, so that they meet some of the deepest needs and unexpressed yearnings of their audience." (4)

In his plays, Beckett strips the theater of its conventions in order to convey disorienting post-traumatic feelings. When examining these plays chronologically, readers can acknowledge a move from gallows' humor to prosaic grief, and as the plays implement more abstract elements, the characters become more dissociated from the self and from their environments. Furthermore, the spectators of these plays "see the happenings on the stage entirely from the outside, without ever understanding the full meaning of these strange patterns of events," similar to Beckett's characters who struggle to make sense of their psychological and physical landscape (Esslin 5). Beckett encourages the audience to not only feel disturbed by the absurd, deconstructed elements on stage, but to also experience reality like a tormented individual struggling to make sense of their feelings, grief, and post-traumatic reality.

Ultimately, Beckett dramatizes traumatic dissociation on the stage. As part of the theater of the absurd, he observes what happens in recesses of the mind and projects this externally. Billie Whitelaw, an actress who was friends with Beckett and worked with him in close collaboration on several of his plays, said in an interview regarding her performance in *Not I*: "He actually put that state of mind on the stage in front of your eyes" ("[1973] 'Not I'"). In conventional drama, situations are less ambiguous, meaning can be extracted more straightforwardly, and conflicts tend to tidily resolve. Yet humans perceive and react to reality in complex ways, especially after enduring overwhelming trauma or loss. For Beckett, the theater is a more multidimensional agent where individuals can act out these responses in all their complexity, confront spectators with the disorderly landscape of the psyche, and express the absurdity of the human condition.

CHAPTER 4

"ANOTHER INSCRUTABLE HOUSE": DISTANCED GRIEF ELIZABETH BISHOP'S ELEGIAC POETRY

Elizabeth Bishop's elegiac poetry—which has often been noted for its restraint and emotional distance—features incredibly complicated and defensive responses to loss. Scholars have discussed her aversion to confessional poetics and the lack of personal details in her work, but her process of grieving through her elegies has been relatively unexplored. Her early poetic responses to loss feature young speakers, so their immature and inconclusive engagements with the grieving process are to be expected as developmentally appropriate. But in her later elegies with older speakers, they continue to engage in maladaptive coping mechanisms that avoid or externalize painful emotions.

Freud proposes that one participates in displacement of an object unconsciously when feelings connected with one person are transferred onto another person, essentially replacing an object with another that is less psychologically dangerous. Displacement of attribution occurs when a characteristic, goal, or feeling is attributed to another person (Freud 271). Although Freud suggested that defenses like displacement are used to combat sexual or aggressive feelings and usually take place in dreams, other scholars such as Anna Freud have since addressed the use of defense mechanisms in dealing with trauma and loss. Sublimation is similar to displacement in that it too seeks to avoid the reality of loss. However, sublimation results not just in the absence of pain, but in the construction of a more pleasurable, palatable, or socially acceptable product. Freud believed that sublimation permits individuals to behave in culturally acceptable ways, signifying maturity and, ultimately, supporting civilization itself. He suggests that sublimation is "an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an 'important' part in civilized life" (79). This defense mechanism has immediate benefits for grieving individuals, as one can relieve emotional pressure or transform pain into an artistic product. While displacement and sublimation can be used to divert emotional pain elsewhere, there is a drawback of not being able to confront the reality of

mortal loss or process emotional responses such as sorrow, anger, confusion, and hopelessness. Instead, one may unconsciously redirect impulsive feelings onto a symbolic substitute or transform these emotions into a more acceptable, detached, unrealistic, and easier object to deal with.

Although these coping mechanisms are not inherently detrimental to bereavement, Bishop's speakers unconsciously implement sublimation and displacement to avoid acknowledging and processing their emotions after loss, instead projecting emotions onto objects external from the self. Through this aversion of pain, her speakers never confront reality or reach a resolution. In "First Death in Nova Scotia," Bishop describes a child's initiation with death, but like most children's experiences, the speaker is unable to comprehend death or confront loss. Similarly, "Sestina" depicts a child who draws a picture of a loss she can sense but cannot cope with or understand. The children use coping mechanisms such as displacement and sublimation to fend off emotional pain and remain in a state where grief is external from the self. Other elegies like "Crusoe in England" and her well-known villanelle "One Art" feature older speakers, yet loss is still externalized and a consolation is unfathomable. Overall, maladaptive responses to loss extend throughout her poetry as Bishop's speakers use defense mechanisms to treat loss with emotional distance, and this method of coping leads to an unresolved, anti-consolatory process of mourning.

Bishop's poems challenge the conventions of the elegy and the traditional patterns of bereavement. Unlike her contemporaries, she avoids explicit confessional, biographical material, but a sense of personal loss still pervades her work. Her father died when she was eight months old, and, after a long battle with mental health issues, her mother vanished into an asylum when Bishop was five years old. Her grandparents then gained custody of Bishop, and critics such as Fuss suggest that her early years were immersed in both loss and mourning (13). This bleak and desolate landscape, isolated and isolating, is the setting for one of her first elegies, "First Death in Nova Scotia." As with the personae present in many other twentieth-century elegies, the speaker in this poem cannot even fathom her loss, let alone move beyond it. But unlike even the most anti-consolatory of elegies, the speaker here is a very young girl.

In "First Death in Nova Scotia," a child is taken into a funeral parlor where her deceased cousin Arthur is laid out in a coffin that resembles a "little frosted cake" (28). The child observes a stuffed loon on a marble-topped table that eyes both the casket and chromographs of British royalty hanging above the deceased. After the child's mother gives her a lily of the valley to place in Arthur's hand and encourages her to say goodbye, the child imagines that the royals invite Arthur to court, yet she wonders how he can go because "his eyes are shut up so tight / and the roads are "deep in snow" (49-50). Critics often connect this poem biographically to Bishop's early childhood experiences with grief while living in Nova Scotia, specifically the death of a younger cousin (Haralson 74).

Through her diction, Bishop depicts an individual who copes with loss by expunging confrontation, emotional pain, and comprehension. Bishop rarely uses first-person pronouns, and this impersonal tone disengages the speaker from emotionally comprehending death. By omitting the "I," one may avoid confronting the reality of loss and instead distance herself emotionally. Although the child-speaker explains, "I was lifted up and given / one lily of the valley" (24-25), this is the only "I" in the poem, and the speaker is passive. She only participates in consolatory grieving rituals at the urging of her mother and does not actively confront her surroundings.

Furthermore, instead of acknowledging emotional responses to death, the child-speaker first centers on external objects and directs energy outside the self—away from the reality of mortal loss. She opens the scene with a "cold, cold parlor" setting (1), which highlights an unwelcoming physical atmosphere and psychological state. In a letter to a friend, Bishop similarly observes, "I long for an Arctic climate where no emotions of any sort can possibly grow" (qtd. in Fuss). While the impulse to displace emotions onto external objects likely operates unconsciously for Bishop, she is aware of her desire for an atmosphere that is inhospitable to emotions and lacks the warmth of feeling.

Moreover, instead of working through loss, the speaker engages in displacement, attributing characteristics related to death to other objects and attributes. For instance, the "stuffed loon / shot by Uncle Arthur" mirrors Arthur's deceased body, which is similarly cold, white, lifeless, and prepared for a more presentable viewing (8-9). Instead of confronting Arthur's lack of speech in death, she personifies

the loon: "Since Uncle Arthur / fired a bullet into him, / he hadn't said as word" (11-13). Readers may initially assume that the speaker alludes to young Arthur in this stanza, yet she later clarifies attributes of the loon such as his position on the "white, frozen lake" and his eyes that "were red glass" (15, 19). Consequently, the pronouns disorient the reader and allow the speaker to avoid descriptions of Arthur and divorce herself from concrete facts of death.

Emotional distancing is also achieved through figurative devices such as personification and metaphor. For instance, after acknowledging the assorted objects surrounding Arthur, he is described as a "little frosted cake" (28). This short description depicts his inanimate body and embellishments for viewing that the child-speaker finds disorienting. Through metaphor, Bishop further avoids confrontation with mortal loss and related feelings, as this figure of speech allows an author to describe an object by manipulating real characteristics. Furthermore, the "gracious royal couples" above Arthur are also personified, and the figures signify a benevolent higher power calling him to an afterlife where he can be "the smallest page at court" (46). Objects that appear irrelevant claim the focus in this depiction of her response to loss, for while Arthur is initially absent from description, she is attentive to the objects within the funeral parlor surrounding her cousin. Overall, the only communication from Arthur is through prosopopoeia by the child, and these personifications absorb the weight of her grief as she avoids interior conversation.

Because facing certain mortal loss would be too painful, the speaker displaces unwanted feelings onto these objects so that the pain can be kept at a distance and potential threats can be externalized from the interior self, yet this method is not adaptive in moving forward after loss. In Sacks' narratives of adjustment to loss, he suggests that a transfer of libidinal energy is effective in shedding emotional turmoil, for "if [mourning] is not to become fixated in melancholia, [it] requires the detachment of libido from the lost object and its transfer to a new one" (14). In other words, after one loses an object or person, one must invest energy elsewhere to overcome or work through grief. However, defensive responses like displacement can redirect one's energy in a more maladaptive manner. There may be a temporary

aversion of emotional turmoil, yet these methods of coping present an "illusion of control" and divert the mourner away from reality (Sacks 16).

Unequipped developmentally to confront death, the child cannot come to terms with the loss and provide a consolation. The poem ends with a rhetorical question rather than a definitive resolution:

> How could Arthur go,
>
> clutching his tiny lily,
>
> with his eyes shut up so tight
>
> and the roads deep in snow? (47-50).

Arthur lacks the warmth in order to move on, as "Jack Frost had started to paint him" red, yet after a few strokes, he "dropped the brush / and left him white forever" (39-40). Similarly, the speaker is frozen in a state of detachment, and as a result, she is unable to arrive at comfort or resolution. Her first experience with the rituals of death is left unresolved, for her psychological landscape is as cold and barren as the metaphorical roads ahead of Arthur, and she is equally sightless and speechless in the face of loss. With a sincere question of how the deceased can move on, she breaks elegiac convention, emphasizes incomprehension, and is ultimately unable to fully process loss.

Another poem with a child mourner, "Sestina," describes a grandmother and grandchild inside a house on a rainy September day as they read the almanac together, yet the grandmother hides her tears with laughter. Disappearing into private thoughts, the grandmother considers if her sadness is related to the time of year, while the child observes condensation on the teakettle. The child then draws a picture of a house and a man "with buttons like tears" to show her grandmother (29-30), and the almanac hovers and speaks above them, urging that it is "Time to plant tears" (37). Doreski notes that there is ambiguity in what is lost, as "its significance ranges over the dampness of the day, the sorrows of a lifetime, the grandmother's awareness of her mortality, and her fears for the child's future well-being" (17). Most criticism attributes the experiences in "Sestina" to be based on five-year-old Bishop after her mother's institutionalization, as she lived with her grandparents in Nova Scotia after they gained custody (Doreski

8). Although the poem does not provide explicit reasons for the numerous tears, this biographical lens suggests that Bishop elegizes personal experiences yet veils her mother’s absence through objectivity.

Like the child-speaker in "First Death in Nova Scotia," the child in "Sestina" cannot fathom loss or experience grief completely, and she unconsciously displaces emotional reactions onto external objects. Although the child may be conscious of grieving experiences around her, the grandmother actively conceals grief, "laughing and talking to hide her tears" (6), and the child attempts to ward off similar sorrow. As the grandmother cries and the rain beats down on the roof like tears, there is a sense of pain within this environment, but the child is safely inside the house seeking an equally safe psychological state, so she is distracted by the condensation forming on the stove and observes external objects. After the grandmother breaks the silence, the child "[watches] the teakettle's small hard tears / dance like mad on the hot black stove, / the way the rain must dance on the house" (14-16). The child’s dissociative observations highlight her emotional distance, for she projects feelings related to loss onto objects within the environment, similar to the child in "First Death in Nova Scotia."

Though she is less passive than the child in the previous elegy, she still does not confront loss, and instead sublimates painful emotions. In this melancholy environment, she sidesteps immersion in sorrow and draws a house, and inside is "a man with buttons like tears" (29). This picture allows her to avoid confrontation with sorrow and pain around her, yet her emotional indirection is problematic in that it discourages adaptive progression through grief. Although the child is aware of the surrounding tender emotions, grief is incomprehensible to her and "only known to the grandmother" (10). The child thus achieves distance through sublimation, creating an acceptable picture that externalizes pain and transforms emotions into a socially acceptable product that she can "[show] it proudly to the grandmother" (30). Yet due to this emotional distance, how to process these great losses are beyond her grasp.

Attempts to expunge emotional pain are not only present in the language, but also in the form. The sestina has several complicated rules for the writer; this poetic form is comprised of six stanzas with six lines each, a following envoi, and repetition of the same six end words. The end words have a strict

algorithm, for the writer must make a successive stanza take its pattern based on a bottom-up pairing of the lines preceding the stanza. This demanding structure produces an unresolved thought process that circles back to the echoing words "house," "grandmother," "child," "stove," "almanac," and "tears." According to Stephen Fry, the strength of a sestina lies in the "repetition and recycling of elusive patterns that cannot be quite held in the mind all at once" (238). Recycled end words and patterns therefore distract the reader from any semblance of emotions from the author and allow Bishop to distance herself from an authentic, personal grieving experience. Overall, the structure of the sestina mirrors the unresolved, cyclic form of grief experienced by the child and author.

Bishop achieves further externalization of emotions and avoidance of reality through an objective speaker who alternates perspective and modifies the reader's perception. Like "First Death in Nova Scotia," the child is distanced from the reality of loss, yet unlike this earlier elegy, "Sestina" features an impersonal speaker who is privy to the grandmother's hidden internal thoughts and the personified messages and thoughts from the almanac and the Marvel Stove. However, the third-person speaker is not entirely omniscient, for she only describes the child's actions and is unaware of her internal conversations, feelings, or thoughts. Keller and Miller note the effects of a guarded speaking persona: "By avoiding explicit focus on the self, … Bishop protects [herself] from overwhelming experience of the world" (8). While the objective outside observer may permit a larger picture of the scene, one may expect a poem with so much emotional baggage to come from in a less detached, neutral, or uninvolved persona. Additionally, just when the reader may anticipate confessional grief that directly deals with loss, the speaker moves from interior conversation to a surreal external environment. For example, the "clever almanac" hovers over the child and grandmother, and objects begin to speak or think. "Little moons" then fall into a flower bed that the child has drawn next to her house. Through this perspective, Bishop again highlights this pattern of emotional abstraction and avoidance.

Personification and anthropomorphism also underscore the suspended, incomprehensible, and stunted responses to loss. For example, after the grandmother hangs up the almanac, it morphs into a dynamic power that holds knowledge above them: "Birdlike, the almanac / hovers half open above the

child, / hovers above the old grandmother" (19-21). The almanac contains knowledge of upcoming events and with the context of its message, "Time to plant tears," Bishop suggests that the almanac can impart instructions on how to cope with loss. Yet this presence is uncomfortable to the grandmother who "shivers and says she thinks the house / feels chilly" (23-24). Moreover, the animate almanac appears only "half open" to the child, again emphasizing her inability to comprehend grief or form constructive responses to loss. Just as the almanac is suspended above them, the child remains in a suspended, wavering state of grief in which she can recognize the pain associated with grief yet is unable to participate adaptively.

Ultimately, due to the use of these tools of indirection and externalization, the child is unable to reach a consolation. Bishop instead underlines the child's confusion, disorientation, and emotional stasis. For example, near the final stanza, the speaker observes "little moons fall down like tears / from between the pages of the almanac / into the flower bed" that the child drew next to the house (33-35). The almanac subsequently says that it is "Time to plant tears" (37). Through the announcement of the almanac, Bishop suggests that tears in the flower bed can stimulate new growth. The child has potential to work through loss by confronting sorrow or pain and permitting the experience of tears, as suggested by this symbolical potential to sow tears like a resource in order to overcome loss. However, the poem ends with the child stuck in a distant state of incomprehension, as she "draws another inscrutable house" (39). Instead of using coping mechanisms adaptively, the child buries and conceals grief.

Although unresolved responses to death and mortality are developmentally appropriate for a child or one's first encounter with mortal loss, Bishop's later elegies also feature displaced and anti-consolatory grief. Subsequent elegies are like "another inscrutable house" for Bishop to project confusion and pain elsewhere and to harbor emotions that appear unfathomable. In "Crusoe in England," for example, Bishop elegizes personal experiences to work through grief of a lost place, identity, and people. She envisions the return of Robinson Crusoe to England as an older man, and he has recently learned about the discovery of a newly born island that has already been named and mapped. However, the island where he was

stranded, what he calls "my poor old [island]" named "Mount Despair," is disappearing from English geographies and consciousness (8, 118).

Bishop's Crusoe experiences a personal and cultural loss, as he finds nothing for him at home despite the longing he felt for the place while he was a castaway, so he catalogs the contents of his island for memorialization. Crusoe laments, "Now I live here, another island, / That doesn't seem like one …" (154-155). Removed from his site of remembrance, Crusoe does not recognize his home in England. Anderson points out that both Crusoes "are displaced figures, but Defoe's [Crusoe] feels that displacement most acutely on the island upon which he is shipwrecked" (67). Bishop's Crusoe, in contrast, experiences more displacement after his return to his home country of England, and while he is aware of the physical relocation and distance, psychological transference of emotions still operates within Bishop's unconscious.

Despite conventionally elegiac attempts to memorialize and lament the island's absence from geography and consciousness, the speaker is still poorly adjusted to life after loss, and Bishop copes with tools of indirection and displacement. Specifically, Bishop borrows another's persona to efface painful emotions. Critics have suggested that this poem is an autobiographical metaphor for her relationship with Lota de Soares, de Soares' suicide, and Bishop's emotional strife after this death (McCabe). Several comparisons between Bishop and her reimagined character can be observed: Crusoe was stranded on an island near Brazil, both Bishop and Crusoe are older at the time of their reflections, and Bishop completed this elegy when she returned home to New England (Haralson 74). Crusoe thus served as a suitable character for Bishop to hang a personal exploration of her life in Brazil, her home for almost sixteen years, and the losses she endured. Through interlocution, which is "the use of another's story and character for the purpose of retelling," (Komura 245), Bishop distances herself from these personal losses. In other words, by retelling another writer's story and character, interlocution serves as way to translate and mask original experiences and grief, which allows Bishop to distance herself from real losses and sublimate pain into a veiled biographical elegy.

Bishop dramatizes spatial, temporal, and psychological distance from Crusoe's lost island. Komura suggests that "indirection and diffusion of sorrow occur … as a result of numerous layers the poem creates between the locus of its occasioning sorrow and the locus of its present narration" (256). What Crusoe has lost—his island, and his experiences on the island—are in past tense. Furthermore, there is a spatial remove: Crusoe is displaced from his island and is on another that "doesn't seem like one" (155). The speaker also ends his elegy by mentioning Friday's death, lamenting "And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles seventeen years ago come March" (181-182). Critics have connected Friday to a veiled expression of grief over Lota (Haralson 74). Around the time of the poem's publication, Bishop explained her difficulty in moving on after Lota's death in a letter:

> Since she died, Anny—I just don't seem to care whether I live or die. I seem to miss her more every day of my life. I try hard to live in the present, as everyone always says—but the present is so hideous to me. (qtd. in Haralson 74)

Like Crusoe, Bishop is unsatisfied with the present and unable to cope with a geographical loss and a mortal loss. She is unable to find consolation and resolution, instead displacing her pain, sorrow, and other adverse emotions through interlocution.

Additionally, unlike Defoe's Crusoe who is civilized and practical in thought processes, Bishop's Crusoe is filled with doubt of his memory and knowledge. Crusoe is threatened by the erasure of the island from memory, so he desperately catalogs his experiences to save the island from complete loss. One of the main functions of an elegy is to "preserve the memory of the dead in order to save it from the totalizing loss of oblivion," so there is a much larger threat to Crusoe if remnant memories are erased and rewritten (Komura 250). Crusoe not only emphasizes a lamentation for his spatial distance from the island, but also expresses a fear that his island will be lost, incomprehensible, or overwritten; while "A new volcano has erupted," and "some ship saw an island being born," Crusoe's island home is "un-rediscovered, unrenamable. / None of the books has ever got it right" (9). If "being born" indicates being discovered and establishing existence, then Crusoe's island is at risk of being forgotten into nonexistence.

Crusoe's desperation, categorization, and longing for the island home is thus an attempt to hold onto his lost object, albeit at a distance, in order to prevent the loss of loss itself.

By intensely cataloging objects, Crusoe combats a threat of dispersion, where "in the instance of collection, means confusion of the scattering, its meaninglessness, the disorganization void of any 'knowledge of [the objects'] origin and their duration in history'" (Komura 250). The poem is comprised of several attempts to salvage details of the island, for he records objects and memories such as the atmosphere, landscape, animals, food, and personal thoughts or dreams. For example, Crusoe lists:

> The island had one kind of everything:
>
> one tree snail, a bright violet-blue
>
> with a thin shell, crept over everything,
>
> over the one variety of tree …
>
> There was one kind of berry, a dark red. (68-71, 76)

Most stanzas include a similar systematic arrangement of objects and attempts to secure the lost object in personal and public memory. This elegy demonstrates that while one may engage in coping mechanisms that redirect grief away from the self, there may be a coexisting desire to retain the memory of an object, place, or person. The author still engages in sublimation and displacement to expunge pain, yet if the memory of place was similarly eradicated, Bishop, like the speaker, risks inducing further emotional pain.

One of Bishop's most infamous poems, "One Art," presents her personal experiences with loss more overtly. The speaker chronicles loss in universal terms, moving from how to deal with the loss of objects like door keys, time, places, homes, relationships, and finally, life itself. In each stanza, she asserts that loss is not difficult to overcome. Yet in the final stanza, as she culminates the sad catalog of losses with the loss of love and mortality, she is less certain of this claim: "the art of losing's not too hard to master / though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster" (18-19). The poem contains several apparent biographical references that joins the speaker's experiences with the author. For example, Bret Millier, Bishop's biographer, suggests that the poem is "really an elegy for [Bishop's] whole life" (qtd. in Haralson 77). Critics like Millier associate "three loved houses" with Bishop's homes in Key West,

Petropolis, and Ouro Preto (11). Additionally, the phrase "Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture / I love)" is most often discussed in relation to Bishop's lost love, Lota. Originally titled "How to Lose Things," Bishop suggests "One Art" serves as a guide to grief, as she can encourage herself and her readers to accept an unrealistic theme that loss is not too complicated, burdensome, or problematic.

Bishop recounts her own pain while meeting the strict demands of the poetic form. "One Art" is a villanelle, a form that developed in late 17th century France and was revitalized in the mid-19th-and-20th centuries. The traditional villanelle is nineteen lines long and divided into five stanzas with only two rhymes, and the pattern is rigorous: A1 b A2 // a b A // a b A2 // a b A1 // a b A2 // a b A1 A2 (Spivack 501). Like "Sestina," Bishop uses the form to veil emotional trouble with loss. She encourages the reader to observe the impressively convoluted form rather than the content within, and she cultivates personal restraint through meticulous poetic rules. Millier reports that Bishop intended "One Art" to be a villanelle from the beginning (Haralson 77). Although we cannot assume that she consciously exploited the form to distract readers from personal grief, subdue and conceal her own responses, or project her emotional turmoil onto an artistic object, the form still unconsciously serves as a vehicle to cloak intense pain and sentiment.

There is evidence of efforts to comfort herself and her readers, but as Bishop sublimates her grief, the reassuring repetitive message grows more artificial. "The art of losing isn't hard to master" may appear consolatory to some, and a few scholars have suggested that there is a sense of concluding comfort (1, 12). However, with the repetition and revisional conditions added onto the line ("not *too* hard"), this message comes across as Bishop's attempt to convince herself of the lack of direct emotional engagement required when mourning. Producing a poem with the appearance of consolation can make the grieving experience easier because pain can be temporarily averted, yet through this process of sublimation, one denies emotions that must be confronted in healthy, adaptive bereavement (Freud 37).

For Bishop, it is not an absence of feeling that discourages resolution in mourning, but the unconscious attempt to use coping mechanisms to avoid pain and master an "art" that cannot be mastered. Bishop clearly experiences emotions such as sorrow, dejection, and hopelessness, as this pain has been

recorded throughout multiple letters and criticism. Even within this elegy, there is a syncopated rhythm in the last stanza and a dash which separates the stanza from the others, which hints at the emotional impact of the "losing you" (16). Losses in previous stanzas do not demand a formal mourning process or a confrontation with personal emotions, as one can move on soon after losing keys, or "hour badly spent" (5). Yet when one practices "losing farther, losing faster," the intensity of suffering is amplified, and the lost object *does* matter. Bishop writes, "I shan't have lied," suggesting a growing awareness of this false representation of adaptive grief (17). Similarly, "(*Write* it!)" appears as an internal command that intrudes upon the misleading repetitions and briefly acknowledges the difficulty of dealing with loss. Yet the final message, "the art of losing's not too hard to master" still denies the reality of loss, and the grieving experiences contained within this poem still echo circularly, like a mourner who is psychologically spinning, unable to make the linear move from lament to consolation.

Overall, Bishop uses coping mechanisms to redirect and externalize painful emotions associated with loss in her elegiac work, and this underdeveloped, unresolved grief persists throughout her elegies. Although this method of grieving is developmentally mature for a child, this displaced grief still exists in poems which biographically connect to losses in Bishop's adulthood. An unconscious utilization of sublimation or displacement is not an innately dysfunctional grieving response, but coping mechanisms can distance oneself from real emotions that need to be confronted, which discourages an adjustment to life after loss. By studying these unconscious motives, one can better understand the seemingly paradoxical responses to loss, the anti-consolatory mood of elegies within the 20th century, and Bishop's aversion of overt confessions. Perhaps Bishop is not an adaptive mourner, but more like the child in "Sestina," drawing a picture of a loss she senses but cannot quite face or comprehend. As the world weeps around her, Bishop illustrates her maladaptive grief by writing another inscrutable poem.

CHAPTER 5

"IT'S A MATTER OF PRIVATE FEELING": COMMUNAL MOURNING IN *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* AND *THE BLACK PROPHET*

Many consider nations to be enclosed communities with clear boundaries. These communities, such as countries and territories, comprise of a large body of people who have similar values and ethnicities within a cohesive physical space or land. A sense of containment is emphasized when defining a nation. Yet transnationalism challenges the assumption that nations are enclosed communities with exclusive experiences. This concept recognizes that there are numerous links between different nations. Many countries face common obstacles, develop interconnected values and objectives, and when this heightened interconnectivity is acknowledged, the economic, social, or territorial boundaries of nations begin to recede. In the nineteenth century, for example, marginalized Irish and American citizens faced threats to their mortality due to immoral economic, social, and legal institutions. In this period, many slaves in America died during the slave trade, and many Irish died during famines. As citizens faced these widespread and tragic deaths, there was a greater phenomenon of collective grief, or individuals mourning in public spheres. While Irish and American writers like Plath, Beckett, and Bishop turned inward and mourned in private spheres, elegists in the nineteenth century grieved in social gatherings and emphasized the power of communally sharing mournful emotions in social, physical, and public spaces.

Unlike modern writers who achieved their reputation through their subtlety and their focus on psychological and philosophical concerns, popular fiction during the nineteenth century was often sentimental, which meant more frequent emotional appeals to readers. In many novels that entered popular culture at this time, scenes of mourning were drawn out and emotional. These scenes elicit pathos and encourage tears, sympathy, or in some cases, the urge to right wrongs. In nineteenth-century America, premature deaths were common topics to write about. Writers often used fictional deaths to react against specific social, economic, or moral concerns, such as the institution of slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe denounces hypocritical, inhumane mindsets and promotes swift and immediate

abolition at a time when slavery was legal. In the novel, several characters die, and the descriptions of helpless slaves, mothers, and children dying are infused with sentimentality, which continues to prompt emotional reactions from readers today. Stowe taps into sentimental power to render slavery impossible to ethically sustain. This kind of communal grief impacted personal moral stances held by nineteenth-century Americans as well as the social and political events to come.

Today, the death of a young person would be declared a tragedy, or a reversal of the natural order. In contrast, a child's death was clearly emotional for nineteenth century Americans, but there was a more brutal backdrop, as children succumbed to death in greater numbers. High mortality rates accompanied rampant illness or disease, and these losses were defining events at this time. Many children in the nineteenth century died before they were ten, so it is not surprising that this theme permeated popular literature and art. Even the number of children who did not survive to age 21 is "estimated at 27%-30% in Northeast rural communities alone, with higher rates elsewhere" (Frank 103). Although many often were forced to confront mortality at this time, Americans struggled to process this trauma and reconcile frequent loss with religious beliefs. Psychologically and spiritually, they were challenged. Alongside these tragic circumstances existed the corrupt social institution of slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe addresses the unfairness of premature deaths and the destructiveness of enslaving fellow humans. She imbues marginalized individuals such as slaves, women, and children with innocence and righteousness, especially when they die, and she implements other rhetorical strategies during scenes of mourning to impact readers' hearts and encourage radical social change.

While the emotional effects of some deaths are described in detail, other slaves are mourned succinctly. For example, in the twelfth chapter, an enslaved woman and her child are sold to Haley, an evil and corrupt slaveholder, and when he sells her child to another man, he tells the man who bought the child to take him while his mother is away so there will be less fuss. When the woman discovers her child has been sold, she has a "wild look of anguish and utter despair," and she is shocked but mostly silent. She mourns the displacement of her son and is emotionally numb, as "the shot passed too straight and

direct through her heart, for cry or tear … the poor, dumb-stricken heart had neither cry nor tear to show for its utter misery" (Stowe 128). The day after she receives the news, Tom hears a splash; the woman jumped overboard, committing suicide. Her death is only described in a few sentences when Tom observes:

> Something black passed quickly by him to the side of the boat, and he heard a splash in the water. No one else saw or heard anything. He raised his head—the woman's place was vacant! The poor bleeding heart was still, at last, and the river rippled and dimpled just as brightly as if it had not closed above it. (Stowe 124)

The trader is not amazed or shocked; instead, he is upset that he has lost money, and the narrator suggests that readers at this time are no better than this character. As a society, they have helped create these injustices with their awareness of immoralities and refusal to advocate for change. Although the woman is not mourned or ceremoniously bereaved by other characters, the abruptness of the suicide has a powerful and shocking effect. This unexpected, short scene coupled with the trader's lack of concern for the loss of life and the role he played in her death encourages readers to feel sympathetic. Stowe highlights the woman's humanity so that readers will be concerned with the loss she endures, feel sadness for her death, and become moved to confront their own misjudgments and take action to encourage social change.

Stowe criticizes values of her culture with this short passage, attempting to re-codify and reorganize the moral principles of readers who support slavery. In a conversation at a slave trade, men, women, and children observe the event and debate the practice of slavery, and a white man uses religious scripture for its justification. He argues, "It's undoubtedly the intention of Providence that the African race should be servants, — kept in a low condition … 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be,' the scripture says" (Stowe 122). After Stowe acknowledges this twisted rhetoric that some Christians used to justify slavery, she refutes the idea that African Americans were destined for an inferior status. Another white male observer breaks in the circle of discussion and advocates for an empathetic Christian mindset: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye unto the … that is

scripture, as much as ‘Cursed be Canaan’” (Stowe 123). With this character, Stowe suggests that principles of Christianity have been deformed through personal interpretation. She didactically stresses the importance of empathy and the intuitive sense of treating others as one would like to be treated (Stowe 123). Therefore, Stowe uses this fictional death scene to stress the importance of emotion and expose the hypocritical, depraved, or morally corrupt values of some readers.

In addition, Stowe uses sentimentality to highlight economic issues in nineteenth century America. She emphasizes that the trader’s worldview has been created and corrupted by social norms that encourage people to ignore others’ feelings and experiences. For instance, when he learns the woman has committed suicide, the narrator comments that Haley:

> was not shocked nor amazed; because, as we said before, he was used to a great many things that you are not used to. Even the awful presence of Death struck no solemn chill upon him. He had seen Death many times, —met him in the way of trade, and got acquainted with him, —and he only thought of him as a hard customer, that embarrassed his property operations very unfairly; and so he only swore that the gal was baggage, and that he was devilish unlucky, and that, if things went on in this way, he should not make a cent on the trip. (Stowe 130)

Haley is unaffected by emotion, and while he reasons that the woman’s death will cost him financially, he lacks the feelings necessary for sympathizing with the woman as a human being who was suffering immensely. On one hand, the unfeeling nature of Haley can be explained by the high mortality rate during this period, for in his role at this time, he would have experienced great mortal loss and may have become desensitized to death. However, Stowe stresses that he lacks a crucial element of mourning: sentiment. Instead of arguing philosophically about the ethics of slavery, Stowe confronts readers with an abrupt suicide and an unfeeling man who encouraged her death. She urges others to consider how it feels to be a slave who is reduced to “baggage,” whose child is taken from her to be sold as property, and who feels this loss so deeply that she ended her life.

Isabelle White suggests that Stowe uses her death scenes to "attempt to repair one of Victorian culture's major ruptures, the split between the communal, self-sacrificing values that had come to be considered feminine, and individualistic, materialistic values that were associated with the public world of men" (5). Surrounding the death scene of this unnamed enslaved woman, Stowe advocates the sentimental values associated with femininity. Besides Tom's short acknowledgment of the woman, she is not mourned with any sort of communal ceremony or expression of pity, especially by the trader. Instead, Haley places financial gain above all else, reducing man to a thing. Stowe therefore exposes conflicting systems of value and encourages readers to recognize the wrong attitudes of the trader. She emphasizes their humanity so that others can question why slaves are considered less than human and why they are not often mourned. Instead of remaining unfeeling and selfish like Haley, readers are urged to invest in the emotional turmoil of this mother.

Moreover, by addressing the reader at the end of the chapter directly, Stowe promotes abolitionism. Imagining that she is addressing an introspective, refined, dignified reader, the narrator suggests they share blame because Haley is doing what readers are aware of and have allowed him to do. In fact, the narrator argues that readers at the time faced even more consequences, for "in the day of future Judgement, these very considerations may make it more tolerable for him than for you" (Stowe 131). This direct address affects readers on a personal and social scale. Jane Tompkins, for example, suggests that the novel is "a political enterprise, halfway between a sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time" (559). Especially in the descriptions surrounding this woman's death, Stowe promotes social change. The narrator makes an overt call to action, urging that "we must beg the world not to think that American legislators are entirely destitute of humanity, as might, perhaps, be unfairly inferred" (Stowe 131). With this direct address to the reader, she demonstrates how these values contribute to a broken, inhumane social system. Stowe offers sentimental, communal, empathetic alternatives to the unfeeling, rational systems of politics and morality.

Other sentimental descriptions surrounding mourning exist throughout the novel. One occurs in the free state of Ohio, where Mrs. Bird and the Senator live and where fugitive slaves often pass through on their way to Canada. Although Senator Bird helped pass the Fugitive Slave Act, which made assisting runaway slaves a crime, his wife challenges his beliefs. As they debate slavery and the new law, the couple dramatize the conflict between reason and feeling. After Mrs. Bird learns from her husband that a law is passed to help fugitive slaves, she recognizes the twisted Christian justifications and understands that it will likely encourage decent humans to act unjustly. At first, the senator stresses the necessity of reason in public interests and denounces sentimentality. He says:

> "But, Mary, just listen to me. Your feelings are all quite right, dear, and interesting, and I love you for them; but, then, dear, we mustn't suffer our feelings to run away with our judgement; you must consider it's not a matter of private feeling,—there are great public interests involved [and] we must put aside our private feelings." (Stowe 82)

In response, Mrs. Bird acknowledges that she is not familiar with politics, but she stresses the importance of comforting and caring for others. She argues that the Bible does not encourage "public evils" like slavery. Instead, the passages encourage empathetic connections with other humans. Stowe recognized that "social action is made dependent on the action taking place in individual hearts," so she often charges female characters like Mrs. Bird with significant moral power (Tompkins 560).

Because women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are often more ethically attuned and have the power of sentiment, they are more willing to denounce slavery or acknowledge the grief of marginalized, dehumanized individuals. For instance, after Mr. and Mrs. Bird discuss slavery and politics, Eliza, a fugitive slave, arrives. Mrs. Bird helps her escape and provides the young woman "articles of clothing" that belonged to her son who recently passed away (Stowe 90). Eliza recognizes this gesture and empathizes with her response, for she had already miscarried twice. The women then share a wordless acknowledgement of grief for their lost children, and the narrator's tone is emotionally raw. Eliza "fixed her large, dark eyes, full of earnest meaning, on Mrs. Bird's face, and seemed to be going to speak. Her

lips moved—she tried once or twice, but there was no sound—and pointing upward, with a look never to be forgotten, she fell back in the seat, and covered her face" (Stowe 90). Stowe depicts an empathetic interaction with a stranger in mourning. As they remember the death of their children, they are sentimentally charged and can silently identify and experience despair. The women thus participate in an empathetic, communal type of grief.

To Stowe, shared experiences of mourning and grief in more public spheres can lead to catharsis. White proposes that the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bird "represents the dichotomy between the heart and the head, between the values of the private world and the values of the public world" (96). This private vs public dichotomy also influenced how people mourned in the nineteenth century. During this time, even though people experienced grief privately, "the death of a family member was expected to unite the family, and the family was frequently evoked as a model for the nation" (White 7). Yet there were obstacles to achieving this unity within the family and nation, as popular mourning literature "responded to and attempted to counteract the diminishing communal significance of the death of an individual" (7). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe addresses this waning experience of shared public grieving experiences. Though women like Mrs. Bird are not involved in political realms at this time, they can tap into feelings and engage in a powerful type of communication. By sharing emotions with others, they can change mindsets within the household, and subsequently, the nation. Tompkins supports this idea, suggesting that women in the novel assert their "beliefs over and against their husbands' socially conditioned viewpoints, and, although they lack the more worldly power of men, they can exert influence within the family and the household" (Tompkins 560). Mrs. Bird utilizes this "feminine" sentimental power in her own home to create a more balanced his "heart is better than [his] head" and helps him see why they should drive Eliza and her child to safety—so much so that the senator breaks the law and gives Eliza ten dollars when they part (Stowe 83). Stowe demonstrates that when mourning moves beyond the private sphere, there is not only greater social harmony, but also individual catharsis.

Specifically, Stowe suggests that sentiment of women is not a weakness; rather, it's a solution. For many grieving mothers of this period, "mourning was regarded as the most sacred of social feelings because the heart softened by affliction turned with greater love not only to the departed loved one, but to all living members of the family, and finally, to all mankind" (Bush 46). Mourning experiences of mothers during this period were therefore powerful because the shared grief bonded humans, and Stowe capitalizes on this power in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the novel, women are models of morality, overturning the notion that the hero has to be a man and counteracting awful cultural practices that are perpetrated by materialism, capitalism, and political gain. Mrs. Bird and Eliza's shared, silent mourning show that when private feelings are not clouded by political reasoning, it changes public interests for the better.

Stowe's scenes of mourning are highly sentimental and actively engaged with readers. The novel emphasizes the importance of feeling and empathy, especially at a time when practices like slavery were dehumanizing and placed financial gain above all else, and the sentimental grieving urges readers to recognize the humanity of other slaves and be moved to consider the immorality of slavery and other societal oppressions. Stowe persuades audiences to alter political, moral, or religious institutions. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the most read book of the century, and this work is so much more than a series of "sob stories." Stowe's novel engages with hearts of individual readers to alter politics and social systems, and it's effective. She does evangelical and cultural work, stressing the importance of sentiment, empathy, and human connection over individual and materialistic values—a relevant conflict in America. In contemporary society, Stowe's notion of collective sentimentality might be therapeutic for marginalized individuals, such as women and racial minorities.

In comparison, William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* has a similar focus on the deaths of marginalized individuals and the power of collective grief. The novel explores the impact of famine and disease in nineteenth century Ireland, around the same time Stowe writes, as Irish society experienced a level of mortal loss that was almost apocalyptic. Widespread deaths made grieving especially challenging at this time, as the societal and psychological aspects of mourning were interrupted. Logistically, for

example, there cannot be a wake or laying to the death of every individual when the population is in a crisis, and emotionally, one must cope with a greater threat to his or her own mortality when mourning the loss of others. In *The Black Prophet,* most people end up buried and not mourned. However, ceremonies of death are not absent in the novel, and interestingly, the individuals who are seriously lamented and remembered are those who the same society condemned. In this famine setting, those who appear irrelevant on the margins of society, such as the female excess, the poor, the sick, and the damned are those who are deliberately remembered. Carleton points out seemingly counterintuitive impulses to mourn, suggesting that when death is on a magnified scale, there is a special focus on marginalized individuals—like Stowe's concentration on the deaths of slaves.

Carleton wrote *The Black Prophet* during the "Great Famine," a cataclysm that is unequaled in Irish history, as more than a million died from disease and starvation, and more than a million emigrated out of the country. Precipitated by the potato blight and exacerbated by the ineffectiveness of the colonial administration, the Famine devastated the social demographics and culture of Ireland (Graham 38). Serious epidemics threatened the population, as cholera and typhus fever made a devastating impact on the poor who were already precariously existing. Carleton sets his novel during an earlier famine in 1817. In the depiction of this society troubled with hunger and disease, he emphasizes that during this time of extreme duress, psychological responses to loss are amplified or disturbed.

Psychological alleviation is difficult to achieve when a society faces everyday threats to their own existence. Joseph Robbins highlights this anxiety when he comments on the society's fear of the miasma, or the "infectious exhalations from putrescent organic matter," in nineteenth century Ireland (59). Robbins suggests that during this period, the Irish were fearful and avoidant of the appearance of the dead and dying. Similarly, anxiety about those who were socially "rotten" existed, as social rules and restrictions like celibacy before marriage were compounded by the judgement of the Catholic Church (Graham 5). Typically, the individuals who are marginalized or condemned in society often do not inspire

a formal social gathering to mourn their absence, but outcasts in *The Black Prophet* stimulate considerable sadness and emotion among the community.

Although readers may anticipate special focus on the mourning of individuals who are socially conventional, Carleton emphasizes the memorialization of minorities, or those who are sexually, religiously, or morally stigmatized. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, mourning rituals in the public sphere serve a purpose: rehabilitate the self, the community, and the nation. After Peggy Murtagh, a young and unwed mother, had a child, she is socially condemned, dies in public along with her baby, and is mourned with a wake. As a marginalized individual, Peggy's death forces the community, which is surrounded by famine and disease, to face the inevitability of death and the reality of their particularly lethal environment. The community is driven to purify and rehabilitate both the self and their society. By remembering their lives and holding a social ritual of mourning, they can reaffirm national roles.

Before Peggy's death, the community clearly treats her as a symbol of feminine excess and sin. She has been shunned by the community and her family and is described multiple times as an "unfortunate girl," which suggests that she is fallen or ruined (Carleton 45, 53, 94). When Tom Dalton, the baby's father, attempts to appeal on Peggy's behalf to acquire food from Darby Skinadre, the town's moneylender. He almost slips into the same language when he refers to her, exclaiming, "This—this—unfor—is it thrue that you've dared to refuse this girl …" (Carleton 52). Though Tom stands up for her, he still views her as an outcast who has sinned. In other words, to society, Peggy is viewed as the "Other," a figure who has acted against religious and cultural conventions.

Although Peggy is an outcast who violated norms by having a child out of wedlock, righteous people come to her wake, and it seems atypical how much attention she receives after death. After Peggy dies, others' awareness of their own mortality and death is heightened. Peggy's corpse was difficult to face, and she "could hardly be looked upon … without tears" (Carleton 91). At one point, a spectator cries with tears in her eyes, "For God's love, an' take her away … no one can stand this" (Carleton 92). This

gathering is emotionally intense and psychologically demanding. During this wake, mourners face not only the disturbing reality of the corpses of Peggy and her baby, but also the memory of a life that disturbed conventional cultural and religious concepts. While Stowe highlights the immorality of certain social systems to her readers, Carleton aims to show his readers hard truths about their personal mortality.

In contrast, descriptions of mourning rituals for those less socially marginalized are not as serious or marked with negative emotion. For example, Barney Gornly's wake is characterized by "glee" rather than sorrow (Carleton 33). Sarah acknowledges this celebratory aspect of other rituals when she asserts, "To Barney Gornly's wake; there'll be lots of glee there, too," (Carleton 33). As a socially and morally deviant figure, Peggy's wake is more emotionally intense and psychologically demanding. Introducing the scene that describes Peggy's wake, the narrator emphasizes her innocence and favorable qualities: "Peggy Murtagh … was an innocent and affectionate girl, whose heart was full of kind, generous, and amicable feelings" (Carleton 89). Moreover, while the narrator and the public do not deny her sin completely, careful attention is paid to the presentation of her corpse. Both Peggy and the baby are displayed with great innocence and purity. She is laid out on a "clean bed" which is "hung with white," has a canopy "of the same spotless color," and dressed white clothes in an attempt to emphasize "her brief but otherwise spotless life" (Carleton 90). Instead of focusing on her sin as many did during her life, they now maintain her cleanliness in appearance and character. The community emphasizes purity that many thought Peggy and her baby lacked during their lifetimes.

On one hand, the community aims to revise the narrative of their sinful lives and assert cleanliness. Corpses are also seen as unsightly and disturbing, and by decorating their bodies, they can avoid facing threats of their own mortality. Kristeva argues that corpses are abject:

> A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic—the corpse represents fundamental pollution. (109)

Her description suggests that there is often anxiety concerning something that pollutes or disturbs system and order, and these are the effects that a corpse naturally invokes. To combat the discomfort and distressing reality of the corpse, the community accentuates purity in Peggy's appearance. Even the position they arrange Peggy accentuates tender qualities, as her deceased baby is positioned so that Peggy is cradling him (Carleton 90). Thus, with a mourning ritual, the community deals with impure by attempting to assert clear boundaries between nature and society, or between the self and what is "Other." To expunge the appearance of uncleanliness, they present Peggy as a mother who has sinned but is now clean and unadulterated. This orderly appearance is easier to swallow than a corpse that represents "fundamental pollution" (Kristeva 109).

In this famine setting, individuals also attempt to expel impurities for self-rehabilitation and preservation. Several of the mourners express anxiety not only about the corpses, but also concerning the protection of personal, orderly, and religious virtues. While many express guilt and forgiveness for Peggy's transgressions, the efforts of mourning are not entirely for Peggy. In other words, although one may assume that a mourning ritual aims to lay an individual to death and celebrate his or her life (like Barney Gornly's "gleeful" wake), the ritual surrounding Peggy is less for the deceased and more for those surviving, for the community must cope with life-threatening circumstances.

Some are passionate in their lamentation for Peggy, but Carleton suggests that their emotional responses stem from personal anxiety about their own mortality. Close family members express anxiety that they have forgiven her too late, as Peggy's father laments:

> "'Father, forgive me … forgive me, Father, or I'll never be happy more; but I wouldn't forgive her, although my heart did at the same time; still I didn't say the word: bring her here … tell her I'm ready now to forgive her all." (Carleton 94)

This emphasis on forgiveness suggests that he experiences extreme emotional duress when faced with Peggy's body and with the realization that his own character and body have impure qualities. For personal

comfort and salvation, her father must absolve himself of his refusal to forgive Peggy, so he begs for spiritual restoration. There is no dialogue about the ethics of how they treated her, like Stowe's scenes that surround mourning. Instead, the mourners are self-interested in personal rehabilitation and salvation, for there were "a number of these humble, but pious and well-disposed people joining in what is termed the Litany of the Blessed Virgin" (Carleton 95).

On a larger scale, Carleton demonstrates a similar concern to preserve the memory of righteousness and order within their society and national identity. Within the community, a drive to preserve constructs of nationalism exists. For instance, during Peggy's wake, the narrator remarks: "In this respect there is not in the world any people so generous and kind to their fellow-creatures as the Irish, or whose sympathies are so deep and tender, especially in periods of sickness, want, or death" (Carleton 93). The narrator establishes an atmosphere at the wake in which mourners aim to preserve distinctly Irish concepts of religion, morality, and law. At Peggy's wake, there is a greater drive to respect "borders, positions, and rules" (Kristeva 4). This Irish community aims to avoid a fragile sense of identity and a fragile sense of social or religious structures.

Societal rules were even more fragile at this time due to multiple famines, a traumatic cultural memory, and imminent colonial control. For example, the nation was still reeling from the Irish Rebellion of 1798 against Britain, and the new century was marked by a disintegration of Irish legislature with The Act of Union (Graham 37). Constitutionally, Ireland became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1801, and the nation remained under British control at the time that *The Black Prophet* was written and during the period when Carleton sets the events. Furthermore, much of the land was no longer in Irish hands, and a sense of dispossession and agitation was present in the nation. The land-owning class were composed of Protestant settlers who were originally from England, and much of the Irish Roman Catholic population believed that the land had been unjustly taken during the British conquest of the country (Graham 40). There was therefore an overwhelming cultural threat of marginalization, or of a disintegration of national order, as the colonial presence, sickness, and diasporic population blurred clear

boundaries of national identity. Consequently, when Carleton's narrator and other characters proclaim their Irishness during Peggy's mourning ritual, they attempt to rehabilitate not only themselves, but also the constructs of their nation by emphasizing virtues that they deem important to the Irish identity such as generosity and kindness. Both Stowe and Carleton call for a more cohesive community and nation.

During this wake, members of the community gather to mourn in a public sphere. In this public sphere, there is a communal effort to avoid marginalization and preserve national order and identity. Peggy's mother, Kathleen Murtagh, is one member who shares these concerns. All the mourners speak in English, including the mother, but as Kathleen proceeds into distress, she "commenced in Irish" (Carleton 94). On one level, speaking her native language while mourning suggests that she feels more herself in the Irish language. In addition, this sudden slip into Irish—a language that has dwindled and been erased by colonial forces—suggests a drive to preserve key elements within Irish culture. Historical context supports this assertion, for after the Great Famine, the Irish language abruptly declined. Before the 1840s, the majority language in the country was still Irish, but the Famine devastated often poor and rural Irish-speaking areas, and the immense death and immigration compounded the issue. The language has social and symbolic importance for Ireland, as it was an integral part to Irish identity. Consequently, remembering the language in this moment shows the drive to preserve their national identity.

Faced with life-threatening and nearly apocalyptic circumstances, the community in *The Black Prophet* remembers marginalized individuals for personal and social rehabilitation. Carleton suggests that when mourning these figures, their society attempts to heal what has broken down into disorder as well as achieve personal comfort. As an anthropologist, Carleton describes important issues in Ireland in the nineteenth century, such as heightened drives to preserve the self, rules, and national identity during this period. Within mourning rituals held during a famine, there are serious threats that individuals are forced to come to terms with. By holding a wake for the figures deemed the most sinful during their lives, the community can cope with mortal loss, the memory of a life which defiled religious and social order, and the disintegrating national identity under colonial control. The wake is therefore an opportunity for the

community to counter marginalization and memorialize both personal and national identities. Peggy and her baby are “victims of sin, but emblems of innocence,” as they are individuals who were social outcasts, but they drive others toward rehabilitation (Carleton 43). Carleton depicts a community’s reaction to loss on a particularly devastating scale, and he suggests that nations can avoid marginalization and preserve identities through more cohesive, communal grieving experiences.

This emphasis on communal, sentimental grief is in stark contrast to the private, isolated grieving experiences to come in the twentieth century in which writers express more physical and psychological distance. Yet both Stowe and Carleton demonstrate that across different nations, shared grief in public spheres triggers individual catharsis and social rehabilitation during a period in which marginalized individuals frequently face dire threats to their mortality. Donald E. Pease suggests that transnationalism "prevents the closure of the nation" (5), so nations are constantly open to connecting and exchanging political, social, and economic ideals. Individuals in both Ireland and America faced threats to their mortality in the nineteenth century. While the novels were written about different types of marginalized individuals, both works suggest that conflicts between feminine and masculine values, the North and South, white and black, lower vs upper social classes, and other divisions might be healed with a community of grief.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Peter Sacks' definition of the elegy, "a poem of mortal loss and consolation," suggests writers can confront losses, work through grief, praise the dead, lament their absence, and finally, emphasize eventual comfort and consolation (15). For many centuries, the elegy moved toward resolution, and researchers mapped out stages that indicated people in mourning should aim to accept and adapt to life after loss and trauma. Because grief is one of the most universal human experiences (and often one of the most painful), numerous studies have analyzed the psychology of mourning to determine how people can cope with events such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a home or a location of living, and immaterial losses that result from trauma. Researchers suggested that if a mourner writes a poem with a clear structural pattern, experiences specific emotions, or puts comforting memories at the front of their minds, humans can stop grieving and start living. Yet for the elegist and the mourner, trauma and loss sometimes seems insurmountable. Although traditional elegies feature this process of adjustment to loss, and speakers within those poems move toward acceptance and resolution, not every mourner progresses through psychologically healthy, mappable patterns or stages.

Modern elegiac literature dramatizes these intensely personal struggles to adapt to loss. The elegy has undergone several changes, especially in the twentieth century, as writers experimented with the genre and relayed their grief in forms like unstructured poems, novels, and drama. Even artistic expressions of grief like memorials can be considered elegiac. Beyond these changes in the form of an elegy, the content of the genre underwent a major transformation at this time. Literature dove into the psychology of grief more explicitly and expressed complex coping and defense mechanisms. Plath, for instance, depicts a hostile, melancholic grieving experience, as she ruminates on her emotions and insults her dead father. Beckett dramatizes other complicated responses to grief, such as post-traumatic dissociation in which one disconnects from thoughts, memories, feelings, speech, and identity. Another private, distanced type of grief plays out in Bishop's elegiac poetry. When we pull away from the

“literary world” and look at the actuality of these things, it becomes clear that, at times, mourning is a desperate quest for peace and balance in after traumatic event, and one may fail to manifest any comfort.

Furthermore, global events that caused mortal deaths in the twentieth century encouraged greater awareness of an individual’s own fragile mortality. As a result of these traumatic events, intangible losses transnationally impacted modern and even contemporary grieving experiences. Whereas before these global events, people often found comfort in religious faith and looked to a god for consolation, it became harder to find peace in an omnipotent authority who observes mass tragedy without intervening. In addition, with this religious doubt, even the consolation that the dead were at peace in the afterlife was dubious.

For both Ireland and America, substantial mortal losses due to war, famine, disease, and social injustices continue to pervade citizens’ consciousness and impact how individuals and communities mourn. While the Great Famine occurred in the nineteenth century, Irish citizens were still affected by colonial forces and public safety concerns, and as a nation, they were challenged with coping with cultural losses and maintaining their national identities. Moreover, the memory of the Famine, an event with over a million casualties, is a loss that continued to be mourned in the twentieth century and continues even in the twenty-first. In comparison, Americans faced different national tragedies and trauma, but mourning was still influenced by past events that took numerous lives, such as the unjust, tragic deaths of individuals in slavery. Despite enduring different calamities, both nations have a history of events that caused extensive mortal loss, especially in the modern period, and the modern cognizance of widespread tragedy caused a cross-cultural disillusionment in consolations that previously felt more stable. For instance, while elegists traditionally reached a resolution by drawing attention to their own surviving powers, this was hard to achieve at a time when one’s physical health and safety was not a given.

For both Ireland and America, cultural losses continue to haunt the consciousness of citizens and impact how they cope with loss. I have personal experience with grieving great cultural and mortal losses in a public sphere. On a study abroad program, I visited a cemetery in Dungarvan, County Waterford.

Without much context of what happened in the location, I walked to the site with other students and professors, led by an Irishman named Liam who had historical knowledge of the location. After entering through large iron gates, we entered a field with tall, unkempt grass. At first, the field did not seem like there was much to observe. A path made from others before us who had walked in the field led to a large monument of a cross, and stepping around the wildflowers poking from the tall grass, we walked in a single-file line to the monument.

Figure 1: Burial Site Monument in Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

Liam clarified that this was a burial site for famine victims. Yet unlike the scenes of mismatched headstones of varying sizes and colors that we had already observed at other Irish graveyards, this site was different: there were no markers indicating who was buried or even how many bodies there were. During the famine, Liam explained, people died in such large numbers—and at such a fast rate—that those who managed the burial site would go out around lunch time, gather the dead bodies in the community, and bury them in the dirt, and then maybe a little after dinner, they would again go out, collect the bodies, and put them in the dirt. This retrieval and burial occurred daily, as members of the Dungarvan community were dying so regularly that several trips were necessary. There were no graves

indicating where corpses were buried or who those bodies were. Additionally, though Liam estimated that there were likely hundreds of bodies, there is no way of counting how many people succumbed to illness or starvation.

As we stood in this empty field and learned about the famine's catastrophic impact on this community, everyone was quiet and contemplative. Though I did not live at the time of the famine, know these individuals who died, or even have Irish ancestry, I felt enormous sadness and sympathy. These tragic, anonymous burials were foreign to me, and it was difficult to comprehend the totality of what I felt. My classmates were from the twenty-first century America, where the idea of constructing headstones for lost loved ones and being able to mourn them in a cemetery was a familiar and comforting ritual. Because familiar rituals of grief were absent, we faced foreign concepts: tragic mortal loss on an enormous scale, no opportunity to read headstones, and the inability to know how many died and who it was that suffered.

This kind of loss is particularly hard to process, and because it felt so unfathomable, it silenced the students and left many in tears. I quietly contemplated the tragedies that occurred and tried to remember the individuals who lost their lives. After reading the inscription on the large monument of a cross in the center of the field, I attempted to get a better grip on the reality of what occurred at the site, but I could only picture faceless humans. As a group, we walked through the grass and stood next to a statue of a weeping woman, the only other physical pillar that marked what occurred in the field, and we stood noiselessly, feeling a sympathetic connection with victims whose lives, stories, and identities are lost. While there was no consolation for the anonymous dead, standing in the physical space and feeling my way through grief with classmates was a powerful experience because it helped me get closer to understanding the entirety of the loss. During grief, it may sometimes feel less painful when one avoids acknowledging connections, affections, and sympathy to people, places, things, and ideas. Yet when contemplating or mourning a loss, empathetic exchanges in public spheres can help mourners process trauma.

Figure 2: Statue of a Grieving Irish Woman During a Famine

Grief, mourning, loss, and trauma are important concepts to consider with a transnational context because these are feelings that all humans eventually endure to varying degrees. Despite prescriptive literary conventions and psychological coping mechanisms that encourage resolution, grief has no official end point, only the potential for adaptation. There are also some losses or trauma, like the memory of those who suffered and departed in the famine, that make grieving an even more unfathomable and challenging experience. With the dark turn of modern literary grief and contemporary trends of communicating in a digital (and often impersonal) spaces, it is crucial to look at grief in a less divided way. Private and public spheres are rapidly shifting, and many don't have the opportunity to go into public spaces with others and mourn together, but adaptation is not insurmountable. By acknowledging others' humanity, individuals can recognize that everyone has lost someone or something, and by maintaining a balance of private and public spaces to process loss, one can recognize commonalities and healthily work through personal grief. We know that these things are very real. We encounter them in the physical space in the way that hits us corporeally. Seeing this on the page hits us intellectually, but shared physical spaces encourages real emotional connections with others. Both are important, both help us understand the other, but we must have both to understand the totality of grief.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Scott Edward. "Elegy & Exile: Elizabeth Bishop's Poem 'Crusoe in England.'" *Worcester Review*, vol. 32, no. 1/2, Mar. 2011, pp. 93–96. EBSCOhost, libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=73791660.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Collected Shorter Plays*. Grove Press, 1984.

"Beckett to Jessica Tandy." Quoted in Brater, E., 'The *I* in Beckett's *Not I'*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 20, No 3, July 1974, p. 200.

Bishop, Elizabeth. *The Collected Prose*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984.

Bottigheimer, Karl S. *Ireland and the Irish: A Short History.* Columbia U. Press, 1982.

Bush, Harold K. *Continuing Bonds with the Dead: Parental Grief and Nineteenth-Century American Authors*. University Alabama Press, 2016.

Capps, Donald. *Men, Religion, and Melancholia: James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson.* Yale University Press, 1997.

Carleton, William. *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine.* London: Simms and M'Intyre, 1847.

Cole, Jr., Allan Hugh. "A Poetic Path from Melancholy to Mourning: Robert Lowell's Elegies as Case Study." *Pastoral Psychology,* vol. 54, no. 2, Nov. 2005, pp. 103-137. doi: 10.1007/s11089-005-6198-2.

---. "Elegiac Poetry: A Pastoral Resource with Complicated Grief." P*astoral Psychology,* vol. 53, no. 3, Jan. 2005, pp. 189-206. doi: 10.1007/s11089-004-0553-6.

Cuddon, J.A., revised by C.E. Preston. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory,* 4th edition. Penguin, 1999.

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM IV. Washington, D. C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1952.

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

Doreski, Carole. *Elizabeth Bishop: The Restraints of Language.* Oxford University Press, 1993.

"Elegy: Poetic Form." *The Academy of American Poets*. 20 February, 2014. www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/elegy-poetic-form.

Esslin, Martin. "The Theatre of the Absurd." *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1960, pp. 3-15.

Frank, Lucy. *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture.* Taylor & Francis Group, 2007.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Wordsworth Editions, 2014. EBSCOhost, libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e900xww&AN=1468741.

---. "The Future of an Illusion." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works*. Edited by James Strachey et al., vol. 21, Hogarth Press, 1966.

---. "Mourning and Melancholia*." The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Edited by J. M. Strachey, vol. 14, pp. 243–258.

Fry, Stephen. *The Ode Less Travelled*. UK: Arrow Books, 2007.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "'Rat's Alley: The Great War, Modernism, and the (Anti) Pastoral Elegy." *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 179-201.

Graham, Brian. *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography.* Routledge, 1997.

Haralson, Eric L. *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2014.

Keller, Lynn, and Cristanne Miller. "Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Rewards of Indirection." *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 4, 1984, pp. 533–553. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/365061.

Knowlson, J., *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, 1996.

Komura, Toshiaki. *Poetry of Lost Loss: A Study of the Modern Anti-Consolatory Elegy*, 2011. The University of Michigan, PhD Dissertation.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982.

McCabe, Susan. *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994. EBSCOhost.

Parker, Gordon, et al. "Issues for DSM-5: Whither Melancholia? The Case for Its Classification as a Distinct Mood Disorder." *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 167, no. 7, 2010, pp. 745–747., doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2010.09101525.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems.* Ed. Ted Hughes. Harper & Row, 1981.

---. *The Unabridged Journals*. Ed. Karen V. Kukil. Anchor, 2000.

Ramazani, Jahan. "'Daddy, I Have Had to Kill You': Plath, Rage, and the Modern Elegy." *PMLA,* vol. 108, no. 5, 1993, pp. 1142–1156. JSOTR, doi: 10.2307/462991.

Robbins, Joseph. "The Miasma: Epidemic and Panic in Nineteenth-Century Ireland." *History Ireland*, no. 3, 1996, p. 59. *EBSCOhost*, libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.27724380.

Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985.

Schetrumpf, Tegan J. "Diminished but Never Dismissed: The Confessional Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Bruce Beaver." *Antipodes*, no. 1, 2015, pp. 117-127. EBSCOhost, doi:10.13110/antipodes.29.1.0117.

Spivack, Kathleen. "Conceal/Reveal: Passion and Restraint in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop." *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 46, no. 3, Sept. 2005, pp. 496–510.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Edited by Elizabeth Ammons, vol. 3, Norton Critical Edition, 2018.

Tompkins, Jane P. "Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History." *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Edited by Elizabeth Ammons, vol. 3, Norton Critical Edition, 2018.

White, Isabel. "The Uses of Death in Uncle Tom's Cabin." *American Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1985.

"[1973] 'Not I' (Samuel Beckett)." YouTube, 17 Oct. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4LDwfKxr-M.