

**Post-World War II Elegy and the Geographic Imagination**

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## Abstract

I argue for the significance of the spatial and geographic in the criticism of elegy. Space and geography are important in elegy, I demonstrate, both as a strategy for ordering the emotion of grief into the practice of mourning, but also in terms of mapping the flexible, shifting distance between the dead and the elegist, inscribing memory, navigating a changed world of loss and absence, and providing a site for funeral rites. Elegy is often critically considered in socio-historical terms; by examining post-war elegy and grounding this analysis within the theories and methodology of the “spatial turn” of the second half of the twentieth century, I challenge critical narratives of shift and break within the tradition by illustrating a shared heritage of geographic tropes in Western elegy, as well as emphasise the particular inflections of place in individual narratives of mourning. I focus on two elegists in each chapter, examining how their geographic imaginations inflect sites of mourning with their specific encounters with death and grief. Each chapter is informed by human and cultural geography. My first chapter maps grounds of burial and recovery marked with the interplay of silence and voice in Tony Harrison’s *V.* and Seamus Heaney’s “Bog Queen” and “Station Island,” using J. B. Harley’s idea of “cartographies of silence.” I then use Nigel Thrift’s theories of modern mobility to navigate the inscriptive funereal mobilities in Amy Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” and Anne Carson’s *Nox*, emphasising the movement of the mourner in response to the stillness of death. My following chapter employs Doreen Massey’s ideas of space as simultaneous narratives to investigate architectural spaces in Douglas Dunn’s *Elegies* and Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters*, and illustrates the transformation of everyday buildings into monuments to loss and grief. Finally, I apply Yi-Fu Tuan’s formulation of place and mythic space to the

border between life and death in the littoral topographies of Elizabeth Bishop's "North Haven" and Sylvia Plath's "Berck-Plage," and the distinctive perspectives on death they embody. Each chapter emphasises precursors and continuities within the elegiac tradition as well as post-war engagements with history, memory, events of death, practices of mourning and commemoration, and the possibility of consolation evoked and ordered by the geographic imagination.

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## 1. Introduction: Elegy and the Geographic Imagination

I sometimes hold it half a sin  
To put in words the grief I feel;  
For words, like Nature, half reveal  
And half conceal the Soul within.

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,  
A use in measured language lies;  
The sad mechanic exercise,  
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,  
Like coarsest clothes against the cold:  
But that large grief which these enfold  
Is given in outline and no more.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (V.1-12, 1849)

This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Elizabeth Bishop "One Art" (17-20, 1977)

Over a hundred years apart, with two World Wars and multiple international conflicts and catastrophes between them, Tennyson and Bishop struggle to represent their grief and sense of loss after the deaths of loved ones. Tennyson confronts the problem that words are inadequate to express sufficiently the magnitude and depth of his grief, while Bishop's challenge is to turn "disaster" into art. Driven by the tension between the inadequacy of words to cover the magnitude of loss, and the imperative to put grief in words, to "*Write it!*," both Tennyson and Bishop give poetic form to their grief, and thereby bring order out of chaos as they produce elegy out of emotion. The impulse to write elegy bridges the gap between Tennyson's "unquiet heart and brain" and his "measured language," between his "large grief" and the "outline" of words that encloses them. Likewise, elegy crosses the distance between losing someone

and mastering the “art of losing.” This gap, or distance, and the attempt to close it with words, has been observed by critics of elegy; Max Cavitch remarks in *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (2007), “Ranging from dull repositories of borrowed affect to dynamic traces of the struggle to fix ineffable loss, [elegies] measure out the distance between emotion and convention, between local disruptions of bereavement and long traditions of resignation” (1). Peter Sacks argues in *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985) that “each elegy is to be regarded, therefore, as a work, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product, and in the more dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience—the sense that underlies Freud’s phrase ‘the work of mourning’” (1). Cavitch and Sacks view the impulse to write elegy and the tensions it contains in socio-historical and Freudian terms respectively; but the tension between “emotion and convention,” and the process of “working through of an impulse,” can also be investigated in spatial terms, and thereby interpreted via the geographic imagination of the elegist.

The “sad mechanic exercise” of the elegy, I argue, serves as a form of map, delineating the world of the dead and the world of the living, and charting the empty space which formerly contained the deceased—a world where absence is covered with weeds and the specific individual traits of the lost one must be hidden or set aside in parentheses. For Tennyson, the “sad mechanic exercise” that “numbs” grief and soothes the “unquiet brain” results in the regular quatrains with the ABBA rhyme scheme; the alliteration of “measured” and “mechanic,” “words like weeds” and “coarsest clothes” fails to hide the “large grief.” Seamus Heaney in *The Redress of Poetry* (1995) observes the “balance” between the “whimper” of “self-pity” and the form of the villanelle in

“One Art” (184); this balance is organised through strategies of typography, punctuation and layout, as well as by enclosing grief into the strict form of the villanelle, creating a sense of overlapping spaces—the personal grief of the bereaved is placed inside the parentheses and the glib patter of the poet outside them. A sense of space, the creation of a geography of mourning, is evident in these elegies, from the “outline” that fails to transmit an accurate representation of the “large grief” to the parentheses that arrange information in “One Art”—as Heaney points out, “As so often in Bishop’s work, the parenthesis (if you have ears to hear) is the place to hear the real truth” (184). The geographic imagination of the elegist, I argue, navigates the space between emotion and its representation, as well as organising grief within an outline and marking its contours and inflections.<sup>1</sup>

The spatial awareness necessary for placing grief, of creating a border between the internal self and the external world, is extended by some elegists to the grounding of their mourning in landscape and geography, both in terms of physical structures and terrain and in cultural and imaginative perceptions of place and space.<sup>2</sup> There is a fundamental connection in Western literature and culture between death and space; in Greek mythology, for instance, death is a

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<sup>1</sup> Shaw observes that after the transformation of the poet into an elegist, organisation from chaos to order is a vital part of the process of “discovery” that is necessary for “confessional elegy” (5). Shaw does not examine the geographic implications of this process in any detail.

<sup>2</sup> From the *Oxford Dictionary of Geography* (249): “Geography is one of the structures of how we understand society and space, practised, *inter alia*, by seeing, dwelling, collecting, travelling, mapping, representing, recording, and narrating; an approach which encourages a focus on complexity, multiplicity, and relational thinking” (291). This thesis is primarily informed by human and cultural geography, as opposed to physical geography which “focuses upon the character of, and processes shaping, the land-surface of the earth and its envelope” (*Oxford Dictionary of Geography* 379). The aspect of human geography that I use is “That part of the discipline of geography concerned with the spatial differentiation and organisation of human activity and its interrelationships with the physical environment” (R.J. Johnston). Similarly, cultural geography emphasises human perception and activity on the physical environment as “the study of the impact of human culture on the landscape; ‘the ways in which place and identity are embedded in a range of cultural landscapes, and the ways in which those social and material landscapes have reflected in influenced various experiences and notions of movement” (Mains). Both human and cultural geography have political dimensions, but as their names suggest they are also investigate human and cultural relations to space, and this involves a study of perceptual, imaginative and creative representations of space—including within literary texts.

realm across a river, the other side of the ocean, and an underground cavern, while the dead go to heaven, or are placed in the stars. The geographic imagination of the elegist draws on this tradition of placing the dead and death itself, defining a border between life and death and also mapping the often shifting and mobile distances between the dead and the living, perceiving elegies as maps that mark and delineate the terrain between the emotion of grief and the “sad mechanic exercise” that is the practice of mourning. This practice of bringing order and definition out of the chaos and void of bereavement is informed by the tradition, convention and ritual of consolation and commemoration—memory is written on landscape or erased according to the needs of the elegist. Death and survival are adjoining countries; elegy is the geography that navigates them.

The spatial coordinates of different components of mourning are complemented by temporal coordinates which chronicle the coinciding narratives of the deceased and elegist. Concomitantly with the shaping and marking of space, the passage of time can be stretched and hastened, made cyclical in accordance with the seasons, or circular through repetition; a moment can be preserved forever and notions of eternity in memory or afterlife can be undermined. These temporal processes, I argue, are grounded in the spaces and places of the elegy. On a small scale, the sense of time in elegy expands upon the birth-date and death-date of the epitaph and relates the progression of grief—ideally from the “unquiet heart and brain” to peace. In “Dying Is an Art, like Everything Else” (2001), anthropologist Michael Taussig summarises the model version of this process as follows: “First you suffer loss. Chaos reigns. Then comes the reward. Peace is established. Life triumphs once more over death and harmony reigns” (307). This trajectory from loss to



harmony is not linear, however—and if a poem does not reach harmony or the traditional elegiac consolation, it does not mean that the poem has failed, nor is the purpose of elegy as a genre undermined. What matters is that the elegist has made the journey from “an infant crying in the night / with no language but a cry” (*In Memoriam A.H.H.* LIV.5.3-4) to an elegist, a person capable of ordering, selecting and representing the features of a map. In a wider sense, the temporal context in an elegy can represent a moment within shifting socio-historical understandings of death and mourning rituals—and examining the historical context of elegy is a common critical theme. Elegy-as-history documents the progress of mourning from the beginning of the elegy to its end; elegy-as-geography charts the meandering doubling-back, the varied velocities and trajectories across terrains of silence, borders, absence and memory.

Although all elegies can be read as maps on a metaphorical level, as a way of marking death and loss, and as representations of emotional topography, some elegies foreground actual sites, using geographic particularity to place grief, loss, memory and death, and I have chosen to focus on a selection in this mode. Tony Harrison’s *V.* (1985) charts a process of burial and retrieval, and concomitant inscription and erasure, in the official cemetery of Holbeck Cemetery, Leeds. Seamus Heaney’s “Bog Queen” (1975) and “Station Island” (1984) navigate cartographies of silence and language in the boglands and pilgrimage routes of Ireland’s Drumkeeragh and Lough Derg, respectively. Amy Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” (1981) maps the mobilities of America’s Interstate 80 from Brooklyn to Ohio. The Roman poet Catullus’s travel to his brother’s funeral is echoed in Anne Carson’s journey from Canada to her brother’s funeral in Denmark in *Nox* (2009). The streets and docks of Douglas Dunn’s Glasgow and Hull resonate with narratives of reified memory

and loss (1969, 1983), while public and private mourning meet in the melancholic monuments of Ted Hughes's "9 Willow Street," "18 Rugby Street," and "59 Eltisley" (1998). Sylvia Plath's "Berck-Plage" (1963) is placed between land and ocean at a resort town in France and a village in Devon. Elizabeth Bishop remembers Robert Lowell amid the shifting islands of "North Haven" (1979) in Maine. None of these elegies could be about anyone other than the person to whom they were addressed; specific geographies align and intersect with specific histories.

Studying the geography of elegy is important because where things happen is not only as important as why, how, and when they happen, but also because location influences the texture of event, experience and emotion, which is reflected in their conceptualisation and representation. The investigation of the geography of these elegies, therefore, foregrounds a focus on often overlooked strategies of representing varying and individual experiences of grief and mourning. The spaces of the elegy are shaped and inscribed by the poet's emotion and memory—landscape and architecture can be idealised and preserved, making the elegy a kind of monument. Elegiac sites can also be made melancholic; the natural environment can be portrayed as destructive and man-made structures can be undermined into fragments and shadows. Focusing on the geographical imagination of the elegist enables the interrogation of narratives of healing and inconsolability, the conventions and tropes of the elegiac tradition, and the influence of the elegist's socio-historical context on his or her understanding of death. Where death is placed in elegy—in sites of silence or beyond topographical borders, for instance—and whether these borders are undermined or how silences and erasures are framed and re-inscribed, can counter or reinforce the elegiac functions of consolation and

commemoration. The specific geographies of the elegies I analyse here do not merely reflect the elegist's own experience with death, but are an active element of the elegist's engagement with the tradition and conventions of the genre, as well as a way of marking the elegist's individual narrative of mourning within collective and public territories. Studying the geographic imagination of the elegist, therefore, highlights the intersections of individual narratives of mourning, spatial strategies for representing death and mourning, and the elegy as a map of mourning—its layout, form, and intervention in the elegiac tradition.

The elegists whose work I use as case-studies here employ the geographic imagination to navigate the relationship between their own experience of grief and loss, their own emotional cartography, and the elegiac tradition and post-World War II historical and cultural contexts of late modernity. Clampitt, for instance, combines narratives of collective mourning for American soldiers killed in war and for Native American Indians forced to migrate westwards with grief for her mother in intensive care, using the restless momentum of traffic on the American Interstate 80 as a unifying device. Heaney's representation of his personal losses and the communal tragedies of the Northern Irish Troubles in "Bog Queen" and "Station Island" can be read as a cartography of silence and sound that echoes the processes of burial and retrieval in the poems—the topography is scarred by historical event, but also marked by mourning. Scholars of elegy frequently focus on the historical context and influences of elegy, focusing on a narrative of changes, shifts, and even breaks within the functions and forms of the tradition. The elegists I discuss here, however, draw on imagined geographies that form part of the genre's tradition—monumental architecture, the passage of the funeral

procession, the ocean as a space for death or a means of connecting to an after-state, and the graveyard as a site of tensions between inscription and silence, for example. Imagined geographies form a persistent part of the heritage of elegy as it has developed from the pastoral lyrics of Rome and Greece to the engagement with post-modern fragmentations and spaces of erasure in Anne Carson's *Nox*. These geographies are in turn connected to general human perceptions of different landscapes and structures and the varieties of emotional affect assigned to them. In order to fully investigate the effect of the geographical imagination on elegy and sites of death, loss and memory, I employ an innovative interdisciplinary methodology that draws directly on the work of human and cultural geographers and applies it to the literary texts of the elegy. This is because the geography of death is necessarily predicated on the geography of life. How poets create textual cartographies, use mobility to inscribe routes and roots, build structures marked by memory and navigate borders, is informed by how people perceive, create and inhabit the topographical and cultural parameters of place. This privileging of the human in space is the province of philosophers and theorists of the "spatial turn," human and cultural geographers, and the literary field of geocriticism, a development of literary geography. In this study I engage primarily with human and cultural geographers and practitioners of literary geography/geocriticism, rather than the theorists who influenced their work.. As the "spatial turn" is an important background for my work, however, I next briefly sketch its parameters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive history of the spatial turn, and its influence on literary criticism, see Robert T. Tally's *Spatialities* (2013). For more on the spatial turn, see for example Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) and Tim Cresswell's *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004).

In the mid-twentieth century, philosophers and sociologists such as Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson began to intensively analyse space and spatial relations in cultures and societies. Michel Foucault's comment in his lecture "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias" (1967) is often cited as a crucial influence in developing a space-based mode of thought:

[T]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (22)

The elegies I write about here show signs of this non-linear, network-based frame of mind. The conversations in Heaney's "Station Island" and in Harrison's *V.*, for instance, involve confrontations with real and imagined figures from the recent and distant past; these dialogues occur on "accumulative landscapes" (Holtorf and Williams 236) marked by traces of events and centuries of ritual activity. Both Heaney and Harrison encounter versions of themselves—they are simultaneously poet and skinhead, poet and young boy listening to a seashell, and thereby inhabit different spaces simultaneously. The geographers whose work informs my analysis are also influenced by "simultaneity" and juxtaposition of spaces and narratives—indeed, Doreen Massey, whose *For Space* (2005) I cite in my chapter on Ted Hughes and Douglas Dunn, argues that space itself is a network of simultaneous narratives (5).

In 1971, Marxist social theorist Henri Lefebvre argued for human involvement in the creation of space: “(social) space is a (social product)” (30), dividing space into areas of “spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space,” which link to the fields of the “perceived, conceived and lived spaces” (33-40). “Representational space” would be the closest to the imagined geography of the elegist, if parts of the definition are applied; it is “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols . . . . It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (39). Although the elegist’s geographic representation of grief and mourning “overlays” and intertwines with specific physical topographies, Lefebvre gears representational space towards “some artists, . . . and some writers and philosophers, who aspire to describe and do no more than describe” (33). The elegist does more than describe; he or she inscribes, forms and maps, actively creating order out of chaos through a process of selection and arrangement—as Shaw remarks, “To commemorate the dead is to affirm that their lives do not fall totally into nothingness. Gathering up, pondering, and justifying the meaning of these lives, elegies bring into play values that did not exist before” (8), going on to insist on the active creation involved in elegy: “an elegy recollects and re-presents an event; unlike a death or an obituary, it does more than just transcribe it” (215). Lefebvre’s Marxism and therefore his predication of his analysis on elements of social space such as means of production and the power of the state makes his work difficult to apply to elegy with its highly-charged emotional content and highly subjective perspectives; indeed, as he mentions himself, “Death too has a ‘location,’ but that location lies below or above appropriated social space” (35).<sup>4</sup> Lefebvre is nevertheless an important figure of the “spatial turn,” and has

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<sup>4</sup> Further detaching death from Marxist preoccupations, Lefebvre writes: “Just as Nietzschean space has nothing in common with Hegelian space, so Nietzschean time, as the theatre of

influenced geographers whose work I use such as Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift, as well as geocritic Robert Tally and scholars of space and poetry such as Ian Davidson. The significance of spatial analysis is carried into post-modern thought, summarised by Fredric Jameson's remark in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) that "I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper" (24). Grief and mourning are cultural practices with cultural languages, elegy involves psychology and history as well as geography, some elegies are inflected with national and regional politics, but the combination of these with the unknowable element of death, and the spatial representation of this unknowability, has not been a concern of geocritics or literary geographers.<sup>5</sup> This insistence on the centrality of space in the way people think and societies and cultures develop has influenced literary criticism, leading to the very recent term "geocriticism" to describe a mode of analysis that foregrounds the spatial.

The burgeoning field of geocriticism serves as a loose theoretical framework for my examination of geographic narratives in these elegies; part of my project is to expand geocriticism further into poetry, and introduce it to the genre of elegy and representations of death. This is necessary precisely

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universal tragedy, as the cyclical, repetitious space-time of death and of life, has nothing in common with Marxist time—that is, historicity driven forward by the forces of production and adequately (to be optimistic) oriented by industrial, proletarian and revolutionary rationality" (22-23).

<sup>5</sup> By the "unknowability" of death, I mean something similar to what Shaw argues is its "inconceivability": "The inconceivability of death can mean one of two things. It may mean that death is a threshold experience: being outside life, it cannot be moved forward in time. To place death inside life, as a painful experience, rather than on the boundary of life, is to forget that, though the idea of death affects the way we live, the *phenomenon* of death brings experience as such to an end" (86-87). Shaw considers death from a philosophical perspective, citing Berkeley and Ferrier; because I focus on the geographic imagination as an attempt to conceive death, to "place death inside life," I prefer to write of death as unknowable rather than inconceivable.

because the “spatial turn” has often neglected the emotional and imaginary; although Jameson mentions that “cultural languages” and “psychic experience” are “today dominated by categories of space,” his discussion, and the analysis of many critics whose work involves literary geography, is grounded in physical, economic and political geography and how they serve and form the narratives of the text—usually prose fiction—rather than how authors create geographies laden with specific, subjective, emotional affect that are based on reality but represented as imagined. The term “geocriticism” is relatively recent, dating back to Bertrand Westphal’s use of it in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2007). As Tally summarises in *Spatiality* (2013), geocriticism “enables productive ways of thinking about space, place and mapping” (3), going on to elaborate that “Geocriticism or spatial critical theory, then, is broadly understood to include both aesthetics and politics, as elements in a constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern, world” (114). Of literary cartography, Tally notes:

The act of writing itself might be considered a form of mapping or a cartographic activity. Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, to emphasize, or to diminish; ... The literary cartographer, . . . must determine the degree to which a given representation of a place refers to any “real” place in the geographical world. (45)

This is a useful encapsulation of the features shared by writing and cartography. The process of selection, and the act of determination and mediation between representation and reality are particularly relevant to the geographic imagination



in elegy; in the chapter “Mapping Conversations with the Absent” I elaborate on the connection between specific cartographic ideas and elegiac strategies, and in “Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy” I compare the representational strategies of landscape paintings and cartography and corresponding mappings of the elegiac littoral site. Both Westphal and Tally give prose narratives as examples, and they barely mention poetry; *Spatiality* is structured as a survey of theory, philosophy and criticism, focusing on the philosophical and metaphorical aspects of writing-as-mapping, and examining social spaces and spaces of power, for example, rather than examining the geographic imagination in literary praxis.

Geocriticism as a term and a field of study has emerged and gained currency rapidly in the last three years; indeed, when I began this thesis in 2010, my proposal was under the rubric of literary geography. Tally does not explicitly discuss the distinction between the two concepts; but he defines the approach of literary geography as follows:

Literary geography implies a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration. But it also means paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical formations that affect literary and cultural productions. This can involve looking at the ways that literature registers the shifting cultural configurations of social space over time, as well as the means by which texts represent or map spaces and places. (80)

The study of literary geography is historically inflected; examining spatial elements of literary texts is often carried out with a view to informing the reader

further about the historical and social contexts of the text and the author's life, intentions, and perspective on their era—the approach provides a history of how people view and write about place. In geocriticism, the spatial is privileged over the temporal; Westphal argues that “Geocriticism will work to map possible worlds, to create plural and paradoxical maps, because it embraces space in its mobile heterogeneity” (141). As a product of the spatial turn, geocriticism is a way of making sense of modernity through the study of space, with a view to orienting the self in the world (Tally 114). To this extent my study is geocritical; the elegies I examine can be accessed via the shifting and overlapping spaces articulated through the discourse of the spatial turn; the relationship between the elegist and the dead is flexible and mobile, and the geographic imagination of the elegist reflects this lability. However, Tally sums up the task of spatial criticism as follows: “As a way to analyse literary texts, but also as an approach to social criticism, geocriticism can perhaps uncover the hidden relations of power in those other spaces that a critical theory less attuned to spatiality might well overlook” (114). Tally here echoes the concerns with power structures evident in Jameson's, Foucault's and Lefebvre's work on space—in spite of the fact that these are issues that have preoccupied the geographers—and poets—whose work I use, my study of the geographic imagination in elegy is not politically, socially or economically oriented. Although social and political narratives surface in most of the elegies I study here—the marks of colonialism and divisive discourse in Heaney's work and class warfare in Harrison's *V.*, for instance—my focus is on how these discourses inform the sounds and silences of the elegiac narrative and the spaces that it maps rather than what the sites of the poems tell us about the Northern Irish Troubles or Thatcher's Britain. My intention here is therefore not only to extend geocriticism in the direction of

poetry, showing that spatial narratives in poetry, with its “plural and paradoxical maps,” are as crucial in terms of representational strategy and making sense of individual place in the world as in prose, but also apply the geocritical methodology of direct engagement with human and cultural geography to work that privileges the imaginative, emotional and subjectively written—the elegy.

I next briefly outline the critical context of my work, and clarify my position within scholarship of place and poetry and elegy, discussing relevant author-specific criticism in each chapter. There are some omissions of very recent work from this literature review—2013 has seen the publication of *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry* (ed. Neal Alexander and David Cooper), for instance, but too late for me to have time to engage with the text in any depth. Critical focus on spatiality in poetry is still an emerging rather than established area, and little work in this direction has been carried out on the modern to contemporary elegy. While the study of place and environment in poetry has a history, the focus of this critical perspective has until fairly recently frequently been limited to landscape, rather than geography, and often related to the poet’s own locale as inspiration. Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1973) is a landmark text in literary geography of a more theoreticised and overtly ideological work. A Marxism-influenced examination of the relationship between the urban and the rural and pastoral (a key distinction for Williams) in English social history and literature from the Middle Ages to the mid-twentieth-century, Williams examines cultural and imaginative associations linked to different areas in England, and questions narratives of nostalgia and progress. Including both prose and poetry in his investigation of the interaction and mutual influence of the country and city, both in terms of perception and statistics-based actual events, Williams’s work is significant both for Tally and

geographers such as Nigel Thrift, whose theory of space and mobility I examine in the chapter “Geographies of Mobility and the Restless Elegy.” Williams’s term “structure of feeling” (22) in particular, to describe an imaginative framework of dominant attitudes with regard to relationships with past, present and future, as well as nature and technology, has become a term used by literary critics, geographers and historians. Williams relates “structures of feeling” to both individuals and collective mentalities; the term is significant because it combines the emotional and the logical, emphasising both their mutual influence and their combined ability to affect change. I return briefly to Williams’s work when I discuss urban architecture and subversions of the pastoral in the poetry of Ted Hughes and Douglas Dunn. I will note here, however, that Williams’s challenge to nostalgia for an idyllic pastoral “‘Old England’ and its timeless agricultural rhythms” (20) is somewhat similar in idea to my own challenge to a narrative of shift and change in the elegiac tradition based purely on historicity and changes in social conceptualisations of death and dying. Williams describes this search for an English Arcadia as a “problem of perspective” (18), comparing the quest to being on an escalator going backwards:

The apparent resting places, the successive Old Englands to which we are confidently referred but which then start to move and recede, have some actual significance when they are looked at in their own terms. . . . But again, what seemed a single escalator, a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England, rural settlement, the rural virtues—all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought into question. (21-22)

Williams uses the spatial to reassert the particularity of each era—indeed, interrogating the very idea of the “era” by challenging the uniformity of progression. Similarly, my focus on the geographic imagination in the post-war elegy is from a perspective that does not consider it a bastardised or mutated form of pastoral elegy, but as a culmination point of continuities, regressions, allusions and innovations, as well as shifts and changes in the genre and in the “structure of feeling” that produces it.

Jeremy Hooker’s *Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970-1981* (1981) is one of the first texts to focus solely on poetry and place. He also uses space to assert particularity, this time of region rather than historical period, examining the texts by poets such as Seamus Heaney, Edward Thomas, and W. H. Auden that engage with specific regions, with a view to countering a sense of “growing cultural uniformity throughout Britain” (11) and exploring “the importance of seeing places with understanding and sympathy and, therefore, with insight into the cultural, social, and linguistic factors that make them specifically human, as well as with feeling for their physical and atmospheric qualities” (13). Although sensitive to post-colonial implications and the historical moment, Hooker’s work is not informed by theoretical framework or critical context. Nevertheless, his awareness of the connections between the poet and his geographic background, and the difficulties of articulating specific regional identity, make his work a significant step.

Like Williams, Peter Barry in *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* (2000) undermines a strict division between city and country, arguing for interaction rather than separation. Barry goes beyond Hooker in contemplating

terminology and theoretical frameworks, describing the distinction between setting and geography as follows:

Setting, in this sense, is generic, evoking a generalised impression of the urban or the metropolitan, while “geography” is loco-specific, giving a rendition of specific cities, and often signalled by using the names of actual streets, buildings, or districts. This “redundant specificity” gives a cartographic precision, rather than just urban-generic, atmospheric details. (48)

Although Barry’s focus is on urban poets, his definition of the “loco-specific” applies to the elegies I analyse here; their “cartographic precision” allows the study of how the elegist shapes geography through his or her elegiac imagination, and elegy through their perception of geography. The elegiac vision transforms 9 Willow Street from Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* into a melancholic monument, its particular architectural features connoting entrapment and an evil fate. However, this “diagrammatic” rather than “pictorial” (51) element of loco-specificity draws on “urban-generic”, “atmospheric” details as well—the elegiac tradition and the Western cultural imagination form a repository of spatial associations that contribute to representations of specific locations. The particular address of 9 Willow Street may be turned into a monument, but this is augmented by the connotations of willow trees and weeping in the pastoral elegiac conventions, as well as notions of the urban as claustrophobic and opposed to nature. Rather than draw a distinction between setting and geography, then, I would argue that both the “loco-specific” and the “atmospheric” inform the geographic imagination. Any place, whether vague or specific, that is assigned a narrative, becomes a geography.

Ian Davidson's *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007) is a product of the spatial turn, firmly situating the modern poets whose works he examines within a world beyond the national, regional and loco-specific associations of their home ground. Davidson actively resists viewing poetry as separate from its socio-cultural context and his work "explores the impact of ideas of space and spatialisation on recent and contemporary poetry and demonstrates the way some poetry, through form and content, engages with some of the most pressing and urgent social and cultural issues" (1). He explicitly links this ideology to that of geographers David Harvey and Doreen Massey, writing of both place and poetry that "I am claiming, along with Harvey and Massey, that it is no longer possible to pull up the drawbridge and claim immunity from economic, social, cultural and environmental change" (30). Davidson's discussion of space includes the response of the poet to real locations, highlighting an engagement with identity and modernity, as well as the spatial layout of the page of poetry, in forms such as collage and concrete poetry. His methodology of engaging with poetry in terms of geographers and cultural critics, therefore, has formed a useful example for my work. While I draw on similar sources from geographic theory, particularly in my discussion of monuments and of mobility, my focus on elegy involves the mapping of the emotional topographies of grief and navigating the shifts and cracks in mental and imagined landscape that emerge as a response to death, rather than commentary on politics of locale.

This very brief sketch suggests a trend towards a self-conscious emplacement of critical work on poetry within the discursive framework of the spatial turn, and engagement with cultural and human geography, as well as other disciplines such as cultural history and sociology. Elegy and the

geographic imagination, however, are not topics that have been addressed in any great depth—yet—by critics associating themselves with geocriticism or literary geography. Readings of textual responses to death and elegy have not been informed by specific geographic theories and ideas.<sup>6</sup> Key texts of elegiac criticism are so far informed by the historical imagination, as indeed is evident from their titles: Peter Sacks’s seminal work covers the development of the genre up to the First World War, while Jahan Ramazani’s *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (1994) appears to take up where Sacks left off; indeed, a shift between traditional and modern elegy is often observed between these critics, although Sacks’s viewpoint is heavily based on Freudian psychoanalysis and Ramazani frames his work in the cultural and social context of Anglo-American elegy. Sandra Gilbert’s *At Death’s Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve* (2006) develops Ramazani’s work on the modern elegy, arguing that the First World War marks a turn not only in the genre but in conceptions of death itself. Despite their focus on historical and social shifts, the scale of their analysis is such that any critic of elegy is indebted to these texts. I next summarise the critical trends and debates of elegy scholarship, concluding with the exceptions to the emphasis of the temporal. Post-modern geographer Edward Soja challenges the privileging of the temporal as follows: “To be sure, these ‘life-stories’ have a geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars of elegy do sometimes gesture towards spatial analysis, but primarily in terms of setting as described by Barry rather than geography, and as a marker in discussions of other contexts instead of geography in its own right. Sacks, for example, notes features of the pastoral environment as metaphors for the Freudian idea of the libido and the work of mourning. Shaw observes in his discussion of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* that “The mere impact of a photograph or of a setting remembered in photographic detail may distract the elegist from the act of recollection that turns the Somersby rectory or the ‘Dark house’ in Wimpole Street into a geography of his mind. . . . Without recollection there could be no meditation, and without meditation no discovery and growth” (214). Shaw’s focus is on the sites as examples of the transforming power of memory; he does not examine these locations or their shaping effect on the elegy further.



and action. The historical imagination is never completely spaceless” (14). By emphasising the spatiality of “life-stories,” I also reassert particularity and individuality, as well as highlighting tensions between the demands of the settings of the elegiac tradition and the need for individual representation.

Sacks’s focus is on the elegiac tradition, particularly the pastoral, and patterns of inheritance. While *The English Elegy* makes very little reference to modern elegy, Sacks’s identification and catalogue of elegiac conventions such as weaving imagery, processions, the offering of flowers, the pathetic fallacy of “nature’s lament,” repetition, invocation, interrogation and cursing, light imagery, and the sense of inheritance, especially in the case of elegies for fellow poets (1-40), can be seen as elements of space and place. Many of these conventions, particularly those related to setting, remain features of modern elegy, even if their expression has shifted or become more varied. Although the conventions of the pastoral elegy are subverted or rejected on occasion, as in Ted Hughes’s “Error,” they still often function as a foundation upon which the modern elegist bases his or her engagement with the tradition; indeed, Shaw goes so far as to remark that “it seems safe to say that some vestige of the pastoral elegy’s therapeutic power, its capacity to provide catharsis or healing, will produce a better elegy than one in which this trace is missing” (194). Sacks views the pastoral conventions through a Freudian lens, however, rather than as specific markers of an individual’s emotional state in a geography of loss and grief. He relates the sun, for example, to the phallus and the libido as well as rebirth and renewal, rather than contextualising it within the individual emotional topography of the poem. Indeed, many of the earlier elegies that Sacks discusses are set in the conventional classical landscapes of the pastoral, invoking Greek and Roman deities and local spirits; they are generic rather than

loco-specific geographies. However, even in the poems that break with this heroic tradition such as Thomas Grey's "Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard" (1751) with its Anglicised countryside rather than classical Arcadia and focus on humble rural folk rather than brother-poets, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (completed 1849) scenes of urban bleakness as well as nature, Sacks focuses on identifying the same psychoanalytic narratives of an Oedipal resolution to the "work of mourning" as in elegies such as Shelley's "Adonais" (1821), which is an overtly classicized pastoral. I argue here that different topographies require different interpretations of the elegiac conventions—what is a consolatory feature in "Crossing the Bar" is threatening in "Berck-Plage," for example.

The recurrence of elegiac conventions is significant as they highlight the continuity and intertextuality inherent to the elegiac tradition, but as many of these conventions such as vegetation and light imagery are related to features of landscape and environment, I view them more as generic markers in mapping the terrain of grief, part of the spatial heritage of the elegy, than signifiers of substitution and inheritance. Sacks insists on the Freudian model of the "healthy work of mourning" which enables the withdrawal of affection from the lost object, and the replacing of it with a substitute; according to Sacks: "The movement from loss to consolation thus requires a deflection of desire, with the creation of a trope both for the lost object and for the original character of the desire itself" (7). The "elegist's rewards" for a successful substitution—the substitution of the lost one for an elegy—are "inherited legacies and consoling identifications with symbolic, even immortal figures of power" (8). This is where the "Oedipal resolution" comes in—the elegist in effect rids himself of the influence of the deceased by commemorating him. Anxieties regarding mortality are understandable when it comes to the death of an admired but distant figure,

but this pattern disregards elegies by men for their wives that express more intimate emotions and shared histories, for instance. The geographic perspective also serves to disrupt the linear process of the “work of mourning” and the progression of the “movement from loss to consolation,” as well as move away from the gendered symbols and the patriarchal inheritance structures that Sacks reads into the pastoral tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Sacks examined consolatory devices and psychoanalytic figurings in traditional elegy, Jahan Ramazani grounds his work in the historical and social context of the post-World War I twentieth century. He argues that the annihilation of religion and funerary ritual along with millions of soldiers during the First World War have produced the mode of “anti-elegy,” or elegy which has little to do with consolation and resolution after death and much to do with lingering bitterness and guilt. Rather than the imagery to do with renewal and “creating a fabric in place of a void” (18) of which Sacks writes, Ramazani finds that anger and despondency have become the “psychic tissue of elegy” (4). Recurring emotions that inflect twentieth-century elegy, according to Ramazani, are ambivalence, scepticism, masochism and self-reproach. The roots of these emotions lie in what Ramazani pinpoints as a shift from “normative grief” to “melancholic mourning.” Whereas Freud attempted a diagnosis of melancholia by discerning similarities in behaviour and attitude between the mourner and the melancholiac, Ramazani assigns characteristics of melancholy to mourning,

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<sup>7</sup> Other strands of elegiac criticism include the assertion of a female elegiac tradition in opposition to the pastoral form with its masculine and patriarchal inflections of the anxiety of influence and poetic fraternity. See for example Celeste M. Schenck’s “Feminism and Deconstruction: Reconstructing the Elegy” (1987) and Melissa F. Zeiger’s *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (1997). My scope includes both female and male elegists; my focus on geography allows an alternative perspective on setting that reads the symbols of the pastoral environment as signifiers of specific loss, grief and memory rather than generic symbols of virility and renewal.

particularly ambivalence and self-reproach.<sup>8</sup> If “normative grief” involves the detachment of the affection from the lost object via the use of a substitute, “melancholic mourning” involves a different process:

Instead of resurrecting the dead in some substitute, instead of curing themselves through displacement, modern elegists “practice losing farther, losing faster” so that the “One Art” of the modern elegy is not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it. (4)

Ramazani suggests a relationship between this perceptual shift in mourning and the hiding of death from view in everyday life—he mentions that the dying are shut away in hospitals and hospices, and burial rites are conducted through funeral homes as examples of an ever-increasing taboo around death (1). The elegist, therefore, according to Ramazani, takes up the cultural task of mourning the dead to fill this silence, but does so from the basis of the poet’s own experience and mind-set, rather than through the conventional formulae of the pastoral space and the deities that populate it. The modern elegist is more willing than his or her precursors to insert his or her subjectivity into the elegy confessional-fashion, but the bitter emotions and hopeless immersion in loss listed by Ramazani are not limited to the twentieth century. In John Donne’s “A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day” (1633), for instance, the bereaved is in a state of absolute negation: “I am re-begot / Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not . . . / But I am none; nor will my sun

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<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud writes in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917) as follows: “Some of the features of melancholia, therefore, are borrowed from grief, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. On the one hand, like mourning, melancholia is the reaction to a real loss of a loved object; but, over and above this, it is bound to a condition which is absent in normal grief or which, if it supervenes, transforms the latter into a pathological variety. The loss of a love-object constitutes an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself felt and come to the fore” (288). In Jennifer Radden’s anthology *The Nature of Melancholy From Aristotle to Kristeva* (2000).

renew.” (18-19, 37). These lines provide an early example of rejecting the pastoral convention of the healing sunrise. In the conventions of questioning and cursing noted by Sacks, self-reproach is expressed by projection onto classical deities or *genius loci* rather than internalised by the elegist. Sacks notes that “The so frequent, formulaic Where were you? May thus mask the more dangerous Where was I?” forms part of an “expiatory ritual” (22), implying that the question of presence by the side of the deceased is a significant ritual related to death. Even if the elegist could have done nothing to prevent the death from occurring, there is a lingering sense that something could have been different, and at least the death would have been properly witnessed; witness and observance of deathbed and funerary rites remain a recurring trope in twentieth-century elegy and beyond, making the mapping of the relative and shifting positions of the elegist and their subject—the “plural and paradoxical maps” described by Westphal—a significant theme for this thesis.

Gilbert’s work, like *Poetry of Mourning*, is inflected by an insistence on “death’s historical particularity” (369); she bases her argument on a distinction between “expiration”, a pre-modern way of dying with the consolatory expectance of an after-state, and “termination,” a term with overtones of science and technology, in which life simply ends. Gilbert thus goes further than Ramazani in terms of temporalizing mourning; while he mostly confines himself to the modern elegy as a reflection of modern socio-cultural practices and perceptions, she asserts a modern way of dying itself. I argue that geographic particularity is just as important, and can counter or reinforce the “modern way of dying” by foregrounding continuity in ritual and in the topography mapped around the death and grief that follows. Anne Carson’s *Nox*, for example, mirrors the Roman poet Catullus’s elegy for his brother with her own journey

towards her brother's funeral in the early twenty-first century.<sup>9</sup> While Vickery mentions a growing specificity of individual experience in twentieth-century elegy, he rarely connects this to particularity of setting.

Ramazani and Gilbert both insert the elegy within its socio-historical moment. This is an important facet of the elegy, and significant for the reading of contemporary anxieties and perceptions of death within the elegy. As Williams observes, however, it is always possible to go back further—the shift from normative grief to melancholic mourning suggested by Ramazani and the progression from expiration to termination discussed by Gilbert give the idea of a linear sequence involving a definite starting point and ending point, but may ignore simultaneity, contradictory and intersecting narratives, and the specific negotiations of tradition represented in the mappings of the geographic imagination. While the identification of stages in elegiac development is important, a “structure of feeling” that foregrounds historicity can perhaps lead to the exclusion of narratives that do not reflect their times; while death may now be viewed as termination, to people watching their loved ones die, it is the

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<sup>9</sup> Other studies of elegy based on history and change include John Vickery's *The Modern Elegiac Temper* (2006) which not only characterises a “modern way of dying” as does Gilbert, but argues that as the elegy has absorbed poetic forms and traditions during its development, the “elegiac temper” has infiltrated other cultural expression and product: “out of this absorptive activity there has been a culturally generic attitude or temper marked by the effects of consciousness of loss, of regret for the fact and infinitude of losses suffered, and of the generation of a reflective spirit largely devoid of final or, often, even satisfactory answers” (1-2). Vickery historicises this “elegiac temper,” citing World War I, the Great Depression of the 1930s and the creation of the atomic bomb as generating a pervasive anxiety among poets and public, as well as a sense of impending apocalypse that challenged both the point and possibility of commemoration (6). While Vickery mentions a growing specificity of individual experience in twentieth-century elegy, he rarely connects this to particularity of setting. Vickery does not discuss any of the elegies I focus on. Cavitch's *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* defines elegy in terms of inheritance, which requires a timeline and a sense of history: “Elegies are poems about being left behind. They are poems, too, that are themselves left behind, as literary and even material legacies” (1). His work explicitly attempts to fill in a gap in American literary history: “The genre has itself been, as it were, left behind in the attempt to narrate the very history it helped to make. This gap in the narrative of American literary history represents more than a deferral of recovery” (2). The period covered by Cavitch's work is well before the period I focus on here, but his analysis of the genre is useful for my study, particularly with regard to his discussion of traces.

specificity of the moment that matters. A geocritical reading can help to complement—and interrupt—the grand sweep of historical narrative and the changes it documents by focusing on particularity of space, showing how moment or memory and their environment shape each other. Gilbert argues that Sylvia Plath’s “Berck-Plage” (1965) for example, “dramatizes the gulf between nineteenth-century views of how death should at least seem to the hopeful believer and twentieth-century visions of ‘modern death’” (331). As Sacks and Cavitch note, the elegy is to do with legacy and inheritance; the genre is itself chronologically bound; if the poet sings someone to sleep, then both singer and sleeper are fixed within the linear progression of time. Life and death themselves are also frequently considered in terms of time rather than space; birth dates and death dates are important in locating the individual and his or her context in biographies and obituaries as well as monuments or gravestones. Nevertheless, space is an integral component to these patterns and dates; I argue in this thesis for the significance of the intense shaping effect that the environment where life and death occur has on the elegy and the elegist’s conception of death. The ocean, for example, as David Kennedy has pointed out in *Elegy* (2007), has been a setting in English elegy since the “watery floor” (168) where Milton’s *Lycidas* lay (6)—this is a historical as well as a literary contextualisation.<sup>10</sup> A geographic reading, however, would map the specific seascape of the elegy, note how the sea is bordered and navigated, and analyse the variations in the frequently invoked tropes of the sea as a site of death, the shore as a liminal zone between stability and fluctuation as well as life and death, and the navigation and mapping of the known and unknown represented through shifting boundaries and crossings.

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<sup>10</sup> David Kennedy’s *Elegy* is primarily a survey of the development of elegy and its critical debates.

Critics who have departed from the domination of temporality and focused on other features of the elegy include Iain Twiddy in *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (2012) and Ellen Zetzel Lambert in *Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy Convention from Theocritus to Milton* (1976); despite the fact that the historical contexts of the poets they study is explicit, place is also an evident area of enquiry.<sup>11</sup> The pastoral environment is a (stylised) geography as well as a convention; Gilbert argues in *Death's Door* that both environment and convention have become obsolete as a result of the First World War and the Holocaust, as well as technological developments that both prolong life and destroy it, and the receding influence of the Christian tradition of an afterlife. Gilbert asserts the lasting impact of the First World War and explicitly engages with Sacks's *The English Elegy*:

But the comforting literary materials out of which, say, "Lycidas" and "Adonais" were made—a "pastoral" context, allusions to dying and vegetation gods, a "movement from grief to consolation" fostered by "traditional images of resurrection"—had been exploded in the mud of No Man's Land. Finally, therefore, the war tore such a hole in history that the generic form as well as the consolatory function of pastoral elegy was permanently defiled for combatants and non-combatants alike. (372)

The brutal rending of the fabric of society caused by war and mass death, according to Gilbert, has led to a shift in the way death and dying are

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<sup>11</sup> Shaw's *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions* (1994) is not strictly history-based, but does argue that "A functional history of elegy tries to explain how conventions are tested and modified: How does the inclusion of a new convention, A, require the exclusion of alternative conventions, B and C?" (248). Shaw's focus is on the tension between renewal and convention in the genre, rather than its decline, and he points out that "We are all condemned to misrepresent past attitudes to death by reading our own beliefs into them. But by testing the conventions, great elegists, like good readers, can act simultaneously as historians and critics" (249). Shaw's primary task is examining ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions within elegy, and he does not discuss geography in any detail, nor does he analyse the poets I focus on.



represented in cultural forms such as the elegy, leading to the rejection of consolatory and commemorative functions of elegy and memorialising in general. Twiddy challenges Gilbert's apocalyptic vision of paradigm shift, not only by explicitly stating that "It is difficult, however, to see Gilbert's identifying characteristics mark the disintegration of the pastoral elegy, because they can all be present in a pastoral elegy" (9) but by demonstrating the presence of the pastoral within contemporary elegy, in works by poets Michael Longley, Eavan Boland, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Christopher Reid, Douglas Dunn and Peter Reading.

Twiddy's argument is that evolution in form and figuring is an inherent part of the elegiac pastoral genre, but that its central ethos persists: "Pastoral elegy's impulse is to find a sense of community or harmony through relegation, something larger than the individual, rather than insisting on the isolated uniqueness of the individual death" (25). Twiddy views the pastoral environment as a way of locating the poet and humanity within the world: "Like nature poetry in general, pastoral looks to nature in order to understand more about human nature, our place within the world, and thus reclaims the distance between pastoral and reality, between human concerns and natural existence" (3). Twiddy does not consider the pastoral environment as strictly Arcadian or even rural, much less inherently antithetical to the urban, pointing out that the "London of 1962" may seem pastoral to the inhabitants of London 2012 (2). Similarly to my approach towards elegiac geographies, Twiddy evaluates variation and change within the pastoral tradition, as well as showing a continuity of intent in enabling the poet to "accept death as natural" and achieve "a renewal of the life-instinct, in line with the seasonal pattern of death and rebirth" (4). His thesis also critically examines the notion of a historiographical

view of the elegiac tradition, as well as a simple division between the pastoral and the anti-pastoral or the non-pastoral. However, he confines his investigation to the pastoral environment, rather than looking at the pastoral within the context of the geographic imagination, and any concern with geography rather than general landscape is on a national rather than site-specific level.

Although the period, texts and generic focus examined in Lambert's *Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy Convention from Theocritus to Milton* differ from mine (and, more generally, the study lacks a theoretical framework), Lambert's work is significant in that it forms a precursor to both Sacks's and Twiddy's work and because it explicitly foregrounds the spatial. Anticipating Twiddy, Lambert points out that "But, in fact, the pastoral ideal, from Theocritus on, has never been that of a *hortus conclusus*. Neither suffering nor death has ever been excluded from this paradise" (xv). Lambert argues that despite variation and evolution in the genre, the setting serves to underline "continuity between pagan and Christian laments" (xv) in "form and feeling" (xvi). She puts forward a specific and nuanced pastoral landscape that differs from the general consolatory mood described by Gilbert:

The pastoral elegy, I would suggest, proposes no one solution to the questions raised by death but rather a setting in which those questions may be posed, or better, "placed." It offers us a landscape. A lament for a king will not sound just like a lament for a fellow poet; but both king and poet can be brought into the pastoral world; both can be mourned here. This landscape itself varies from one poet and one subject to the next. But, and this is the important point, it remains a concrete, palpable world, a world in which the elegist can place diffuse, intangible feelings of grief

and thereby win his release from suffering. (xiii)

I have quoted this passage at length because Lambert's insistence on the specificity and individuality of the experience of grief and her vision of the pastoral setting as a frame for bringing order out of the chaos of grief resonates with the themes of this thesis. I take Lambert's argument further, however, by saying that the elegy itself, no matter the environment, is a geography where grief is inscribed—it is both map and territory, Tennyson's containing and mediating "outline" and Bishop's "disaster."

The central debates in elegiac criticism therefore involve the nature of the pastoral, its possible decline or destruction, and the effect of historical and social context on the genre. By considering how death, loss and grief are conceived in spatial terms, I interrogate the historical narrative of change within the elegiac tradition, using geographical readings to de-stabilise the notion of a post-World War I paradigm shift by arguing that the preoccupations of placing the dead, whether in the grave or the afterlife, and the orientation of the survivor/elegist around the absence left by the dead, are evident throughout the centuries of elegiac tradition. This geographic concern moves discussion of the elegy away from binary pastoral/anti-pastoral and normative/melancholic grand narratives of elegiac criticism by emphasising the interactions between the historical sweep of the post-World War era and the individual geographies of the elegist. I insist that where something happens or is placed is necessary to considering what happens, and I stress a fundamental linkage between geography and literature, and by extension between the human and social sciences and the arts. I have given examples of how the literary geographer and literary critic view poetry and elegy; I now briefly mention how geographers consider the literary, pointing out that human geographers allow for connections

between map and text, geography and poetry. This association is possible because of the shaping force of imagination and emotional affect in both human conceptions and perceptions of space and representations of these conceptions.

If the geocritic Tally reads literary narratives as maps, the other side of the coin is that cartographic historian John Brian Harley reads maps as narratives. He suggests in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (2001) that maps, as “constructions employing a conventional sign system,” become texts” and that therefore, “Text is certainly a better metaphor for maps than the mirror of nature. Maps are a cultural text. By accepting their textuality we are able to embrace a number of different interpretative possibilities” (159). Cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove in *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (2001) quotes John Donne’s “Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward” (1633) in his discussion of imaginings of the globe” (28), for instance.<sup>12</sup> This interlacing of systems of representation is highly significant for my work on elegy. Cosgrove also reinforces the connection between poetry and the way that people perceive—and order—the world:

Poetic narrative, measured observation, and rational speculation of celestial motion and terrestrial pattern variously shaped the sense of global order in ancient Greece. Poetry, unlike mathematics or prose, registers divine inspiration rather than human authorship as the earliest foundation for Greek knowledge.

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<sup>12</sup> Donne’s poem is concerned with using metaphors of the globe to orient the distance between the speaker and God and the limits of perception. The lines cited by Cosgrove are as follows:

Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,  
And tune all spheres at once peirc’d with those holes?  
Could I behold that endlesse height which is  
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,  
Humbled below us? (21-25).

Poetic knowledge is less closely bound to ocular vision than the Greek *theoria*, or rational knowledge. The narrative quality of myth gives temporal structure to the natural order, marking beginnings, becomings and ends, while observational description and speculation construct a more fixed spatial and geographical frame of being. (29)

Although Cosgrove here discusses ancient Greek poetry and its effect on shaping the classical perception of the globe, his perspective on the “narrative quality of myth” and its qualities as a signifier of different moments of passage can be applied to the modern elegy. The poets I discuss here map the terrain of grief—indeed, often using the “narrative quality of myth,” particularly in the case of Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* and Amy Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” —by marking its various stages as well as constructing a “geographical frame of being” for death, memory, and the rituals of mourning. Cosgrove emphasises the role of interpretation as well as representation in geography, arguing for the significance of images, including maps and photographs as well as “written descriptions . . . which pay special attention to the poetics of place and landscape form” (*Geography and Vision* 3), arguing as follows:

[W]hat holds the category together is the capacity of such images to represent geographical vision in the dual sense of communicating eyewitness knowledge and interpretation of geographical realities, and of conveying the forms and ideas, the hopes and fears that constitute imagined geographies. In both these modes of geographical cognition, and in their constant interactions, graphic and pictorial images play active and creative

roles that take the significance of representation well beyond mere transcription of spatial and environmental facts. (*Geography and Vision* 3)

Cosgrove's insistence on the active nature of maps and other images as a means of communication as well as representation speaks to my emphasis on the importance of environment elegy; setting is not merely a responsive background that echoes the mourner's emotions via the convention of the pathetic fallacy, but an imagined geography that plays an essential role in orienting and enabling grief and mourning as well as marking the space between the mourner's representation and the "real world." Indeed, the "hopes and fears" mentioned by Cosgrove correspond remarkably with the intention behind placing the dead in elegy; the hope of ultimate reunion and the fear of oblivion are essential components of the elegiac geography, represented in customs and elegies of burial by inscriptions on gravestones and objects buried with the dead for use in the afterlife. Cosgrove's emphasis on the "active and creative roles" of represented features in maps also echoes the dynamism and restlessness observed in the elegy by Cavitch, Shaw and Sacks.

While my examination of post-war elegy and the geographic imagination is overall informed by Cosgrove's "imagined geographies," each chapter applies a different set of modern geographic theories to a pair of complementary elegies. My first chapter, "Mapping Conversations with the Absent," is informed by Harley's conception of the "cartography of silence," in which absence becomes an "active human performance" (86). The chapter explores the flexible and shifting relationship between the elegist and the dead in Tony Harrison's *V.* and Seamus Heaney's "Bog Queen" and "Station Island," introducing themes of erasure and inscription, memory and forgetting, and the shifts between them

that recur throughout this thesis. In *V.*, Harrison centres a meditation on class divisions and communication with the dead on Holbeck Cemetery, a site where gravestones are defaced and inscriptions are effaced. In “Bog Queen,” Heaney assigns a voice to a long-dead but preserved anonymous body found in the unstable ground of a bog, and in “Station Island” he summons ghosts of cultural icons to disrupt patterns of religious pilgrimage. *V.*, “Bog Queen” and “Station Island,” I argue, chart a dynamic pattern of burial and retrieval—both physical and metaphorical—in which the silence of the dead and the voice of the elegist are closely connected to the landscape.

My next chapter “Geographies of Mobility and the Restless Elegy,” focuses on Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” and Carson’s *Nox*, and continues the investigation into travel and memory begun in the analysis of pilgrimage routes and haunting in Heaney’s “Station Island.” Clampitt and Carson, however, travel to bury their dead, not to raise them. Here the elegists respond to the stillness of the resting in peace with their own restlessness, taking journeys towards funeral rites that inscribe presence and memory onto spaces of emptiness and amnesia. This chapter complicates Cavitch’s opening statement that elegies are poems about being left behind (1) by focusing on the movement of the mourner and acts of approaching the dead and leaving them behind. I apply theories of modern mobility and traces and spaces of travel by geographers Nigel Thrift and Tim Cresswell, as well as Marc Augé’s idea of the “non-place” and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s conceptualisation of the nomadic to argue that Clampitt and Carson’s journeys enact a ritual that not only maps the essential function of leaving the dead behind but also enables the memorialisation of the dead in post-modern landscapes of erased significance.

The third chapter, “The Chance of Space and the Architectural Elegy” also deals with memorialisation but in static rather than fluid structures. Using Doreen Massey’s idea of a space comprising simultaneous narratives and narrative trajectories of coincidence and missing links as well as intersections and intertwinings, I examine the architectural reifications of narratives of loss and memory in Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* and Douglas Dunn’s *Elegies*. I argue that the elegiac imagination makes the present absent in everyday built environments and structures; Dunn and Hughes assign collective and individual monumental significance to spaces outside the explicitly memorial zones of the cemetery and other self-consciously monumental sites of memory such as streets, municipal buildings, and domestic dwellings, but also challenge memorialisation and rituals of remembering by building what architectural historian Victor Burgin calls “monuments of melancholia” (26), where “there is so much that has been forgotten” (26).

My final chapter, “Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy” applies ideas of mobility and instability to representations of the border between life and death in the littoral landscapes of Plath’s “Berck-Plage” and Bishop’s “North Haven.” I use human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s formulation of place as a centre of meaning and space as uncharted territory to examine the border between life and death, and identify and investigate the contrasting perspectives on death and memory in the poems via the distinction Tuan and phenomenological geographer Edward S. Casey make between the engaged perspective of the landscape painter and the distanced perspective of the cartographer. I place Plath’s “Berck-Plage” and Bishop’s “North Haven” within distinct elegiac traditions of the sea as a site of devouring emptiness and a site of connection to



an afterlife, and examine the resulting cartographies and conceptualisations of where the dead go and how they are remembered.

The themes of memory and forgetting and the arranging of blank space and the persistent trace run through each chapter, and are examined via a reading of the geographical imagination of the elegist. The tension between the urge to write elegy and the failure to find words that are complete enough and the representation of this tension are analysed via the elegist's arrangement of chaos into order both in terms of form and content. The relationship each individual elegist has with the generic geographies of the elegiac tradition is also investigated, reinforcing the continuity of the spatial across the changes and developments of the temporal perspective. This thesis is the first in-depth study of the geographical representations of death and bereavement in elegy, and the first thesis that uses contemporary geographical and cultural research to examine these conceptualisations of place and space in elegy. I aim to make clear in this work that death needs a geography as well as a history. Elegies are microcosms of socio-cultural responses to death, but also, crucially, individual reactions to the dislocation and disorientation of bereavement.

## 2. Mapping Conversations with the Absent

The relationship between the deceased and the elegist is flexible, located in shifting and unstable sites. Memory is unpredictable, landscapes are fluid and layered, and architectures and paths of mourning are made porous and winding by the elegiac vision that imbues them with melancholic traces and the geographic imagination that attempts to arrange space and trace into some sort of order. In the imagined geography of mourning, the dead body lies at the centre. The dead body is inscribed with anxieties as well as grief—questions about what happens next, fear of confronting ending and emptiness, and a possible struggle with beliefs in an after-state and a division between body and spirit. Before the body remain the spaces marked by dying moments; beyond it wait burial, eulogy and elegy, formal commemoration and unanticipated remembering, and eventual erasure. The body becomes text to the elegist even as the person becomes memory, and the gravestone and bones of the body in the landscape become increasingly separate as the body decomposes and the stone endures. In Tony Harrison's *V.* and Seamus Heaney's "Bog Queen" and "Station Island," this process of passing and disintegration is placed within an unstable cartography of language and silence; burial and effacement are undermined through recovery and inscription. The dynamic interaction of the absence caused by the deceased and the presence of the fragment or memory that recalls them results in tensions between erasure and inscription, and silence and language. Navigating these oppositions is a central concern for the elegist; as W. David Shaw writes, "Silence seems the only possible response to the elegist's discovery that the universe of sense is also a universe of death. When he thinks he is safely on the ground, he looks down and realizes he is

standing on a girder, thousands of feet above an abyss” (104), going on to observe that “Though silence must weigh heavily upon the strangeness of death, not to speak at all is to stop being meaningful (119).<sup>1</sup> I argue that V., “Bog Queen,” and “Station Island,” engage viscerally with the flesh becoming word by mapping the dead; the resulting navigation of shifting locations of absence and presence are echoed in a process of burial and retrieval and reflected in a cartography of silence and language.

Harrison and Heaney are both poets associated with specific regions, and the role of language and discourse in the maintenance of identity is central to the work of both. Both poets self-consciously and explicitly integrate language, in terms of accent and register as well as discourses of politics, nationality, and class, into their representations of cultural, physical and emotional terrain. Harrison’s fluency when evoking tensions between generations and classes in Leeds is shared by Heaney when articulating the discursive problems of the Northern Irish Troubles, for example, but they also communicate the intrusion—whether welcome or disruptive—of ancient languages into the present, and the search for authentic language and heritage amid its erasure and colonisation. In “Classics Society,” for example, from Harrison’s collection *From the School of Eloquence and Other Poems* (1981)—which deals explicitly with language and communication—he writes

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<sup>1</sup> W. David Shaw’s chapter “The Paradox of the Unspeakable: Speaking by Being Silent in Romantic Elegy” deals primarily with speech and silence in Romantic elegies by Wordsworth, and nineteenth-century poets Tennyson and Dickinson. His focus does not include language or silence in the sense of text and erasure, nor does he link silence to setting.

(6-9; italics in original)

The language of “home” here is contrasted with the rhetoric of empire, ambivalently suggesting its irrelevance both to the speaker’s own home and the England with which he is familiar. In the prose-poem “The Stations of the West” (1975) Heaney shows a similar preoccupation with ancient and modern language and their reflection in cultural and physical topography, evoking a tension between an uncomprehending hearer of Gaelic and bilingual speakers of Gaelic and English: “On my first night in the Gaeltacht the old woman spoke to me in English: ‘You will be all right.’ I sat on a twilight bedside listening through the wall to fluent Irish, homesick for a speech I was to extirpate” (47). For both Harrison and Heaney, language is a crucial marker of conflict, difference, similarity, the homely and the foreign, but both poets are also aware that language can be faulty and easily silenced as a communicative method—they also write silences, muteness and stumblings into their work. In “National Trust” from *School of Eloquence*, Harrison writes “The dumb go down in history and disappear” (14), explicitly linking voicelessness and erasure, and in “Whatever You Say Say Nothing” Heaney describes the dangers of loaded language during the Northern Irish Troubles: “The famous / Northern reticence, the tight gag of place / And times: yes, yes.” (32-34)—to speak can be a target, and to belong to a place can lead to being muted by its geography. Here I examine how these two poets, renowned for their adeptness in navigating conflicting and layered linguistic—and by extension textual—terrains, accustomed to using the subtleties of language and its suppression to delineate between home and elsewhere, approach what Shaw calls the “universe of death” and write about its strangeness.

The funerary rites of burial and commemoration are directed towards silence and formal remembrance at a specific site; the body lies silent, gradually becoming a part of the landscape, its voice and narrative reduced to the lines on a plaque or gravestone. Prosopopoeia, the “rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting” (*OED*) and apostrophe, speaking to (rather than for) the absent or dead, are fundamentally implicated in the elegiac tradition, and also therefore in the cartographies of silence and language that surround the dead body and the mourner in elegy. By dynamic processes of burial and retrieval I mean the disruption of the trajectory towards the absence and erasure of death, and a dislocation of the body below ground and the memorial above ground. These shifts occur both through the writing of the elegy that addresses the absent as if he or she were present, or assigns a voice to the dead and gone, disrupting the cartography of silence with language, and the representation of the recovery of the dead, particularly the body, through assigning action to the dead or by displacing the body. In *V.*, which takes place at Holbeck Cemetery in Leeds, the speaker visits his parents’ grave to find graffiti sprayed across the gravestone. He engages in a prosopopoeic dialogue with an imagined skinhead vandal and contemplates the severing of communication with the dead via the loss of the tradition of caring for the grave as well as the erasure and gradual decay of the gravestones and monuments. In contrast to the formal environment of mourning in Holbeck Cemetery, and the eroding of once solid identities via the vandalising and crumbling of its grave-stones, Heaney’s “Bog Queen” is an attempt to provide a narrative for an anonymous body placed—or thrown—thousands of years ago into an unmarkable grave in the boglands of Drumkeeragh, Northern Ireland, and retrieves it as a museum artefact into the world of the Northern Irish

Troubles. As opposed to the anonymous, mummified corpse of the “Bog Queen,” “Station Island” resurrects significant figures from Irish mythology and cultural history along a pilgrim path by Lough Derg in Ireland, and enters into conversation with them. Both Harrison and Heaney ground their work in specific locations and contexts, sharing some of the same preoccupations with conflict, language and memory, and how these concerns of identity and belonging can be mapped onto the burial ground and the body it is supposed to contain. Both poets also use the traditional elegiac devices of prosopopoeia and apostrophe in navigating these cartographies of burial, language and silence.

The body itself inside the landscape serves as a marker in a map of conflicting imperatives and discourses—the returning of dust to dust and impulses of immortalising via monument, memory and memorialising, versus the inevitability of personal, collective, and historical forgetting. As journalist and biographer Peter Stanford writes in *How to Read a Graveyard* (2013), “That element of dialogue—between the living and the dead, between any particular instant and the timeless moment, between landscape and the sacred, between the collective weight of a community’s history and those who have inherited it—is present in some measure in all graveyards” (66). While these negotiations are found in all elegies, they are particularly foregrounded in the sites of burial and haunting. *V.* re-draws the map of the public urban space of Holbeck Cemetery into a shortcut for football hooligans who desecrate the gravestones and litter the ground, and a playing site for children. The burial ground has become a battle-ground; the dead and their gravestones represent a past way of life, and the skinheads the impulse to re-inscribe and destroy it. *V.* moves between personal loss and memory, and the wider scope of collective absence and change through an imagined dialogue with a skinhead, making the cemetery a

microcosm of global and local contemporary anxieties and identity politics. Reflecting the instability of the cultural perceptions of Holbeck Cemetery and their changes since the Victorian era, the earth in which the bodies are buried is itself in danger of collapsing into a disused coal-mine, showing a fundamental connection between culturally imposed mapping and the territory it describes.

Contested landscapes and the difficulties of constructive rather than divisive voice and dialogue also form major themes in Heaney's elegiac communication with the dead. Heaney's recurring themes of language and silence and their connection to physical topography and political cartography are evident in "Bog Queen" and "Station Island," both poems that suggest a flexible relationship with the dead and by extension the past.<sup>2</sup> Heaney's bog poems, including "Bog Queen," chart sites where the distance between pre-Christian Ireland and nineteenth-century colonised Ireland and twentieth-century conflicted Northern Ireland is collapsed through the emergence of bodies preserved by chemicals found in wetlands. "Station Island" similarly maps a site where history and mythology collide with the present in the form of ghosts, making the old pilgrim path an uncanny liminal site where the erasures of time are re-inscribed through dialogue with the dead. In V., "The Bog Queen," and "Station Island", both Harrison and Heaney navigate the passage of time and the inevitable changes and erasures it brings to the historical record and

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<sup>2</sup> As well as a way of representing death and absence in spatial form, Heaney's rearranged or emphasised cartographies are related to English colonial re-mappings of Ireland. As scholar of post-modernity Geoff King observes in *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies* (1996), this process was "an attempt to achieve conceptual as well as military control," as "under the cloak of rationalization and enlightenment, the names of places and geographical features were changed, depriving the population to some extent of their own legacy and meaning (30). Michael R. Molino, for instance, links questions of language and cartography in the works of Seamus Heaney and Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1981): "[T]he British, under the auspices of creating accurate maps of Ireland, transcribed, Anglicized, or changed outright Irish place names in favour of names more conducive to the English tongue. The implication of the play's historical setting and action is that the Irish, through their contact with the British, began to lose, not only their native tongue, but their sense of place, belonging, and tradition as a result of a linguistic invasion during the Ordnance Survey" (19).

the correspondences and ruptures with the past by charting flexible geographies of language and silence, centred on the dead body and its retrieval.

As well as signifying death and ending—similarly to Shaw, Philip McGowan writes, “Death occupies a silent abyss that is forever beyond language” (12)—silence is a response to death. The two-minute silence of respect for the dead is still a ceremony observed in England during private occasions of mourning and publicly observed moments such as Remembrance Day, for instance. And yet, as Shaw points out, to remain silent in the face of death is to cease “being meaningful” (119). The point of elegy is to make a sound, to make a mark; this function is an essential element of the geographies of the dead, and in particular what McGowan describes as “new geographies of communicative tension and theoretical risk” (26) in his examination of the silences of suicide and an “absent God” in poems by Anne Sexton and John Berryman.<sup>3</sup> The elegist addresses the dead or tells their story, an ancient function seen, for example, in Catullus apostrophising the “dumb ashes” of his brother in “Catullus101,” and Hamlet passing on the imperative to immortalise his narrative with his dying words:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,  
  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
  
To tell my story.— (5.2.350-52)

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<sup>3</sup> McGowan argues in “Berryman, Sexton and the Poetic Possibilities of Language” (2013) that Berryman and Sexton grapple with “how to negotiate any relation with a being unseen and forever silent in response to enquiries about our function in the universe. Accepting God’s silence as the *sine qua non* of being, and producing a mid-twentieth-century slant on the *via negativa* in work that tests the limits of their own craft, both explore the possibilities of faith in God’s absence shadowed by the persistent appeal of suicide as the final response to the world” (2). His discussion of the “geography of death” is based on philosophy and metaphor rather than real places viewed and constructed through the elegiac imagination.



A few lines later Hamlet's life ends with "The rest is silence." The narrative burden Horatio must bear in response is one of death and disaster:

And let me speak to the yet unknowing world  
 How these things came about: so shall you hear  
 Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts;  
 Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;  
 Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause; (5.2.334-8)

These lines could equally describe the Troubles; indeed Heaney in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" (from *North*) has the speaker call himself "Hamlet the Dane, / skull-handler, parablist, / smeller of rot/ in the state" (IV.6-9).<sup>4</sup> The emptiness of the grave is filled in Heaney's poem by Hamlet "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons" (IV.15-16)—mortuary speech cannot always be eloquent.

As a counterpoint to the language of grief, the mourner must accept the possibility of silence as a response to loss—if no words come after breath is drawn in pain. The paradox for the elegist is the impulse to "*Write it!*"—loss of language must also be written about. One strategy for navigating this paradox is etching the silence of the dead and the silence of the elegist into the topography of the elegy. The graveyard of Holbeck Cemetery is "choked up with weeds" (86), suggesting both neglect and a rupture in the traditional forms of taking care of the dead, but also the muteness of the dead—inscriptions and epitaphs, and thereby also memory and connection with the past have become obscured,

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<sup>4</sup> *Hamlet* is a play of ghosts as well as gravediggers; as such it forms perhaps a slightly unlikely precursor to the burial elegy and discussion of communion with the dead. Harrison invokes Hamlet and the ghost in *V.*, as I discuss in the following section. For more on the bog poems and *Hamlet*, see Jonathan Hufstader's "Coming to Consciousness by Jumping in Graves": Heaney's Bog Poems and the Politics of *North*" (1996).

leaving only silence. Harrison's elegiac bearing of the narrative left vacant by his parents' death and his communication with them by traditional means is similarly stopped with the "prayer for my parents I can't make" (174). Elegiac cartographies place and navigate the shifts and contradictions of silence for the dead and speech to commemorate their passing, silence to forget the dead and speech to remember them, silence to remember and speech to bury, and these are all reflected in the cemetery and wider community of Leeds in *V.* and the "imagined geographies" of Heaney's Ireland.

The insistence on speaking for the dead and to the dead, the counterpart of language, is the silence of the dead and the absences that accumulate in the record of their lives. This silence is also connected to cartography. I adapt the phrase "cartography of silence" from John Brian Harley's essay "Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe" (2001) because the conventions of cartography are echoed to some extent in the construction of elegy. Harley notes that "silences" must be navigated at every stage in the map-making process:

As in the history of cartography as a whole it would be possible to construct a broader typology of silences. Silences are contributed by many agents in the map-making process, through the stages of data gathering to those of compilation, editing, drafting, printing, and publication. In assessing silences we must be aware not only of the geographical limits to knowledge but also of the technological constraints to representation, and of the silences in the historical record owing to the destruction of evidence. (85)

There is a reminder here of the political, cultural and personal influences that shape maps; what the map-maker chooses to suppress is, as Harley points out, as significant as what is included. Similarly, in elegy, the elegist chooses the focus of the poem—whether it is consolatory or bitter, commemorative or angry, whether it tells the whole truth or elides it. While the silences in elegiac cartographies due to “geographical limits of knowledge” reflect the unknowability of death, the “silences in the historical record” here are particularly apposite to both Heaney’s and Harrison’s work.<sup>5</sup> Heaney must navigate the landmarks of the preserved bodies, skeletons and artefacts in the bogs, while accepting the fact that they are merely traces of past civilisations. To read inscriptions in the bog landscape and the body is to be faced with absences due to the changes and erasures wrought upon the bodies by natural processes and the re-contextualising caused by archaeological and scientific procedures—the bodies go from being bodies in the ground to objects of display in the museum.<sup>6</sup> Harrison is also concerned with persistence and inscription, not only of the gravestones and the funerary tradition, but also of the burial ground itself; beneath the bodies in Holbeck Cemetery waits the ever-expanding and devouring “cavernous hollow” (301) of a former coal-mine. The “deep peace” (154) of the dead underlies—and underlines—the vocal clash of discourses in the instances of prosopopoeia where Harrison assigns a voice to both an imagined skinhead/alter-ego and his family. The silence mapped in Holbeck cemetery is also evident in the poet’s awareness of the lives of the dead beyond the epitaphs that truncate their narratives, and in recognising a contemporary lack of communication with the dead—Harrison’s father visited his own mother’s

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<sup>5</sup> I discuss elegiac cartography and the “geographical limits of knowledge” further in Chapter 4: “Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy.”

<sup>6</sup> Karin Sanders points out the “the precarious balance bog bodies occupy on a seesaw between being perceived as humans and as inanimate objects” (9) and discusses the ethical implications of this shifting state in *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (2009).

grave far more regularly than Harrison does his parents. Harrison thus charts a deepening silence, an absence where intimate relationships with the dead and the past used to be performed at the appropriate site. Heaney, however, explores sites where the dead have re-emerged; the bog poems deal with the complicated and conflicting demands of assigning voice and narrative to the dead with no personal connection to the living or externally imposed framework for creating a relationship with them.

The silences of elegy, particularly the elegiac geographies of Harrison and Heaney, are thus not merely gaps in the narrative or historical record; they shape the environment around them and are integral for maintaining a relationship with the dead in signifying the distance between them and the living. As Harley continues,

So, allowing for those gaps on the map which make the pattern of lines and points a comprehensible image, we should be prepared to regard silences on maps as something more than the mere absence of something else. I am deliberately insisting on the term silences in the context of maps, rather than the somewhat negative blank space of the older literature, for the reason that silence should be seen as an “active human performance.” Silence can reveal as much as it conceals and, from acting as independent and intentional statements, silences on maps may sometimes become the determinate part of the cartographic message. (86)

The formal two-minute silence of Remembrance Day and the “drawing of breath in pain” before telling a story are an “active human performance.”<sup>7</sup> Silence is not merely a gap in elegy, nor merely the opposite of speech. Prosopopoeia demonstrates how silence shapes speech, while apostrophe, when the dead or absent are spoken to, shows how speech shapes silence. “The rest is silence,” with its pun on “rest” as continuation as well as respite, is a language of its own, a language that burial elegies are peculiarly poised to inscribe.

The counterpart of burial, silence and forgetting is retrieval, language and memory. As archaeologists Cornelius Holtorf and Howard Williams comment in “Landscapes and Memories” (2006), “In as much as they can thus evoke, or indeed hide, the past, landscapes are linked to socially or culturally mediated remembrance or memory” (235). Both Harrison and Heaney map memory and its effacement onto the physical as well as cultural topographies of their elegies. This “hiding of the past” is part of the cartographic silence, but the evocation of memory and the retrieval of the dead also takes multiple forms of haunting and excavation. In *V.* Harrison evokes the figure of a skinhead vandal, who turns out to be some sort of alter ego. In “Bog Queen” the body is not only assigned language but also excavated, the body and its surroundings thereby accumulating multiple different inscriptions and contexts. In “Station Island” the dead are retrieved in the form of ghosts of iconic cultural and historic figures, their appearance linked closely to the pilgrim path along which the speaker is travelling.

Conversation with ghosts that reveals the speaker’s inner thoughts and motives is an ancient literary device—a classic example is an indecisive and

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<sup>7</sup> The repeated negations that describe the site of “Indian Meadows” in Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” and the blank spaces around the text fragments and photographs of Carson’s *Nox* can also be considered in the light of an “active performance” of silence.

guilty Hamlet's encounters with his father's spirit, and indeed Harrison's confrontation with the imagined skinhead and his uneasiness at the prospect of meeting his mother's ghost can be related to this trope. In *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* (2009), Michael Thurston describes interaction with spirits as *nekuia*, "in which the shades of the dead are invoked and confronted" (Thurston 1-2), and connects this invocation to classical heroic quests. The practice occurs when "the protagonist, usually at the nadir of his journey, at a dark moment of exhaustion or despair is driven to seek counsel and guidance from the past preserved and the prophetic vision vouchsafed to a tutelary figure in the Underworld" (2).<sup>8</sup>

While the figure of the skinhead can be seen as a prophetic warning of a desecralised, divided Britain with no poetry, the "past preserved" of the schema described by Thurston is significant here; both Heaney and Harrison retrieve figures from their real and imagined pasts. Social theorist Michael Mayerfeld Bell proposes an alternative scenario for ghosts that is also relevant to *V.* and Heaney's poems; instead of a ghost that springs from the human psyche or located in an Underworld or a state beyond death with other ghosts, he invokes ghosts as a necessary feature of place:

The point of this essay is to argue that ghosts—that is, the *sense of the presence of those who are not physically there*—are a ubiquitous aspect of the phenomenology of place. Although the cultural language of modernity usually prevents us from speaking about their presence, we constitute a place in large measure by

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Thurston discusses communication with the dead in *V.* and "Station Island" in terms of the "Underworld descent tradition" stretching back to Homer and Virgil, among others. Thurston's analysis is framed around the tropes of the *nekuia*, in which the shades of the dead are invoked and confronted, and the *katabasis*, in which the protagonist actually enters (literally "goes down" into) the Underworld" (1-2). He does not discuss elegy or its conventions in any great detail, nor draw comparisons between *V.* and "Station Island."

the ghosts we sense inhabit and possess it. The meaning of a place, its *genius loci*, depends upon the geniuses we locate there. (813; italics in original)

According to this theory, the skinhead in *V.*, the dead speaker in “Bog Queen”, and William Carleton, James Joyce and the other spirits in “Station Island” are integral parts of Harrison’s and Heaney’s imagined geographies. This goes some way to explain the uncanniness of elegiac landscapes; to write an elegy is to acknowledge the absent. Bell’s connection of ghosts and the specificity of place is part of what Holtorf and Williams describe as an “accumulative landscape”: “landscapes composed of the traces of human action and natural features that form the focus of retrospective memories” (236). Holtorf and Williams describe a landscape of “retrospective memory” as one through which “the past appears to impact upon the present through physical and material traces as people look back at what has happened in the same landscape before their own time. Retrospective memories create the past at particular places and through certain social practices” (237).<sup>9</sup> The social practice of visiting a grave with personal significance, or of pilgrimage, serves as a means of connecting elegiac place and performance in order to “create the past.” Indeed, part of the disturbing dynamic of “Bog Queen” and the rest of Heaney’s collection *North*, which draws on the Northern Irish Troubles as a subject matter, is that Heaney makes a connection between violent patterns of the past and the conflicts of the present, embodied by the murdered Bog Queen and embedded in the ground of Ulster.

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<sup>9</sup> Holtorf and Williams here refer to Holtorf’s *Monumental Past: The Life-histories of Megalithic Monuments in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* (2000-2008).

The tense connections between past and present, as well as negotiations of remembering and forgetting, evoke historian Pierre Nora's concept of the *lieux de memoire*, or "site of memory," a monumental arena of self-conscious history that replaces a living narrative of instinctive continuity:

On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory—unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth—and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces. The gulf between the two has deepened in modern times . . . With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history. (8)

The rituals of mourning and the elegiac tradition can be viewed on one level via Nora's distinction between memory and history. The basic practice of mourning has continued throughout history in all cultures, linking the dead and the living, and reinventing itself according to shifts in cultural context and necessity, and can thereby be considered to be in the "realm of true memory." Its tangible accoutrements, however, shift negotiation with death and the dead into the practice of history. Elegy cannot be an unself-conscious product—the ordering of thought necessary to write it, as well as the inherent self-reflexivity of the tradition prevents this. The elegy therefore joins "museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders—these are the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity" (12). The elegy and the burial site take a complicated position in the "mediation" of past and present, their "communicative



geographies,” to appropriate McGowan’s term, serving as *lieux de memoire*.<sup>10</sup> This function of the elegy is particularly evident where they engage with collective as well as individual memory, and that engage with national “heroes, origins, and myth” in a conscious effort to reinforce national identity. V., “Bog Queen” and “Station Island” have precursors in the elegiac tradition that link burial-ground with nation-state, a construct implicated in the placing of the body in the ground and the cartographies of language and silence that are subsequently marked on both the body and its surroundings.

A precursor to Harrison’s V. is Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751).<sup>11</sup> Silence and sound, death and continuing life in Gray’s “Elegy” are mapped in the quintessential landscapes of an agrarian England that emphasises continuity and the traces, both natural and man-made, of a long history; the grave-yard is located “Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree’s shade,” (13), between a “yonder ivy-mantled tower” (9) and “yonder nodding beech / That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high” (101-102). The graveyard itself is “Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap, / Each in his narrow cell for ever laid, / The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep” (14-16), their graves marked with “Some frail memorial still erected nigh, / With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked” (78-9). These borders contain sounds

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of burial elegy that describe and challenge monument and statue include Philip Larkin’s “An Arundel Tomb” (1964): The stone fidelity / They hardly meant has come to be / Their final blazon / Both a coat of arms, and a public proclamation, and to prove / Our almost-instinct almost true: What will survive of us is love” (38-42). Toi Derricotte’s “Not Forgotten” (1997) is an ironic burial elegy that plays on the notion of “gone but not forgotten”—though it begins with a fairly conventional visit to tend her husband’s father’s grave, the realisation that “the grass had closed / over the headstone, and the name had disappeared”(8-9) causes the poem to end on a despairing note: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (12-13). Burial elegies without headstone and monument include Thomas Hardy’s “Rain on a Grave” (1913) in which the dead woman is at the mercy of nature and the elements. Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Dirge Without Music” (1928) explicitly connects silence, death and burial with nature and its processes rather than cemetery and monument : “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (10-11, 18).

<sup>11</sup> I discuss correspondences between V. and Gray’s “Elegy” and the critical debate surrounding this relationship in more detail in the following section.

and silence; the noises made by birds, animals and insects—the funereal curfew that opens the poem as it “tolls the knell of parting day” (1) in particular highlights the endless sleep of the inhabitants of the churchyard. The mourning ritual they are afforded is a “sigh,” a wordless exhalation rather than the oratory of eulogy, which is in keeping with the “noiseless tenor of their ways.” This soundlessness is turn countered by the epitaphs on the stone and the meta-text of the elegy that records them; as Clymer observes, “The silent voice of the tombstone, otherwise inert language, is heard when it is read; the deceased, silenced now in death, speaks through the reader, whose voice is conscripted by this epitaphic possession” (348). We see in this voice/silence dynamic Harley’s point that “silences on maps may sometimes become the determinate part of the cartographic message”—the “silent dust” of the dead and their “mute, inglorious lives” are contrasted with “applause,” the music of “living lyres” and other funerals where “The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.”<sup>12</sup> As Catherine Robson points out in “‘Where Heaves the Turf’: Thomas Hardy and the Boundaries of the Earth” (2004),

It has long been recognized that this beloved poem [Gray’s “Elegy”] propagates a myth of Englishness which is predicated upon the containment of lower-class insurrection, but now we perceive that its vision of the graveyard’s organic community, rooted in place and removed from history, manifests not only ideological bias but also, as Laqueur notes, material misrepresentation: “the rude forefathers of the hamlet” were definitely not “each in his narrow cell for ever laid,” nor were their

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<sup>12</sup> William Matthews in “Men at My Father’s Funeral” (1995) contrasts his own funeral rhetoric: “I’d made my stab at elegy, / the flesh made word” (9-10) with “Silence, the anthem of my father’s / new country” (13-14).

“bones” from “insult” protected. (13)

Historian Thomas Laqueur notes of the “Elegy” that corpses of the time period were stacked and jostled, hence the “mouldering heaps of turf” (13). The soothing sounds of the countryside and the reminders of a peaceful rural existence therefore also paper over the ugly realities of burial of the time, much as the “Elegy” buries the hard realities of agrarian life under a nostalgic vision of England.<sup>13</sup> To some extent Harrison retrieves the “lower-class insurrection” in *V.*, as well as challenging the idea that organic national unity—and unself-conscious links to the past—can be embodied in sites and rites of mourning.

Nationalist discourses are often linked to burial elegy, with burial in home turf for soldiers, for instance, still regarded as significant. The body within the earth of the mother/fatherland is a significant emblem of patriotism, and therefore lies at the intersection of social and private discourses of mourning. Indeed, as Ken Warpole suggests, one reason for resistance to cremation in Ireland is not only due to prevailing Catholic funerary customs but the fact that in many previously occupied countries, “burial in the national soil came to be regarded as an act of patriotism” (449).<sup>14</sup> Heaney’s elegiac work maps some of the same sound/silence oppositions as Gray and Harrison, particularly with regard to memory and voices for the dead, but grounds them in the context of the Irish burial elegy. Memory and forgetting have a tense relationship in elegy;

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<sup>13</sup> According to Laqueur, “Archaeologists estimate that the average English churchyard, in use for a millennium or so, might contain the remains of some ten thousand bodies. This explains the usual elevation of the ground above the level of the church floor and the lumpiness that is so striking in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representations. In fact, these bumps are the last, unlevelled, addition. From very near the beginning, gravediggers intercut, hacked through, turned over, tossed out earlier tenants to make room for new ones, and every hundred years or so apparently leveled the ground and started again. The lumps we can still see today escaped still another round of recycling when the bodies stopped coming and now, survivors from another age, they sit atop a layered jumble—a stratigraphy of bones—that extends at least a couple of meters above the subsoil” (9).

<sup>14</sup> This process can also operate conversely; consider the rhetoric of patriotism (even imperialism) in Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier” (1915): “If I should die, think only this of me: / That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England” (1-3).

Shaw remarks that “Elegy is always “in memoriam”—an art of re-viewing and recollecting the past, as opposed to merely remembering it. . . . [E]legy is equally an art of forgetting. Indeed, until the mere impact of a sensory impression of the dead is effaced, until the dead are forgotten, they cannot genuinely be recalled either” (214). Shaw’s observation has overtones of Nora’s distinction between active, unselfconscious memory and efforts to preserve memory that counterintuitively hasten its disappearance.

These commemorative tensions have political dimensions in some elegies, particularly those related to conflict. Edna Longley argues in “Northern Ireland: Commemoration, Elegy, Forgetting” (2001) that memory and mourning are active and charged preoccupations in Northern Irish elegy:

Local adherence to nineteenth-century Irish and British commemorative modes makes tensions between pre-modern and modern memory a live issue. This influences what elegists take from earlier war poets. Second, civil-war deaths bring public and personal mourning into mutual relation and question. Third, Troubles elegy revives modern elegy as “protest elegy” by implying an attitude towards causes of death. (237-238)<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of the Troubles elegy is therefore, ideally, to navigate a path between “total recall” and “amnesia,” to avoid obsessive remembering and the resulting loss of closure or healing.<sup>16</sup> Longley continues: “Thus, as many argue, solving Northern Ireland’s problems may be equally inseparable from

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<sup>15</sup> V. has also been described as protest elegy, and been accused of allowing the elegiac form to muffle the protest. See, for example, Bruce Woodcock’s “Classical Vandalism: Tony Harrison’s *Invective*” (1990) which I discuss further in the next section.

<sup>16</sup> Ted Hughes famously said of destroying Plath’s journals that “In those days, I regarded forgetfulness as necessary for survival.” I return to this theme of forgetting and healing versus remembering and festering in my discussion of Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* and the melancholic monument.

remembering the past in new ways: a remembering that enables forgetting. Later I will suggest that, by reinventing genres of commemoration, ‘Troubles elegy’ inscribes parameters for ‘new remembering’” (236). If this is read via the *lieux de memoire*, Longley’s suggestion implies a return to unself-conscious and direct memory, rather than the self-conscious and inescapably political memorialising of the contemporary Northern Irish elegist.

Elegies of burial formed a small but significant part of the cultural nationalism movement of Ireland in the 1800s, with poets such as Thomas Moore (1779-1852) and Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-1845) linking nationalist rhetoric with land, voice and memory.<sup>17</sup> As Longley remarks, “On the Moore-Davis system [later to be questioned by Yeats], remembrance of the (often remote) glorious past should inspire present action to enable a future” (241). This requires engagement with a memorialising voice versus silence. In “Oh Breathe Not His Name,” Thomas Moore’s elegy for Robert Emmet (1778-1803), for example, the “determinate part of the cartographic message” (as Harley puts it)—and the elegiac message of eternal remembrance—is silence:

Oh! breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,  
Where cold and unhonoured his relics are laid;  
Sad, silent, and dark, be the tears that we shed,  
As the night-dew that falls on the grass o'er his head.

But the night-dew that falls, tho' in silence it weeps,

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<sup>17</sup> Irish nationalist movements in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries agitated for separation from the British government. There were many phases and diverse demands and groups, depending on class, religion and social status, but the cultural nationalism movement, which reinforced a sense of Irish identity both in terms of language and literature, was a central feature. For more information, see for example Sean Cronin’s *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology* (1980) and Declan Kiberd’s *Reinventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1996) . *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. London: Vintage 1996.

Shall brighten with verdure the grave where he sleeps,  
 And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,  
 Shall long keep his memory green in our souls. (1-8)

Gray asked the “silent tribute of a sigh,” while Moore forbids even the faintest noise made by a breath. This is because the Irish nationalist orator and rebel leader Emmet was buried anonymously in an unknown site after his execution; he had requested that no epitaph be carved until the Irish Republic existed. The prevailing silence is therefore not a respectful silence for the dead, but contrasts with Emmet’s loud public voice when alive. While Gray’s “Elegy” maps a scene where the silent lives of the dead are given a voice through the invocation of their lives, “Breathe Not His Name” serves to reinforce a process of erasure. The elegy maps an absence where the monument should be; the recurring iconic sign of green evokes both the elegiac renewal of springtime and an Irish nationalist symbol, but also emphasises the anonymity of the grave. The soundless tears that fall, again inscribing an absence rather than the presence of traditional rites of lamentation, mark the Irish collective emotional terrain as the night-dew marks the land with evergreen memory—because the mourning rites cannot be performed, and the emotions released, they remain fresh.

A preoccupation with formal rites and remembrance is evident in many Irish burial poems with nationalist overtones. In “My Grave,” Davis rejects churchyard and epitaph carved in stone, in favour of “an Irish green hill-side, / On an opening lawn—but not too wide” (19-20). He goes on to command “put no tombstone there, / But green sods decked with daisies fair;” (25) and request that “Be my epitaph writ on my country’s mind, / “He served his country, and loved his kind” (27-28) concluding that “Oh! ‘twere merry unto the grave to go, / If one were sure to be buried so” (29-30). Here again is a conflation of Irish

collective consciousness with the land, with an imagined epitaph marking a site within an imagined geography. However, Davis, as opposed to Moore, suggests that the trappings of monumentalism merely separate him and his memory from the land; true memorial happens in living memory and the “green sods decked with daisies fair.” While the iconography of the green is repeated in “My Grave,” both this poem and “Breathe Not His Name” suggest a conflict between memory as represented by the people and history as represented in monument; the former rejects history and the latter needs it to ratify memory. Davis attempts to anchor himself—and by extension the Young Ireland nationalist movement into “all-powerful, spontaneously actualizing,” memory, whereas Moore offers his elegy as a “historical trace” in place of a monument. This theme recurs in Irish poetry, particularly of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where in the absence of officially sanctioned history and monument, tradition and memory rely on more spontaneous dissemination and passing down in a battle against erasure and silence. Indeed, Sanders mentions Nora in the context of bog bodies:

History, on the other hand, is an intellectual and discursive reconstruction, and as such, Nora implies, it is cold and lifeless in contrast to the warm, vivid, and vital memory. Placed into this dynamic, bog bodies are essentially co-opted from history by a more mnemonically oriented archaeological imagination and made “warm,” “vivid,” and vital again.” (12)

I examine the distinction between memory and history further in the section on Seamus Heaney; as there is no living memory of the cultures of the bog bodies, it would seem perhaps that Heaney is rather attempting to wrench their narratives into historical narrative rather than collective memory. Both history

and memory bear their own anxieties about history and memory as well as about silence and language; Moore's poem demonstrates that Irish poetry is uneasy about a reliance on "living memory," comparable to W. B. Yeats's "living stream" in "Easter, 1916." As Declan Kiberd remarks, "Easter 1916" "enacts the quarrel within his own mind between his public, textual duty (to name and praise the warrior dead) and his more personal urge (to question the wisdom of their sacrifice). The poem speaks, correspondingly, with two voices, and sometimes enacts in single phrases ('terrible beauty') their contestation" (213). This elegy for revolutionaries killed or executed in the Easter Rising is predicated on a tension between silence and language; it is an elegy for "sweet" (21) voices turned shrill and then silent, for a "mocking tale or a gibe" (10) with companions become "polite meaningless words" (8) with strangers, for mothers' lullabies a "murmur of name upon name" (61) of revolutionaries, for stifled political rhetoric and ideals. Yeats writes:

Hearts with one purpose alone  
 Through summer and winter seem  
 Enchanted to a stone  
 To trouble the living stream. (41-44)

Declan Kiberd reads the stone as a "stone-enchanted heart" (214), a petrified centre amid natural change, encouraging stasis rather than evolution. I suggest that the stone in the "living stream" can also be a gravestone, an invasion of living memory by the monument that replaces it as well as the intrusion of death into the interactions of nature. Heaney's work, including his bog poems, engages with the Irish elegiac traditions of burial, language, silence and landscape sketched here, and retains some of the same anxieties about history and memory that troubled Moore, Davis and Yeats. In "Station Island" he writes:



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(IX.65-69)

The stone in the water here echoes “Easter 1916,” but is associated with silence rather than speech. Place is again linked to communication, or refusal to communicate, with the ambiguous “know my place” that suggests staying within a prescribed role as well as understanding the poet’s own terrain. The cairnstone is given a potential voice but ultimately denied it, and the power of the “eddy to reform the pool” is similarly negated. In Yeats’s poem the stone remains unchanging in the midst of flux, but here the stone is presented as powerless to affect the course of events—silence means that the stone fulfils its function in a landmark that can mean a funerary monument, and that its essentially static nature is unable to affect the flow of history.

In the following sections I examine the imagined geographies of Harrison’s and Heaney’s elegies more closely. Both poets examine nationalist or exclusionary rhetoric in their elegies, and use the burial site as a locus for narratives of conflict, fear and belonging, as well as loss and mourning, interrogating how grief becomes mourning ritual and then fades, and how the body becomes a trace of the past. Whereas Nora appears to consider traces to be markers of the absence of a complete and accurate narrative, pathetic

remnants of a past that has been lost, in the geographic as opposed to the historical imagination, traces act as markers of presence necessary for mapping a site. By examining the silences and languages of the sites of burial and recovery, it becomes evident that elegists frequently have more complicated notions of “eternity”—the interplay of absence and presence in the marks and blank spaces of the site, eternal remembrance is both reinforced by the act of writing the elegy and thereby recovering the dead, but also countered by the acknowledgement of change and decay in the landscapes of remembrance and breaks in communication with the dead.

**“This World’s So Torn:” Silence and Division in *V*.**

The burial site in Tony Harrison’s *V*. is Holbeck Cemetery, situated on Beeston Hill in Leeds, overlooking the city, which opened in 1857. Unlike in Gray’s “Elegy,” where the forefathers of the hamlet appear to lie in uniform graves with similar stones, the graves here range from the Grade II-listed memorial for Henry Rowland Marsden (1823-1876), a local boy who made a fortune manufacturing road-building machinery in America and returned to Leeds to become mayor and philanthropist, to the individual or family graves of local tradesmen, inventors and industrialists, as well as the “guinea graves” on which a one-line inscription cost a guinea and in which as many as sixty people could be buried. As well as a *lieu de memoire*, marking the “the boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity” (Nora 12), the cemetery serves as a map of social strata, failure, poverty and upward mobility in the history of the community; Joseph Henry (1845-1923), for instance, was born in Leeds to poor

parents, went to work in a mill at the age of 9, learned the trade of ironfounder, opened his own business at the age of 31 and eventually became Lord Mayor.<sup>18</sup>

The multiple narratives of the gravestones offer multiple potential voices for the dead, as well as multiple discourses inflected by political perspective or social study regarding their legacy. I argue here that the recording—and re-coding—of different voices, registers, and languages in *V.*, represented both as vocal and textual expression, stages a history of both class conflict and power struggle, but also serves to map the “communicative geographies” of silence and language. Silence is not only mapped in the pauses between words and spaces between inscriptions, but acknowledged as an active language in the multiple conflicting and mutually over-riding languages of the graveyard. As the poem continues, the multiple voices—both collective and individual—mapped by the cemetery and its surrounding town are gradually over-written by a single contest of word and will, and eventually the poem ends with the poet’s own reduction from speaker to four-line epitaph. The command of the epitaph is for someone to read it with his or her back to the town, rejecting the urban cacophony, and enter into an imagined dialogue with the poet—a double prosopopoeia as the poet assigns a voice to his own dead body and his imagined interlocutor, and an instance of apostrophe where the imagined speaker addresses the spirit of the poet.

The different implications and applications of language in *V.* have been noted by critics; as David Kennedy observes of the poem, “Language is literally a place of struggle as variant meanings suggest themselves and force the reader to consider them in a dynamic relationship” (*New Relations* 39). This

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<sup>18</sup> See Eve S. Tidwell’s *Focus on Holbeck in 1881 with Reference to Holbeck Cemetery* (2005).

conflation of language and place recalls Denis Wood's definition of a map, which represents the results of struggle over territory and the right to define, as language: "Within the map image, elements of visible language serve as counterparts to iconic signs, overlapping their content and spatial domains and echoing their iconic properties. In the map image, entire words and arrangements of words are given iconic license, generating a field of linguistic signs best likened to concrete poetry" (123).<sup>19</sup> The linguistic signs of *V.* not only contrast past and present through the inscriptions on the gravestones and their effacement (gravestones themselves and the vegetation around them can be seen as iconic signs), but also map a conflict of class and culture. As Neil Roberts and Christopher Butler emphasise, the battle of words—and by extension the battle of registers, accents, and tones—between poet and skinhead acts as an important source of dynamic tension within the poem.<sup>20</sup> This focus, however, excludes the physical presence of the dead and their intangible legacy, which are a major theme in elegy, particularly those set in burial sites where the remains of the dead lie beneath the ground and their memorials stand above it.

In criticism of *V.*, the dead are often left out of the conversation, or reduced to a silent, generic set of middle-class tradesmen and bourgeoisie who lie passive under the onslaught of the skinhead's aerosol can. Sandie Byrne, for example, claims that

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<sup>19</sup> Sean O'Brien extends the space contested by divided discourses to the whole of Britain: "To say that language is foregrounded in *v.* is an understatement. Indeed, during the controversy, all that was visible and audible to the poem's opponents was its emphasis on 'bad' language—the 'fuck' and 'cunt' of 'inarticulate' spraycan discourse. The 'dreadful schism in the British nation' could appear to be four letters wide" (60).

<sup>20</sup> See also David Kennedy's "'Past Never Found'—Class, Dissent, and the Contexts of Tony Harrison's *V.*" (2009), which focuses on class and political argument at the expense of the individual dead: "I shall argue that while the poem can certainly be said to mourn and commemorate the decline of the working class, it can also be said to mourn not only the decline of class as a social and political conception but also the possibility of dissent" (165).

The dead in *V.* are not described as illiterate, but their words have not survived them. With limited access to cultural capital, they were not able to produce it, and were rendered effectually mute. The skinhead, however, is neither mute nor illiterate. His sprayed words will probably outlast him, and he has not blushed unseen upon the desert air of Leeds, but his writing is anything but prized, and introduces him to no *carriere ouverte aux talents*; he will “croak” still doing “nowt”. (75)

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the dead in Holbeck Cemetery come from different professions, some achieving international success; they are hardly the “mute and inglorious dead” of Gray’s “Elegy.” Whether or not they were all denied access to “cultural capital,” or indeed whether they felt the lack is something that Harrison does not speculate on. *V.* explicitly includes foreign and ancient languages as part of the field of linguistic signs that marks the cemetery:

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I want to re-insert the dead into the field of communication of the burial site—both their language and their silence are part of the topography of the site. Foreign and ancient languages represent education and high culture, but also attempts at dignified commemoration or “gilding” of death and grief. The “illusion of eternity” is evident in the persistence of Latin and Christian liturgy, but

countered by the expletives of the skinhead graffiti, which rejects and defaces the cultural value system represented by the engravings, silencing the language of memory.

Silence and the dead are rarely mentioned in criticism of *V.*—the most usual approach to silence relates to attempts at censoring Harrison’s work, including *V.* Byrne asserts that “Harrison has indeed set himself up as the kind of poet who finds words for the silent and silenced” (*HV& O*, 85), but by “the silent and silenced,” she means the oppressed and suppressed living rather than the dead. Existing criticism of *V.* related to language and elegy is frequently focused on the dialogue between the speaker and the skinhead, the relationship between the poet and the vandal, and the political and cultural consequences. According to Roberts, for example, “The language of the skinhead is undoubtedly the main artistic triumph of *V.*” (219), and Butler suggests that the central division of the poem is between the “conflicting linguistic registers of the poem, that of a resisting skinhead, and that of the poet, who is trying to pull it all together” (94). Communication and antagonism in *V.* is placed within the context of class struggle and economic conditions of 1980s Thatcherite Britain, with its high levels of unemployment, particularly in the North as traditional industries such as steel and coal mining were shut down. Byrne, for instance, comments that

The skinhead is an effective concrete poet. He sees his words made instantly manifest, and they gain an immortality perhaps more secure than the poet’s. [...] It may largely consist of profanity and be both repetitive and unoriginal, but it is striking, vigorous, manly vernacular and, above all, effective. [...] While the sprayed messages bring about no political change, [...] they

do succeed in recording the anger of working-class Leeds youths (if not its causes). (55)

This focus on politics and historical particularity subsumes both the elegiac and the specificity of the elegiac site. Byrne reduces the geography of the elegy to a background for the dialogue between poet and the “spirit of place”: “Harrison’s interlocutor is the human spirit of blighted Leeds, and the bleak, scarred, desecrated landscape is like a projection of his blighted and blighting spirit” (69). Byrne lists the places of the poem, saying that it is “grounded”: “on the worked-out pit which once helped to support the economy of Leeds, and ranges over the churches used as warehouses, the boarded up shops, the football ground which has become a cockpit for displaced aggression” (70). Her emphasis is on “elegy for place”, rather than an elegy for individuals buried within this specific place; the role of the dead in this scene is left unmapped. Byrne casts the voice of mourning in *V.* as a protest, resisting the personal implications of the elegiac voice and corresponding silence. She asks whether “grudge and a political agenda shine through an elegiac miasma” (*H., V. & O* 146), noting that Bruce Woodcock has argued that “Instead of being a badly needed “Mask of Anarchy” for the 1980s, *V.* finally has more in common with Wordsworth’s “Immortality” ode, its rancor gagged by the elegiac strain and the tendency to grand gestures” (Woodcock 62).<sup>21</sup> Woodcock explicitly acknowledges the elegiac purpose and drive of *V.*, saying,

But the elegiac direction which opens the poem, however ironised or undercut linguistically, shows a central element in *V.* At the

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<sup>21</sup> Similarly, as if to avoid the “elegiac miasma,” Butler’s criticism is framed in terms of “ventriloquism,” with its overtones of appropriation, rather than the traditional elegiac conventions of prosopopoeia and apostrophe: “But then Harrison insists on internalizing the skin’s voice: so that another underlying problem of the poem becomes the nature of his own imaginative identity. As the skinhead rises to Harrison’s challenge to aerosol his name, and sign his work, the internality of the ventriloquized debate is revealed” (99).

heart of its magnificent attempt to take on Thatcher's Britain is actually a very personal anger and sense of tragedy, a feature common to Harrison's work with its continual awareness of time and death. *V.* is as much a personal elegy for Harrison's father and mother as it is for his society. (59)

However, he overshadows this recognition not only by focusing on the skinhead/poet working-class/intellectual battles of the poem but by referring to the "problem of formal containment", suggesting that the "formal facility of verse" (62) undercuts its protest

While *V.* may be driven by the force of righteous anger that manufacturing England's dead and gone, it is not merely a protest, or indeed a protest elegy; ignoring the individual voice(s) of elegy at the heart of this anger does Harrison a disservice. As a post-World War II elegy, *V.* is not only innovative in mapping its community's concerns, but also in the "imagined geographies" (*Apollo's Eye* 3), and the "geographies of communicative tension" (McGowan 26) wherein relationships between past and present, living and dead, history and memory, and monumentalism and erasure are mapped. Luke Spencer describes the scene as follows:

*V.* opens with images of vertical and horizontal ancestry. On the vertical axis are the occupants of the cemetery poised above the empty galleries of a long-disused pit. The narrator is positioned horizontally in relation to the community of decent people whose graves lie all around him. Both planes converge in the image of a hypothetical ultimate levelling down that will collapse the graveyard into the lowest worked-out seam of the mind. This idea



of the past exerting a geological pressure on the present will recur at the end of the poem, where it will serve as a means of formal closure. (93)

The past exerts linguistic as well as geological pressure onto the present. There is not only language and text in the poem, not only protest and elegy for place, there is blazoning, spraying, *cri-de-coeur*, Latin, Greek, French, hymn, jeering, scrawling, warbling, electioneering, chatting, labelling, inscribing, humming, yelling, chiselling; there is a “repertoire of blunt four-letter curses” (51) and “hymnal fragments and gilded prayer” (44)—traces of the past that construct the *lieux de memoire*. These instances of language and voice are mapped around “choked” graves, the constant instability of a “swallowing” disused coalmine and the “blackened dynasty of unclaimed stone” (36) that dominates the graveyard with its negation (and the blank surface that invites the re-inscription of graffiti), a symbol of the absence and erasure that surrounds the changing of the generations.

Harrison’s concern with the dead and voice, both the silence of the dead and the silence or lack of communication of the living now continued in death, recurs throughout his work, particularly poems about his parents, giving the silences of Holbeck Cemetery a personal inflection as well as an intertextual or political meaning. In “Marked With D.,” for instance, his father’s death is portrayed as freedom from inarticulacy: “but he hungered for release from mortal speech / that kept him down, the tongue that weighed like lead” (11-12). In “Book Ends,” about Harrison’s mother’s death, he and his father “never could talk much, and now don’t try” (4); rather than a sign of having nothing in common, or of an empty relationship, Harrison goes on to say that this silence is in fact a marker of both similarity and difference: “The ‘scholar’ me, you, worn

out on poor pay, / only our silence made us seem a pair” (7-8). Here silence is a language that indicates different ways of life, marking a distance both spatially between father and son and temporally as a generation gap—and the loss of the mother magnifies it and removes the bridge that used to cross it. Silence and death in Harrison’s work are also frequently linked to unstable geographies, as with the devouring hollow beneath Holbeck Cemetery. In “The Heartless Art,” (‘in memoriam S.T. died 4 April 1985’), Harrison’s elegy documents his friend’s death as well as the process of writing the elegy. His friend evidently has a terminal illness: “Next spring, when you’re no longer here, / we’ll have the land grassed over and quite flat” (7-8). Death is obliquely linked to silence; in the second stanza, Harrison writes “I hear, three fields away, a hunter’s gun, / you, in the silence after, being sick” (13-14). If “you, in the silence after being sick” is read without the final comma, the “silence after” is a space occupied by the dying after his illness, a counterpoint to the shock of the hunter’s gun, and the suddenness of even expected deaths. Particularly interesting in terms of the cartography of death is the tenth stanza:

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Here death is the silence “after one last groan.” David W. Shaw notes that “When elegies aspire to silence, they aspire to the integrity of a blank page or

void. Since no poem can be composed entirely of pauses filled with words, zero values of disjunction and elision are most likely to appear” (133), and gives dashes, caesurae and parentheses as examples—we see these “zero values” here, absences puncturing the elegist’s work of writing. The gaps framed by the parentheses are filled in by footnotes that come after the text of the poem: the first contains “how you stayed alive”, the second “4<sup>th</sup>” and the third “10.05.” The silence marked by these absences, then, is not merely a gap, a lack of knowledge, but an active marker that shapes the elegy.

I mention these other elegies as context for my discussion of *V.*, to demonstrate the connection between the geographic imagination and the language of silence in Harrison’s elegies. Particularly in “The Heartless Art”, the spatial layout and typography of the poem sketch a cartography that frames silence in its parentheses, until silence comes to dominate the craft of writing the elegy, undermining its function—the poem concludes “why should you need / to know the final failure of the poet?” (76-77). The epigraph to *V.* is a comment from Arthur Scargill, politician and president of the National Union of Mineworkers: “My father still reads the dictionary every day. He says your life depends on your power to master words.”<sup>22</sup> While this statement has implications for the political overtones of *V.* and change in generations that permeates the poem, in an elegiac context this comment resonates with Bishop’s insistence in “One Art” that “the art of losing’s not too hard to master” (18). The “final failure of the poet” in “The Heartless Art” is the fear of all elegists, the idea that losing is too hard to master through words, that words cannot fill the silence, and thereby life is also too difficult to master. The words of the elegy thus assume some of the purpose of the legend that explains the symbols

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in *V.* as “*Sunday Times*, 10 Jan. 1982.”

and colour conventions of the map, and provides a connection between Tennyson's textual "outline" and interior "large grief." As Wood writes,

It is difficult to imagine a map without language. However separate the evolution of iconic and linguistic representation, the map has, for millennia, embraced both. External to the map image, language assumes its familiar textual forms: identifying, explaining, elaborating, crediting, cautioning. Its main role, though, lies within the map image and in its interpretive template, the map legend. Like graphic marks, typographic marks sign the content of the map on different yet complementary grounds. (122)

In *V.*, the elegiac field of quatrains, intertextuality and musing on loss and mortality is studded with a second layer of typographic statements. As opposed to the parentheses enclosing emptiness in "The Heartless Art," the capital letters that denote graffiti and brand names mark presence, breaking up the ordinary poetry, and conflating the words sprayed by skinheads with the discourse of advertising and labelling that marks territory, whether in the cemetery and its surrounding town or market share and target consumer. Cans of HARP are scattered around the cemetery; as well as showing the lack of traditional respect for the dead and providing the fuel for the skinhead's aggression, the choice of brand is an icon of regional Northern identity, and perhaps an ironic comment on the lyres and music present in traditional elegiac conventions. Territory is marked to symbolise both otherness and belonging: "LEEDS *V.* / the opponent of last week, this week, or next," (49-50), demonstrating a static collective identity based on a shifting sense of the enemy. The graffiti also re-inscribe: "This pitman's of last century daubed PAKI GIT, / this grocer Broadbent's aerosolled with NIGGER" (151-152). The

resentment and anxiety related to otherness and foreign influence is an anxiety that Harrison's father shared in his use of the "most liberal label" (341) of "coloured chaps" (340), and his concomitant "longer tiring treks for tins / that had a label on them that he knew" (347-348). Harrison's father—and his generation and its legacy—are thus implicated in the skinhead's collective anger and fear, if not their actions. Harrison's father's search for familiar food as his neighbourhood is taken over by immigrant shops is also a search for conversation:

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(357-360)

This is another instance where those now dead are shown to have been increasingly silent while living, echoing the "muteness" of Gray's villagers. Harry Harrison's silence dominates this section of the elegy, an enclave of peace amid perceived alien and thereby hostile territory, voices, names, languages and labels.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The dead buried in Holbeck Cemetery include Irish immigrants; Joseph Henry, for example, was born to Irish immigrants who came to Leeds looking for work in the 1840s, while many of the descendants of those buried in Holbeck emigrated to America and Australia, where they were perhaps resented in their turn. Like the dead woman in Heaney's "Bog Queen," who "dreams of Baltic amber" and wears Phoenician cloth, these dead are at the centre of trade routes and the mobility of Empire, unlike Gray's villagers who died and were buried "far from the madding crowd" surrounded by symbols of Englishness.

The racist tags on the gravestones of pitmen and grocers of the nineteenth century are not attempts at communicating with the dead, or even labelling them in particular. Harrison observes that

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There is a sudden shift in voice here. The dead are portrayed both as lying in “deep peace,” a conventional, even religious, turn of phrase suggesting silence and remoteness from mortal concerns, and as angry about the state of their gravestones. This contradiction not only suggests the ready appropriation of the voices of the dead by conservatives condemning innovation—and immigration, but also plots enmity between the dead and the skinheads. The dead, represented by Harry Harrison, might secretly be in sympathy with the skinheads, but here they are enlisted in condemnation of their actions and their dishonour towards their ancestors, with the voice of the living poet unable to subdue the dead with the platitude of resting in peace. Although critics such as Woodcock see the form of elegy as “containing” the poet’s anger, the dead are actually harnessed in support of it. Indeed, the dead in Holbeck Cemetery are not expected to lie silent. The elegy is enlivened by references to ghosts, closely connected to sound and communication; even the noise of the boys playing football in the cemetery is subdued by the potential presence of the uncanny: “they hum Here Comes the Bride / though not so loud they’d want to rouse a ghost” (107-108). Even though the peace of the dead is transgressed against, even desecrated, and the speaker explicitly states on several

occasions that he believes in no world after this one, there is still a stanza that hints that this disbelief may not be so unshakeable:

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The register here has regressed to the childish, with the use of the words “spooky,” perhaps in conscious imitation of the young football players.

Assuming that the reference is to the ghost scene at the beginning of *Hamlet*, it is interesting that the parent “playing Hamlet” (a term that evokes acting, as if the cemetery is a stage-set, and emphasising the potential prosopopoeia if the ghost were to act out the part written for it) is the mother (with the rhyming of “mam” and the first syllable of “Hamlet”) rather than the father. If his mother were to be the speaker, this role ties in with the silence between Harrison and his father portrayed in his elegies for his parents. The “swearing” suggests the obscenities the poet has been trading with the skinhead and a maternal rebuke, but also echoes the play:

Hamlet. Never to speak of this that you have seen,

Swear by my sword.

Ghost. [Beneath.] Swear. (1.5.156-158)

The sword, with its intimations of allegiance and reprisal against transgression, here underscores the divisions and conflicts of the contested space that is *V.*, from the opposing teams of the boys playing football to the battle of words between skinhead and poet, and the bloodshed of the Somme marked by the monument in the cemetery, the Gulf War (388) and the “map that’s colour-

coded Ulster/Eire” (393) on television (another instance of labelling). “For this swearing,” writes Harrison, the ambivalent tense suggesting past, present and future—the ghost may appear to seal a promise that could be made in the future, or that has been made during the course of *V*. “For this swearing” is also perilously close to forswearing,” the breaking of a promise and betraying an alliance, a sense that permeates the battle of class and education between poet and skinhead.

Although the dead are assigned opinions through memory and prosopopoeia in an act of retrieval, and the poet can address the imaginary skinhead, this apostrophe is not extended to the dead. This is partly because of the poet’s beliefs: “I know this world’s so torn but want no other” (122). Because he does not believe in anything after death, the poet is careful to speak about the dead but not directly to them (which is perhaps one reason why he wishes to avoid a spectral encounter). When he tries, his attempts are overtaken by silence. As the poet gazes upon his parents’ grave with the word UNITED sprayed across it, a different mode of voice emerges:

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The prayer is “furtive” because it is a reassigning of significance to UNITED as well as a transgression against the beliefs of the poet, suggesting an unwilling act of recovery. It is also in contrast to the “gilded prayer” (44) chiselled into the gravestones with due rite and ceremony, as opposed to the casual defacement of the vandals. Later in the poem, however, we find out that this prayer has



been stifled: “I wish on this skin’s word deep aspirations, / first the prayer for my parents I can’t make” (173-174). The language for speaking with the dead has been lost. The poet notes that in his childhood, he had helped his father “with the flowers” (11) when he tended the grave of his own parents who were “in Heaven” (12), and that his father had come “each week to bring fresh flowers” (13) and “came home with clay stains on his trouser knees” (14), suggesting kneeling and by extension prayer and some sort of communication with the unseen. The father’s actions are in contrast with the poet’s own “odd 10 minutes” (96) between train journeys at his parents’ grave. The grave of the poet and his mother, then, despite the surrounding noises and the heated (if imaginary) debate going on around it is a silent space that swallows sound. This silence is mapped into the topography of the site. While the grave is covered by the “rose roots and the daffodils / by which dad dignified the family plot” (19-20), this gesture towards the traditional rites connoting the renewal of nature is transformed into graveyards “strewn with rubbish and choked up with weeds / since families and friends have gone away / for work or fuller lives, like me from Leeds?” (86-88). The absence of the next generation and the implied forgetting means that the grave is “choked up”—silenced and hidden—and the connection between living and dead is severed.

Harrison envisages a sort of ultimate unity, however, that transcends all divisions and silences. The “choked-up” grave may represent absence and silence, but

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This reminder of the unstable ground of the graveyard as it rests on a mined-out coal pit and the trope of what could be termed the “devouring earth” in burial elegy serves to represent an ultimate silencing, a final collapsing of divisions and challenging the “illusions of eternity” of the *lieu de memoire*.<sup>24</sup> There can ultimately be no physical retrieval of the buried, and their trajectory is towards increasingly final disappearance. The prospect of “spooks,” then, is temporary. As Spencer says,

Harrison evokes geomorphology as a global and timeless process which, by affecting us all, can be regarded as a species of unifying destiny. The only final victory belongs to “vast, slow, coal-creating forces / that hew the body’s themes to get to the soul”. Yet there still remains the awkward short-term problem of Harrison’s relationship to all that the skinhead represents as spokesman for Northern working-class disaffection—that is to say, his relationship to society and history as opposed to geology and eternity. (98)

Perhaps the poet draws some comfort from the fact that the skinhead’s vandalism is also finite, due to collapse into the earth. The final caving into the “rabblement of bone and rot, / shored slack, crushed shale, smashed prop” (11-12) is also the ultimate sacrilege, however, destroying the consolation of monument and ritual embodied by the cemetery.

The speaker ends his elegy for his parents with a self-inscribed epitaph, denying any future elegist or family member the recovery inherent in inscribing

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Sylvia Plath’s “Berck-Plage,” in which “Six round black hats in the grass and a lozenge of wood, / And a naked mouth, red and awkward” (7.15-16).

a commemorative verse. *V.* echoes Gray's "Elegy." Criticism of *V.* often includes a comparison of Gray's "Elegy" and *V.*, and what this relationship reveals about changes in Britain and conflicts in class and regional identity, as well as Harrison's poetic voice. There are dissenting opinions regarding the significance of Gray's "Elegy" to *V.*; Byrne, for example, catalogues the differences between *V.* and the "Elegy": "A more fruitful source of dissent and resistance is Gray's 'Elegy,' a model of difference for *V.*, an anti-pastoral elegy whose bleak depiction of urban Limbo is all the sharper for being cast in the conventions of picturesque Arcadia" (67), concluding that "If 'On Not Being Milton' was about being debarred from the canon, from literacy, from counting—about not being allowed to be Milton—then I suggest that other of Harrison's poems are about choosing not to be Milton, or Marvell, or Gray, or anyone else" (83). Neil Roberts emphasises the relationship, noting that "In this poem there is an identifiable single precursor: Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' (1751). There are lines that seem directly, and unironically, haunted by Gray's poem" (219).<sup>25</sup> If a consensus among these divided critics can be reached, it is that at the very least, "Elegy" is an influence on *V.*, even if it is only to provide a spring-board for subversion.

Rather than the "Elegy" being a "single precursor," the imagined geography created by the language and spaces of *V.* inhabits a nexus of moods and spaces that reflect some of the traditional concerns of elegy and burial. *V.* records Christian traditions of marriage, burial, and afterlife, and English cultural traditions of commemoration, mapping them within a desacralized, even actively

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<sup>25</sup> O'Brien notes that "From the outset, then, the poem exists in debate with its famous model" (61) in its "infringement" of the "iambic control" of the "Elegy" (61). Luke Spencer remarks in his discussion of the "politics of form" in *V.* that "Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' is the chief source of the alternately rhymed (abab) four-line stanzas; but Harrison rings some remarkable changes on the steady, meditative plod of Gray's lines" (92). He points out, however, that *V.* reflects the "Elegy" in its use of specific location and its echoing of Gray's "attempts to combine his (mostly classical) learning with an accessible style" (93).

desecrated, urban cemetery, in a mood that evokes Philip Larkin's "Aubade," which describes religion as "That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade / Created to pretend we never die," (23-24). *V.* questions the ultimate meaning of poetry, learning and the high culture of classical languages, challenging their power to articulate the concerns of the Other and mastery over the silence of death. The elegy nevertheless is driven by the imperative to write about the dead, using language to chart the divisions and strata of a crumbling, conflicted society, and wistfully suggesting their significance as a barrier against disintegration and extinction, recalling T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, particularly "V. What the Thunder Said": "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431). The burial-ground-as-battle-ground in *V.* has certain similarities to the Irish burial elegies I discussed in the introduction to this chapter; the site serves as a microcosm of the divisions and oppressions, and of anxieties related to the effacement and silencing of language. As Spencer points out, "Drawing a perspective from 'at least 300 million years ago', when primeval forests began to be converted into coal seams that lie beneath Beeston Hill cemetery, the poem is able to endorse the skinhead's 'UNITED' as an unwitting expression of human community" (97).<sup>26</sup> Harrison's concluding stanzas in *V.* reinforce this sense of defiant union: "I doubt if 10 years of bleak Leeds weather / and 30 falls of apple and of may / will erode the UNITED binding us together" (418-420). The cemetery is a site of transformation as well as tension; the skinhead's graffiti can be read as an act of communication between living and dead, despite its subversion, while the poet retains the power to re-inscribe the skinhead's defacement even as the skinhead re-inscribes the gravestones.

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<sup>26</sup> In its final insistence on the speaker's parents' unity, *V.* recalls the effigy in Larkin's "An Arundel Tomb"; in spite of the map where "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis" (29-31, 36), it seems that "The stone fidelity / They hardly meant has come to be / Their final blazon, and to prove / Our almost-instinct almost true: / What will survive of us is love" (40-42).

### **“My Body Was Braille”: Mapping Bodies and Roads**

What survives in Heaney’s cartographies of burial and retrieval seems to be hostility and division—and the imperative to write about it. In the boglands and pilgrim roads of “The Bog Queen” mapping language and silence extend beyond the dead and sites of burial and memory to complex politics of language and register and by extension identity; the body becomes a nexus of conflicting narratives. In *V*, these narratives are encountered through inscriptions and graffiti on gravestones and labels on products, whereas in the bog elegies, the tales read around the dead are even more fragmented; they must be discerned via traces of relic and costume and artefact, through bone and the position of the bone and body, through forensic investigation. These dead lack even the one-line inscription of those buried in the “guinea graves” at Holbeck Cemetery; the dialogue between Heaney and the dead is predicated on uncertainty and the voice of the dead must be read from the body itself. The elegiac cartography of these sites is therefore coloured by silences; as John Brian Harley writes, silence in maps can be unintentional, due to “geographic limits of knowledge,” and intentional, the result of “deliberate policies of secrecy and censorship,” and the more “indeterminate silences rooted in often hidden procedures and rules” (84). The elegiac map here is also drawn to engage with “the silences in the historical record owing to the destruction of evidence” (85); this is not a silence that is the result of Heaney deliberately curtailing his mapping, but because of the centuries that have passed since the burials.

Although born in Northern Ireland, Heaney has identified himself as an Irish national, and his work engages with Irish rural landscapes, mythologies

and literature. As Christopher T. Malone remarks, “His poetry exhibits a tension between a sense of responsibility to place and a desire for freedom, between the poet holding himself accountable to community and seeking a space free from historical and social ties” (1084), a tension that resonates throughout the history of literature from Ireland. As a result, Heaney is awkwardly placed within these traditions of rhetoric and silence; his work is saturated with references to language and voice, often emphasising the bodily element of speech and sound with the word “tongue” and phonetic terms such as “plosive,” suggesting a specific positioning of tongue, teeth and breath. In “Whatever You Say Say Nothing,” he introduces a third element of discourse into the binary oppositions—that of the British and international media,

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These buzz words of the Northern Irish Troubles almost eclipse the voice of the poet or “singer”; similarly to the labels in *V.* on consumer products—and gravestones—they reduce human lives and histories to stereotypes. The “jottings and analyses / of politicians and newspaper men” (l.9-10) are inscriptions that attempt to solidify a labile situation, petrifying division between factions and world-views, and reinforced by the sharp puncturing internal rhymes and hard consonants of “backlash” and “crackdown.”

It is no surprise then, that the act of naming is significant in Heaney’s work; as Susan Shaw Sailer argues in “Time Against Time: Myth in the Poetry of Yeats and Heaney” (1991),

Heaney's use of mythic elements speaks to their condition as metonymy, as one way among others for naming what is. In Heaney's earlier poems this naming is a tool with which to "rent/the veil of the usual" and so make it visible in its role as sustaining rite and ritual; by *The Haw Lantern* poems, naming has become the act of memory and imagination by which the sense of the past is created. (5)

I would argue that this metonymy is closely related to cartography, in which a legend, or an image, represents a whole. Although Sailer does not mention "North" specifically, in that poem Heaney forges a landscape of metal and weaponry as metonymy for Viking invasion and a heritage of violence:

I returned to a long strand  
 the hammered curve of a bay  
 and found only the secular  
 powers of the Atlantic thundering. (1-4)

The Norse god Thor is summoned through the "hammer" and the "thundering," but religious forces are rejected in the "secular powers" of nature. Floyd Collins observes that "the adjective-noun combinations "long strand" and "hammered shod" consist of words pitched like cold, intractable metal" (80). Heaney returns to this image of hammering in "Station Island" in sequence II where he encounters the ghost of William Carleton,

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Here guns are the weapon rather than the axes and swords of the Vikings, but the effect of a nation—and landscape—forged by violence and discord echoes “North,” particularly the image of “hammering home” and its resonance with the complicated sense of simultaneous belonging/otherness that pervades Heaney’s work.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the eventual disappearance of the remains of the dead and the destruction of the cemetery as it collapses into the disused coal-pit beneath Holbeck Cemetery, in the bog poems the bodies are retrieved or emerge from their graves. Critics have noted that the resurfacing and excavation of the bog bodies creates a perceived collapsing of the distance between past and present. Glob observed that “We stand face-to-face with our ancestors,” in encountering the bog bodies.<sup>28</sup> Karin Sanders describes the function of the “material body” as a “rupture of time and space” in *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (2009), going on to note that “Reconnection with the past is frequently intended to *stabilize* the present. Yet bog bodies, uncanny and liminal, more often than not refuse to be constant; indeed, they *destabilize*” (xvi; italics in original). Sanders refers to the bog itself as a site uncanny in its liminality: “They are solid and soft, firm and malleable, wet and dry; they are deep, dark and dangerous; but they are also mysterious, alluring, and seductive. Neither water nor land, bogs are liminal spaces, thresholds between surfaces and depths, ambiguous sites of origin. ... Bogs are unhomely homes for whomever

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<sup>27</sup> Heaney also returns to this conflation of metal and landscape in his 1979 elegy “The Strand at Lough Beg” (in memory of his cousin Colum McCartney): “Like a dull blade with its edge / Honed bright, Lough Beg half shines under the haze” (33-34).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Sanders xvi, lacks citation.



is placed in them” (7).<sup>29</sup> In the imaginary geography sketched here by Sanders, the *unheimlich* bog thus infuses the bodies within it with its property of unpredictability, while the bodies themselves lend their mystery to the perception of the bog. This is an interesting interpretation considering that Heaney’s own discussion of the bog poems emphasises how familiar they seem to him. Heaney’s first encounter with the bog bodies was via Danish archaeologist P.V. Glob’s *The Bog People: Iron-Age Man Preserved* (1966); Heaney’s later comments on the emotional impact of this text in “The Man and the Bog” (1996) fuse foreign land and language with the homely:

The boggy landscape that Glob wrote about so lovingly and uncondescendingly, that fragrant secret outback of heather and scrub, of squelchy rushes and springy peatfields, it was all completely familiar to me. And the fact that in the speech of our local district in Ulster we used the word moss—so close to *mose*—rather than the word bog, that made me feel even closer to the marvellous Danish story which Professor Glob had to tell.

(3)

Heaney’s fascination with the bog bodies began when he encountered the photographs in Glob’s book; these images form a nexus of carefully intersected narratives and both natural and artificial mediations, each of which contains its own silence and language. He concludes “The Tollund Man” (1972) by asserting closeness rather than distance from the bogs and their contents:

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<sup>29</sup> Sanders’s characterization of the bog recalls the site of the sea(shore) in the elegiac imaginary as a border between life and death, the knowable and the unknowable, and its transformative and destructive properties. See my discussion of Sylvia Plath’s “Berck-Plage” and Elizabeth Bishop’s “North Haven” in “Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy” for further discussion of the liminal littoral.

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(III.9-12)

This tension between home and sense of dislocation emphasises both the fragmented and layered spaces of the bog poems, and the mutually shaping effects of land and language. The boggy landscapes cannot sustain the same markers and memorials that the *lieu de memoire* of Harrison's graveyard does, leaving the bodies themselves and the language and narrative that describe and identify them as the only way of making a connection to the past. The bodies themselves are "illusions of eternity" because of their physical preservation, suggesting longevity, and the fragments of their history and narrative, emphasising the illusive nature of their connection with the past.

The sense of lost knowledge connected to the bodies is reflected in the cartographies of their sites of discovery. The unstable surface of the peat bog does not permit the natural coordinates that locate where Gray's villagers lie beneath elm and yew with the "turf in many a mouldering heap" (14), which is why the bodies, as Sanders points out, are often marked with the name of where they were found:

Yet in spite of the apparent ease with which we assign identities and life stories, all bog bodies are inevitably caught in the grip of anonymity. [...] The names of bog bodies are with very few exceptions place names [for example Tollund Man and Grauballe Man] and as such, they are assigned to a taxonomic site in the archives that only allows them to move halfway into commonality

and community with the still living. (9)

Part of the purpose of elegy is to map the distance between the dead and the living; in the bog poems this map covers both vertical distance into the earth and horizontal distance between Denmark and Ireland, as well as the intersection of the natural environment and the names and labels it is assigned by cartographers and archaeologists. The language of home and disorientation Heaney uses to describe his responses to the layered geography of the bogs and the bodies preserved within them contrasts with the scientific process of those who investigate the bogs, but in titling his poems with the only labels the bog people can have, he maintains a connection between the scientific and emotional registers that chart the imagined geography of the bogs.

In “Bog Queen,” metonymy and cartography are used to place the body in the landscape, but also to retrieve it with an unusual but insistent sense of elegy. As Jahan Ramazani writes,

Although Heaney’s bog poems are partly landscape poems (about the bogs), partly *memento mori* poems (about mortality), partly ekphrastic poems (about pictures), they can also be read as elegies. Heaney mourns the dead preserved since the Iron Age under the peat of Ireland and Jutland, many of them ritually killed in sacrifices for the Mother Goddess. In these obliquely occasional poems, he also mourns casualties of the sectarian killing that has blighted Northern Ireland since 1969, murders on behalf of Mother Ireland and Mother Britannia. (337)

Ramazani notes the preponderance of “digging” imagery in Heaney’s poetry, from the early “Digging” that conflates digging with writing, to the “excavation

and exhumation of the dead, then later, Dantean and Virgilian voyages to the nether world. *North* is full of bones, skulls, preserved bodies, the poetry itself becoming a charnel house” (336). Stephen Regan agrees with Ramazani, noting the “strong elegiac tendency” of the bog sequence, with “familiar commemorative rituals, beginning with a pilgrimage” in poems such as “The Tollund Man” (14). While both Ramazani and Regan note elegiac traits in the bog poems, I want to narrow their general focus to that of silence, burial and geography, with the corresponding implications for history and memorial. Ramazani considers the bog poems a “charnel house” (338)—a structure for housing skeletons and human remains after exhumation. However, the bones and remains are more delicately placed within the landscape than this term would suggest; the marks left on the topography of the bog both by their burial and their excavation, as well as their transformation into artefacts in museums in Dublin and Denmark, create a second life of public visibility after centuries of effacement.

Heaney attempts to redress this effacement by employing prosopopoeia to give a corpse found in a bog, probably a victim of ritual sacrifice, a soliloquy. Rather than vocal speech, this voice is more inscription that maps both her own body and the landscape:

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The metonymy of “dawn suns” for the passage of time locates the queen within a daily and seasonal cycle rather than the recorded history of retroactively assigned dates or ages. The “queen”—so designated because of the artefact of a “diadem” found on her head, but also giving her the narrative of going from a position of power to victim—lies passive and silent—the voice assigned to her details only the marks made upon her and the marks she makes by her surroundings. Even the language of her body must be read rather than spoken aloud; indeed, her body is penetrated by “illiterate roots,” suggesting that the interaction between her and her burial ground is silent. The elegiac convention of the dawn suggests repeated unsuccessful attempts by the sunrise to revive the dead, recalling the “fatuous sunbeams” (13) in Wilfred Owen’s “Futility” (1918), but also evoking the body “rolled round in / earth’s diurnal course” (78) in Wordsworth’s “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” (1798) and thereby the passing of the days between the death and the finding. Harrison alludes explicitly to this Wordsworth poem in *V*:

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The long geological processes here force body and soul apart, echoing the oppositions of *V*. In “Bog Queen,” the preserved body has been more gently dismantled. The body of the “queen” is precisely placed within the landscape, becoming a tactile series of codes read and consumed by the elements and the

seasons; as Helen Vendler points out, the queen is “digested” by the “seeps of winter,” and her narrative is “eloquent and rich, as step by step the buried woman is undone, until she becomes a geologic rather than a human phenomenon” (45). The digestion of the body is perhaps a nod to the devouring or swallowing grave-site in burial elegy, but more than this, the body and its accoutrements become both a marker of the geography of the bog and its microcosm, containing its vegetation: “Bruised berries under my nails,” (22) and its terrain: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons—(34-36).” According to Vendler, the “Bog Queen is set in Ireland, and based on a body discovered on the Moira estate south of Belfast (45) but the mention of “fjords” imprints Scandinavian landscape and language upon Ireland, as in “North.” The body is also at the centre of trade, implying travel and cartography; the queen “dreams of Baltic amber” (21) and is dressed in “Phoenician stitchwork” (31). The positioning of the body underneath the unstable surface of the bog is marked by “gemstones dropped / in the peat floe / like the bearings of history” (26-28) again conflating time and place as in “Whatever You Say Say Nothing,” and weighed down by “stone jambs / at my head and my feet” (47-48). Jambs are used to build thresholds—the body forms a portal between past and present, reinforced by a possible pun on “enjambment”—the word and the body bridge both the line in the poem but also the past and present.

Ramazani views voice and language in this poem as a commentary on prosopopoeia as “imposition,” even violation; although the dead woman’s body is given a voice, it is because Heaney “reinscribes it with his own imaginings” (339). This stamp of appropriation means that “elegiac regeneration leaves her as dead as alive, the poet bestowing speech upon her but drearily withholding

the full life-giving force of dramatic monologue. Much as her original discoverers “robbed,” “barbered,” and “stripped” her, so too the poet worries that his elegy, however tentative, perpetuates that violence” (340). Although according to Vendler, the “queen” speaks out, she does not actually say anything out loud. The only verbs given to her before the final stanza are “I lay waiting” (repeated 1, 16), “I knew” (34) and “My skull hibernated” (39), all connoting internality and silence, thought rather than action, but the “waiting” and “hibernating” suggesting an awareness of recovery, even resurrection in the spring. The passivity of the bog queen is enforced by the description of finding the body: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (42-44). In the final stanza the body suddenly becomes active: “and I rose from the dark” (53); Vendler suggests that here Heaney “owes something to ‘Lady Lazarus’” (45) and indeed, the negotiation of voyeurism, activity and passivity, as well as the integument of the corpse, provide further correlations to Plath’s poem. Because of the passivity of the queen’s inner monologue, I would describe Heaney’s voice in this poem as gentle rather than “dreary” as Ramazani does. The static silence of the burial ground is emphasised by the soft (both in meaning and in sound) verbs of “seeps”, “nuzzle” and “soaked”, describing the gradual encroachment of the landscape upon the body, and also the “waiting” and “hibernation” of the corpse itself.

Heaney is almost murmuring the body to sleep, in harmony with the natural processes that take their course as the body rests in peace; the rude awakening is caused by those who discovered the body and put it on display, bringing the “queen” into the contact of the “bearings of history.” Michael R. Molino remarks of “Bog Queen,”

The words “bearings of history” express both progression, the ball

bearings upon which history rolls, as well as orientation or location, that is, to establish one's bearings. In either case, the ritualized murder of victims like the Bog Queen is the means by which the history of humankind progresses—what is called the “floe of history” in “Kinship—and the means by which humans know their place in the scheme of things. (93)

While I agree with the first part of Molino's analysis, in that history suggests both progression and orientation—and is thus inseparable from geography—I would suggest that rather than the “progression of history” depending on ritual murder, Heaney claims that through murder and burial, the victim ceases to be an actor in history. The Bog Queen has lost her bearings, her link to history, as she sinks to a static silence out of time measured and recorded by humans. As Susan Sontag says in “The Aesthetics of Silence”:

Silence is equated with arresting time (“slow time”).... As time, or history, is the medium of definite, determinate thought, the silence of eternity prepares for a thought beyond thought, which must appear from the perspective of traditional thinking and the familiar uses of the mind as no thought at all—though it may rather be the emblem of new, “difficult” thinking. (192)

This notion of “slow time” recalls the “vast, slow, coal-creating forces” that separate body and soul in *V*. These same forces silence the voice of the Bog Queen; she has lost her own particular narratives to become landscape, part of place rather than time, with only the natural passage of the days and seasons and the progression of the landscape upon her body reminders of the passage of time.



Sontag's phrase "arresting time" suggests the recurring "lay in wait" and the mention of "hibernation," a temporary suspension of animation, usually during the winter, and also suggests that this re-immersion into the flow of narratives and marked time is the bog queen's destiny. The silence that allowed her to rest in peace is shattered as she is marked by historiography first by the archaeological study of "peer's wife" Lady Moira (Vendler 45), who published her findings in the journal *Archaeologica*. Lady Moira was a member by marriage of the ruling class in Ireland at the time, with English heritage and titles; the "bog queen" has been recovered to the surface of a land stamped by foreign influence. By her inclusion in *North*, the bog queen is also caught up in the trajectories of post-colonial conflict; her retrieval is ambivalent:

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Instead of a beatific spirit of place, waiting patiently to re-join her people, the final lines of the poem sketch an excavated victim instead of a triumphant resurrection. If the "small gleams" are taken to refer to teeth, without the context of the poem this could refer to victims of physical violence or what is left after an explosion.

"Bog Queen" describes the "ball-bearings of history," and "North" describes "Memory incubating the spilled blood" (28). Commemoration in the poems of *North* is tainted by the dark, obsessive side of remembering. Molino relates this insistence on memory in Heaney's work to language and writing:

The tradition he wishes to excavate is both a product of and

perpetuated by language. Tradition, from this perspective, is a palimpsest of discursive surfaces, not something written and then erased, but something written and written again, one layer on top of the other. As each new layer of the palimpsest is written, certain portions seep through or in some way influence the layers that follow. (6)

“Bog Queen” could indeed be viewed in these terms; not only does it invoke traditions of burial elegy, but it breaks new ground in its subject, an anonymous victim from a thousand years ago. The poem can also be seen as fleshing out the archaeological reports of Lady Moira and Glob, whose text and photographs were a major source of inspiration for Heaney. Museums and archaeological reports deal in deciphering facts and labels. Museums in particular can sanitise historical evidence to make it more palatable and “family friendly,” with the result that the labels of bone and bead can be as reductive of circumstance and environment as the labels that the media assigns to factions and conflicts in Northern Ireland. However, Heaney’s constant invocation of the Viking invasions in *North* through language and imagery, as well as the reminders that the bog people were always there, *waiting* rather than dead, suggest that the past in Heaney’s bog poems is never far enough beneath the surface to become erased or sanitised. An alternative view of history besides the palimpsestic is described by Leerssen as follows:

[T]here is no chronological vacuum between then and now, between the past which happened “once upon a time”, in *illo tempore*, on the one hand, and our contemporary latter-day observation of that past on the other hand. A continuum of human interpretation, of human sense-making, [...] joins us to the past.

The *res gestae*, past events and occurrences, took on meaning even as they occurred, and from that moment onwards have been transmitted in an ongoing process of reckoning and remembering. (213)

Heaney actively resists erasure and amnesia by conflating present and past, by shrinking the distance between them both temporally by excavating the bodies and spatially by forging his landscape according to Norse words and mythologies. In terms of Harley's "cartography of silence", this practice means that the devouring depths of the bogs are given their own geography of amnesia, marked by the presence of the bodies in it; the retrieval of the bodies entails a shift to a geography of remembrance.

In "Station Island," the recovered dead have names and histories, and are present in spirit rather than flesh. Station Island is in County Donegal's Lough Derg, and as critics have remarked, it follows an ancient pilgrimage track to St Patrick's Purgatory, where rites of vigil, fasting, and physical penance are performed. Michael Thurston notes that "according to legend, (and to some medieval maps), a cave on the island is the opening to Hell" (162). Critics have observed the significance of this setting and its rituals in terms of connecting past and present, but not always the mutually shaping effect of geography, action and language, and their elegiac effect. Sailer, for example, asserts that in contrast to the bog poems, "with the poems of *North Part II* through *Station Island* (1984), the past mounts itself on the present not so much through a region's geography and the rites built up around it as through pain that arises because of the past or that arose in the past and endures, sometimes unassuaged, into the present" (55). However, it is precisely the combination of

topography and repeated ritual that creates the “continuum of human interpretation that joins us to the past” described by Leerssen and thereby the elegiac geography. Indeed, later on Sailer comments that “Heaney’s images owe their allegiance to the time/space world, a complex confluence of bird sound, human language, and history” (57). Instead of the seemingly unmarked, unstable depths of the bogs, then, in “Station Island” Heaney evokes a landscape that is explicitly “accumulative,” to use Holtorf and Williams’s term for a site inscribed with religious and cultural significance. Heaney’s re-tracing of the old pilgrim track provides an access route into collective as well as individual memory. Holtorf and William emphasise the connection between landscape, ritual and memory as follows:

For example, memories can be evoked through the enactment of both everyday practices and rituals at certain locations across the landscape and along the pathways connecting them. This kind of “looking-back” is not necessarily about accurately recalling past events as truthfully as possible: it is rather about making meaningful statements about the past in the given cultural context of a present as well as evoking aspirations for the future. (238)

The continuity of the ritual of Lough Derg suggests what Pierre Nora describes as “a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth” (8)—Heaney’s combination of invoking collective Irish memory and fiction and interrogating their narratives by inserting his contemporary perspective shows both connection with his ancestors and a reinvention of tradition. We saw this “looking back” mentioned by Holtorf and Williams in “Bog Queen,” in the viewing of past atrocities through the lens of the present. In “Station Island,” the

insistence is on making “connections” via the pathways around Lough Dergh—Heaney links landscape to language and discourse through the speaker’s communication with the ghosts who cross his path. Although Vendler suggests that compared to Heaney’s prior work, which included the “spellbound trance of isolated child-contemplation, the oracular dark of the silent Iron Age bodies, and the domestic sequestration of Glanmore have all been banished by the crowding and voluble personages of Heaney’s past” (98), I argue for a connection between the bog bodies and the “Station Island” spirits, not only in their prosopopoeic qualities but also in their physicality and place in an accumulative landscape. As much as place conjures forth ghosts, so do the ghosts mark the specificity of the place; as Bell remarks: “Ghosts are much of what makes a space a place” (815). As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Bell uses the word ghosts in the sense of a “felt presence” of something active rather than the more usual “scary spirits of the unsettled dead. ...disturbed souls who came to a bad and frequently unjust end, and who haunt our anxious memories” (815). Ghosts in both senses are evident in Heaney’s portrayal of the spirits of authors such as Patrick Kavanagh and James Joyce, as well as his murdered cousin and other victims of the Troubles.

Although the ghosts encountered and apostrophised/ventriloquized by Heaney are specific to his personal history and framework of literary and cultural influences, as well as the history of Ireland, Henry Hart points out that the spirits—or “dream-encounters” as he calls them—are also in opposition to the traditional function of the Lough Derg pilgrimage. He notes that the “frame narrative” of the pilgrimage, with its allusions to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, “creates a significant context, but remains in the background to create an ironic contrast with the unholy acts and tales of the

pilgrims” (235). Simon Sweeney, for instance, from the first sequence of the poem, is “an old Sabbath-breaker / who has been dead for years” (l.19-20)—as Hart observes, Sweeney is the “iconoclastic Celtic hero of *Buile Suibhne*,” a “guardian of the dark wood, an accuser who threatens to trap the potential pilgrim and prevent his journey towards redemption” (240).<sup>30</sup> Sweeney’s purpose is ambivalent, however—while his wild presence counters the ordered accumulations of the landscape and rituals connecting present and past, he is also a symbol of the past, and his appearance suggests a collapsing of temporal distance. Sweeney advocates freedom, straying from the inscribed paths and avoiding entrapment: “‘Stay clear of all processions!’ / Sweeney shouted at me” (l.65-66). Processions in Northern Ireland mean organised expressions of collective and exclusionary ethnosectarian identity, as well as religious ceremony—most notoriously the Fourth of July Orange Order Parades. To “stay clear of all processions”, then, means both to avoid getting in their path and avoid being caught up in strict definitions and articulations of identity. “Station Island” is a gradual progression from Sweeney’s blunt warning/command to a more sophisticated language of self-determination and individual identity. In the final sequence the speaker encounters Joyce, whose Stephen Dedalus wished to “fly by the nets” of “language, nationality, religion” (157); Joyce orders the speaker to “fill the element / with signatures on your own frequency, / echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements” (XII.43-45). This is a command to re-inscribe, to progress, and to escape the well-worn paths.

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<sup>30</sup> As Hart mentions, *Buile Suibhne* is a medieval Irish poem that Heaney began translating in 1972 (240). Sweeney recurs in several sequences and poems, such as *Sweeney Astray* (1983) and “Sweeney Redivivus” in *Station Island* (1984).

Not all the voices of the ghosts are as encouraging as Joyce to Heaney's poetic mission, however. Shaw remarks that "When the odd assortments of sound and sense in a poem send a reader in search of its silent or unspoken meanings, the interplay between what is heard and what is intimated or half said creates a polyphony that gives the poet a chance to speak with a divided mind upon a subject" (126). As with the skinhead vandal Harrison's speaker faces in *V.*, Heaney is confronted by opposition from the ghosts he encounters, and must attempt to justify the value of poetry and decide the point of memorial and posterity—the silences embedded in the landscape and that mark the spaces of loss are an essential component of this opposition. Hart describes the interplay of prosopopoeia and apostrophe as follows,

Heaney does speak, but through the mouths of antagonists. His method is excruciatingly self-reflexive. He uses words to scrutinize the duplicity of words, and like Plato accuses poetry of mendacity. While poetry pretends to remember a dismembered past, re-presenting what is absent, Heaney reminds us that its pretence can be deceptive and callous. (239)

Heaney's constant reminder of the silence around sound serves to interrogate this idea of "re-presenting what is absent." His recovery of the spirits, as with his recovery of the Bog Queen cannot be seamless—Heaney's self-reflexive method gnaws holes of doubt—silences—into the fabric of his prosopopoeic narratives. Heaney's interplay of apostrophe/prosopopoeia with interrogating antagonists is a similar set-up to that of Harrison's confrontation with the imagined skinhead in *V.* The skinhead, however, is bent on effacing the past, whereas Heaney's conversations with the dead entail an enquiry into the divisions and conflicting actions and allegiances of Ireland's cultural heroes. For

Harrison the skinhead represents a future of desacralisation, of labels and obscenity and diminishing engagement with culture and art, but for Heaney the recovery of the dead is an attempt at laying the past to rest. Whereas Harrison questions the value of poetry via the skinhead's blunt "*it's not poetry we need in this class war. / Yer've given yerself toffee, cunt. Who needs / yer fucking poufy words*" (268-270), Heaney's ghostly interlocutors veer between offering guidance and challenging the adequacy of elegy to express death and grief beyond Tennyson's "outline." The ghost of a priest, for instance, asks as follows:<sup>31</sup>

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(IV. 43-52)

Unlike the aggressive and confident skinhead in V., the spirit here "falters," expressing the doubt and lack of complete narrative in the prosopopoeia of

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<sup>31</sup> Heaney writes of the priest that "His name had lain undisturbed for years" (IV.13), perhaps alluding to "Oh Breathe Not His Name" and linking the priest to the anonymous bog people lying beneath the earth with no identifying inscription. Neil Corcoran, among others, however, has identified the figure of section IV as Terry Keenan, a "priest who had died on the foreign missions shortly after his ordination. ... This section meditates on the ratifying role of the priesthood in Irish society, and its effect on the priest himself, 'doomed to the decent thing' [IV.35]" (161).



“Station Island. The pauses in the priest’s speech marked by the ellipses suggest Shaw’s “otherwise inaudible meanings” (103) marked by punctuation—here the ellipses after “Unless...” evoke a similar limit to knowledge as the space between the parentheses in Harrison’s “The Heartless Art.” “Possessed” here is ambivalent, suggesting both the uncanny possession by an external power, and also ownership—to what sense of belonging or identity does the poet acknowledge allegiance? The “motions” here can refer both to the rites of the pilgrim passage and also to the writing of poetry and elegy, the “mechanical exercise” described by Tennyson. The pilgrimage is pointless if the “god” has withdrawn, and to borrow W. H. Auden’s “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” “poetry makes nothing happen” (II.5)—it can heal neither the divisions of Ireland or the class wars of Britain. Auden continues, however, of poetry that “it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth” (II.9-10). Both Harrison and Heaney end their elegies with an assertion of poetry as an identity as well as a statement of intent, suggesting a recovery of poetry as a force as well as a retrieval of the dead. For Harrison, *V.* takes the place of the “prayer I can’t make”, while Heaney is encouraged by the spirit of a monk in section XI: “What came to nothing could always be replenished. / ‘Read poems as prayers,’ he said,” (XI.11-12).<sup>32</sup>

Personal ghosts in “Station Island” demand reparation as well as answers. The “callousness” and potential deceptiveness of elegy is particularly evident in sequence VIII, in which Heaney displays what Ramazani describes as one of “many burdens of modern poetic mourning” which is “questioning the ethical grounds of recuperative art” (8). Is it right to attempt to bandage the “open wound” of melancholic mourning, as Ramazani describes modern forms of grief (4) with words, or right to hide death, particularly horrific and violent

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<sup>32</sup> According to Corcoran, in section XI “the ghost is a monk to whom Heaney once made his confession” (162-163).

death, behind them? Of “Station Island,” Ramazani notes: “Heaney worries that his elegy [“The Strand at Lough Beg” (1979)] may be less a commemoration than a betrayal of the dead man, a falsification of his violent death, a sanctification of sacrifice” (346). The dead man is Heaney’s second cousin Colum McCartney, murdered at a roadblock by sectarian paramilitary members; Heaney’s elegy for him, “The Strand at Lough Beg” is described by Ramazani as a “renewing pastoral elegy” which enacts “modest transcendental gestures” (346), which Heaney “recants” (346) in “Station Island”:<sup>33</sup>

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(66-74)

Heaney here accuses himself of substituting landscape for body—the body being buried in the metaphor of the empty shore. To have dealt explicitly only with absence—the silent space of the shore—and not the actual way or moment

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<sup>33</sup> For more on Heaney and the conventions of the pastoral elegy, see Twiddy’s *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*.

of death is seen as an evasion. In “Station Island,” therefore, Heaney seems to recover not only the spirit of his cousin via the communicative techniques of elegy, but also his body: “a bleeding, pale-faced boy, plastered in mud” (52). This line would seem a mere reiteration of his only description of the victim’s physicality in “The Strand at Lough Beg”: “to find you on your knees / With blood and roadside muck in your hair and eyes” (36-37), but it is in fact a restoration of the whole body—the whole boy—and his manner of death from the metonymy and allusion in the earlier elegy. The naming of things that Sailer describes as Heaney’s way of describing “the rootedness of the present in the past and the presentness of the past” (55) is therefore ambivalent for the elegiac function, as it can suggest a flinching away from the reality of death and grief that does a disservice to the deceased.

Unlike Harrison’s skinhead, who is summoned only as voice and spraycan, Heaney’s ghosts in “Station Island” are given physical bodies as well as an intertextual presence composed of memory and pastiche. Yet the brief life given to these bodies is often concomitant with their deaths; as Hart notes: “Meditating on divine emptyings and ultimate sources, Heaney sobers himself with all-too-present smells of mortality” (245). The priest is “glossy as a blackbird, / as if he had stepped from his anointing / a moment ago:” (IV.7-8); “His breath came short and shorter” (IV.22), echoing his death. In section VII the figure of an old football team-mate, identified by Corcoran as William Strathearn, recounts the story of his murder by two off-duty policemen (162), which is evident in his wounds:

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The bodies of these ghostly figures are mapped with their narratives through their clothes and wounds, connecting them to the preserved bodies excavated from the bog—indeed, this is emphasised in the line “through life and death he had hardly aged.” Heaney thus not only retrieves the lives and historical narratives of the figures that make up his imagined emotional and cultural topography, but recovers their deaths as well, inscribing them into the geographical narratives of Lough Derg. Specific features of the landscape, both physical and aural, summon the appearance of each figure. Sweeney appears via a “hurry of bell-notes” (I.1) into a cornfield. The bells are a synecdoche for the development of Christian Ireland, but they are also linked to the Sweeney chronicles; the sequence ends with “The quick bell rang again” (I.75), in this context suggesting both speed and “living” as in “the quick and the dead.”<sup>34</sup> William Carleton appears “bareheaded, big, determined / in his sure haste along the crown of the road” (II.6), and emphasises the connection between body and earth: “We are earthworms of the earth, and all that / has gone through us is what will be our trace” (II.64-65).<sup>35</sup> The priest appears as “I faced the sun, my back / to the stone pillar and the iron cross” (IV.1-2). Colum McCartney appears during a period of meditation at one of the “stone beds” of Station Island, in a rite described by Corcoran as “a self-punitive routine of prayer, fasting and

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<sup>34</sup> From *Buille Suibhne* (trans. J. G. O’Keeffe): “Now, in the place where he was, Suibhne heard the sound of Ronan’s bell as he was marking out the church, and he asked his people what it was they heard. ‘It is Ronan Finn, son of Bearach,’ said they, ‘who is marking out a church in your territory and land, and it is the sound of his bell you now hear.’ Suibhne was greatly angered and enraged, and he set out with the utmost haste to drive the cleric from the church” (3-5).

<sup>35</sup> There is an echo of Hamlet here: “Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service,—two dishes, but to one table: that’s the end” (4.3.23-25).

barefoot walking around stone circles or “beds,” thought to be the remains of ancient monastic cells” (159). McCartney imposes the geography of his own death onto the site:

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Again flesh comes into conflict with the word. Poets and poetry here are static, unable to intervene in the event or its aftermath. The dead man’s journey to (presumably) the cemetery at Bellaghy from the site of his murder disrupts the stillness induced by the meditative ritual of circling the “bed,” imprinting a specific geography of violence and loss on to the pilgrim route.

These conversations and the briefly recovered dead emerge into a cartography of silence. As Hart remarks, “Images of emptiness and absence recur and, like Eliot’s contemplative silences in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, anticipate moments of fulfilment” (245). Sweeney is a disruptive force in a “morning hush” (I.2): “*Sunday, / The silence breathed / and could not settle back*” (I.6-8; italics in original). In section III the silence is also an active element of the scene: “There was an active, wind-stilled hush” (III.6). This section, which evokes the artefact of “a toy grotto with seedling mussel shells / and cockles glued in patterns over it” (III.11-12), rather than a body, centres around an absence rather than a summoned presence, creating a site of silence rather than place of language. The trinket belonged to Agnes, Heaney’s aunt, who

died of tuberculosis before Heaney was born (*Student's Guide* 161). As Corcoran observes, "At the centre of Heaney's pilgrimage, however, there is not presence but absence, figured frequently as a 'space.' It is a 'space utterly empty, 'utterly a source, like the idea of sound' in III;" (166). He goes on to note the "final linking of the blank space with freedom comes after Heaney has been counselled by Joyce; and the whole of 'Station Island' discovers its enabling and releasing alternative in its exemplary artist figures" (166). This interplay of absence and presence is indeed particularly evident in section III:

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Images of silence, absence and emptiness do not merely "anticipate moments of fulfilment," as Hart writes, and space does not merely offer the connotations of artistic limitlessness. Silence and emptiness in the imagined geography of Lough Derg also stand for the names not breathed, for hidden and forgotten memories, for the realm of the dead and the uncharitable. If "Station Island" is considered from an elegiac perspective, it is clear that its silences and empty spaces are the forces that shape the narrative—interrupting the litany and at the centre of the passage around the "beds," reminding us of the burial and forgetting that underlie the textual recovery of the dead.

### **Silence and Ending**

Harrison uses the grave-site of his parents as a starting point for widening his scope to capitalism, class war, and global military conflicts, as well as to show the detachment of the living from the dead and by extension their pasts. The bodies in the earth are doomed to eternal silence and eventually even their traces will be lost beneath the unstable earth, even as the vision of an England of stable employment and imperial power is also lost. In contrast, Heaney focuses geographies of conflict and fear on the bog elegies, using the burial grounds to map layers of history and memory, and the reappearance of the bog bodies to show the labile, elastic relationship between the dead and the living. I examine these concerns further next.

There is a striking similarity in the topographies of *V.* and “Bog Queen”. Both elegies map unstable ground, and both surfaces can be used for fire—the coal in *V.* and the peat in *Bog Queen* are both used for giving off light and heat and thereby paradoxically maintaining life. This also means that the dead cannot rest in peace; the bodies in the bogs are discovered as peat is cut for fuel, whereas Holbeck Cemetery is precariously balanced on top of a gaping maw of disused coal-mine, literally undermining all ceremony and ritual burial. The mapping of silence and sound on these sites is predicated against this instability and uncertainty; there may be more bodies in the bog, creating sites of silence within the landscape, while the caving in of the cemetery will disrupt the muffled yells of the boyish football players as well as the shouts of the skinheads. And yet, all burial grounds are inherently unstable; the process of burying is disruptive, hence Gray’s “mouldering heaps of turf,” for instance.

Heaney’s elegies for the nameless but preserved bodies discovered in boglands in Ireland and Denmark chart sites conflicted between the demands of

the past and the present. Both anonymity and preservation are significant in the cartography of this struggle, exemplifying the empty silence where monument and inscription would be and the traces of the past that can be gleaned from the body. In contrast to *V.*, which maps a burial ground of graves marked by linguistic signs of names and occupations, under which bodies moulder and decay from flesh to bones to dust, the chemical composition of the peatbog maintains the essentially human appearance of the dead body. Reading the identity of the body, however, is only possible through examining the traces of the past residing in the body and its positioning within the earth. As such, Heaney's bog poems are extreme versions of the burial elegy, engaging with the tropes of inscription and decomposition, and the local and national dialogues embedded in the burial site without the mediation of the gravestone or the written historical record. The dead in the bogs lack even the one-line epitaph of those buried in the "guinea graves" at Holbeck Cemetery; the dialogue between Heaney and the dead is predicated on uncertainty, lacking Harrison's personal connection to the deceased, and the voice of the dead must therefore be read from the body itself. The elegiac cartography of these sites is thus coloured by what Harley calls "the silences in the historical record owing to the destruction of evidence" (85) as the bog environment has degraded the body (in some cases, for instance, the chemicals of the bog destroy bone while leaving skin). Despite these differences in the ways of reading the site—Harrison reads the stones and Heaney reads the body—the cartographies of voice and silence in the bog poems reflect Harrison's depiction of the burial site as contested space and the violence of claiming territory. Whereas Harrison accepts the impact of history and the erasure and reinscription of historiography through the graffiti on gravestones and the reshaping of the paths of the



cemetery to provide a short-cut for football hooligans instead of for contemplation and funerary rites, Heaney resists the weight of history by mapping the inevitable silences in the temporal narrative of the bodies and burial sites left by the passage of 2500 years, and counters these erasures left by time by giving a voice to the dead and linking it to patterns of speech and silence in the present. The bog poems are thus interventions in history; their cartographies etch spaces where the dialogue of voice and silence can occur.

This uncertainty regarding the placing of silence and sound as well as the lability of the landscape reflects the anxieties regarding history and memory in the work of both elegists. Sontag suggests the following purposes of silence:

Behind the appeals for silence lies the wish for a perceptual and cultural clean slate. And, in its most hortatory and ambitious version, the advocacy of silence expresses a mythic project of total liberation. What's envisaged is nothing less than the liberation of the artist from himself, of art from the particular artwork, of art from history, of spirit from matter, of the mind from its perceptual and intellectual limitation. (192)

Nevertheless, the job of the elegist comes with the imperative to speak, to mark—a clean slate is impossible. Noise and speech are a response to the silence of death, even as movement is a response to its stillness, as I discuss in the next chapter. “Hortatory” recalls the apostrophe and ceremonial speech of the elegist—and the freedom for the poet sought in “Station Island” and promised by Joyce, and the final lines of *V.* where the poet both acknowledges his identity as a poet and suggests its ultimate insignificance:

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Both Heaney and Harrison place their identities as poets, and their poetic language, in precarious topographies—above pits, in unstable boglands, amid layered and divided paths and islands. Even as silence undermines but also emphasises their language, however, perhaps it is this very awareness of the fragility and porousness of poetry, remembrance and historical and social narratives that gives their words power. As we have seen, silence in Ireland is double-edged, connoting an engagement with history by the living as well as an escape from historiography by the dead, whereas in *V*. it is impossible; the gravesite is surrounded by both textual and vocal noise. This is why geography is important for the burial elegy; amid the deafening silence and the muffling noise, it allows the charting of crumbling “fragments of prayer” in Holbeck Cemetery and the country where incendiary “tongues lie coiled” in a way that refuses to privilege either.

### 3. Geographies of Mobility and the Restless Elegy

Death, loss and motion are inextricably linked in Western funerary culture. Funeral processions (or discreet hearses for the less famous) carry the dead to their final resting places. The burial or the cremation involves moving the body or its transformation into a different state, a process often accompanied in Christian traditions by ceremony and rites such as prayer, the throwing of earth onto the casket or scattering the ashes in a significant site. Graves and memorial sites are often visited by people for whom they hold significance, an ancient rite of pilgrimage persisting in the modern world. The multiple purposes of elegy include recording the witnessing of death and bidding farewell; the geographical functions, as I argue elsewhere in this thesis, include placing the deceased within a post-death space and building landscapes of memory. In these formulations of leave-taking and return, the dead, their passage to another spiritual and physical state and their commemoration are the focal point, rather than the mourner's own physical journeys towards the body, with the body, leaving the body and returning to the site of remembrance. Before the dead can be placed and remembered, however, the elegist must confront the process of dying and the resulting loss; elegy can also be used to chart the journey of the mourner towards the deathbed, and thereby towards, away from and around absence. Elegy can therefore chart the mourner's movements, as well as their emotions and intellectualisations, into the geographies of grief. I categorise texts that locate a mobile mourner within a kinetic relationship with the deceased and their absence as "restless elegies" because their focus on the physical and imaginary movement of the mourner heightens the contrast between the living and the peaceful rest of the dead, and because they

contain—more or less successfully—the tension between the chaos of grief and the order necessary to write about it.

In this chapter I focus on mapping the movement of the elegist/mourner as a response to death in Amy Clampitt's "A Procession at Candlemas" (1983) and Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010). Both of these texts foreground the mourner's mobility—Clampitt writes of her journey along the American transcontinental highway Interstate 80 towards her mother's deathbed, while Carson's work details her brother's "vanishing" and her own process of gathering and recording memories of him, and visiting the site where his ashes were scattered. These journeys are part procession, part pilgrimage and partly an attempt to chart the gathering of traces, both personal and historical/cultural. I argue therefore that the movement of these elegies across the terrain of bereavement serves the following purposes: to map their recognition and growing understanding of absence, and to calibrate confrontation with the ultimate stillness of death into a kinetic progression that reflects tension between funereal and elegiac convention and the restlessness of grief. Although the figuring of restless elegy has accompanied the mobilities of funeral and remembrance rites since their formulation, a defining feature of the twentieth-century restless elegy is the recurrent placing of the mourner within technologies of transport. Since the proliferation of the automobile, the modern elegy has moved to the rhythms and the networks of aeroplane flight paths, highways and ocean liners rather than horse-drawn carts and marches.<sup>1</sup> "A Procession at Candlemas," for example, with its journey along a busy highway

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robert Lowell's "Sailing Home from Rapallo" (1954), in which Lowell and his mother are carried to her burial in a steamship, Sharon Olds's "The Race" in which the speaker must dash through an airport and catch a plane across a continent to reach her father's deathbed on time, and Marilyn Hacker's "Autumn 1980" in which she takes a bus from Montreal to New York towards the knowledge of her mother's death.

across the American landscape—both physical and historical—can be seen as an updated version of the funeral procession by horse-drawn cart and railroad of Abraham Lincoln's body in Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (1865).<sup>2</sup>

A common spatial positioning of deceased and mourner is on either side of a border; the deceased is placed beyond human reach into the realm of the numinous and unknowable, whether Christian or atheist.<sup>3</sup> In Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais" (1821), for instance, John Keats is placed in "that high Capital, where kingly Death / Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay" (VII.1-2). Algernon Charles Swinburne is left behind by Thomas Hardy in a "fair niche above the unslumbering sea" (1) in "A Singer Asleep" (1914). Heaney and Harrison undermine this division of mourner and dead through their poetics of burial and retrieval; "Procession" and *Nox* employ modern, networked and technological modes of mobility to engage with this elegiac convention of placement. Both texts use the framework or motif of the journey as a vehicle for travel into historical, cultural and personal pasts. *Nox* engages with the cultural elegiac imaginary and spaces for the mourner and the deceased through its form; the text is in fragments, laid out on a long strip of A5-sized paper which is folded accordion-style and placed into a box. On one side of the spread is a word in Latin from a poem by Gaius Valerius Catullus (84 BC-54BC) about travelling to a brother's funeral, followed by its translations and connotations. On the other side there are meditations (some numbered) or picture or other artefact pasted onto the paper that elaborates on or springs from the

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<sup>2</sup> For a comparison of the "imaginative centre" of Whitman and Clampitt's elegiac work, see Ramazani 322-7.

<sup>3</sup> I investigate the structure of bordering itself further in "Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy" in my discussion of "Berck-Plage" and "North Haven."

translations.<sup>4</sup> Both Clampitt and Carson invoke funerary tradition and culture to ritualise their journeys while reflecting modern travel and transport and ideas of desacralised, post-modern non-place—the tension between the inscriptive ritual and the erasure of significance contributes to the restlessness of the poems. In the introductory section to this chapter, therefore, I situate “Procession” and *Nox* into an elegiac context of mobility and restlessness, and discuss the restless elegy from a literary and geographical perspective. I contextualise my study of the restless elegy within current criticism of elegy and link the movements that define it to the “mobility turn” in human geography, which provides the analytical tools for illustrating how movements are given direction and purpose.

The mobility of the modern mourner is a lacuna in scholarship of elegy, and indeed there is little existing study of “Procession” from a geographical perspective and even less on *Nox*. While scholars such as Diana Fuss have investigated the deathbed and other sites of dying, the elegist’s journeys towards, around and away from these spaces have not been investigated in any depth.<sup>5</sup> Peter Sacks notes the ritual significance of the funeral procession, and observes that “The emphasis on the drama, or ‘doing’ of the elegy is thus part of the crucial self-privileging of the survivors, as well as a way of keeping them in motion, ensuring a sense of progress and regress, of traversing some distance” (19). Cavitch and Angela Leighton both briefly discuss elegy in terms that evoke restlessness. Max Cavitch opens *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning From the Puritans to Whitman* (2007) with the following definition of elegy: “Elegies are poems about being left behind” (1), a statement inflected by a sense of abandonment, suggesting the movement of the dead and the stillness

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<sup>4</sup> Because *Nox* has no page numbers, I use the Latin word on the left spread to locate the texts I quote and discuss.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Diana Fuss’s “Last Words” (2009).

of the bereaved. He continues: “Ranging from dull repositories of borrowed affect to dynamic traces of the struggle to fix ineffable loss, they measure out the distance between emotion and convention, between local disruptions of bereavement and long traditions of resignation” (1). The idea of “dynamic traces” is certainly relevant to my study, as is the distinction between emotion and convention—traces being significant both as markers of motion and as vestiges of the deceased, while tension between grief and convention, I will demonstrate, is expressed through restlessness in form as well as content, particularly in the case of *Nox*. However, Cavitch’s summary emphasises the elegy as the finished product of grief rather than its process, which is what I hope to show here. For Cavitch, elegy “bears traces” rather than inscribing them, while they “measure out distance” suggesting milestones rather than journeys.

Considering the abundance of movement by both mourner and deceased in “Procession,” *Nox* and other modern elegies, it seems that it is the elegist who is striving to leave the dead behind rather than the other way around. I argue that regarding modern elegy in particular, Cavitch’s definition must be complicated to encompass its ambiguities and multiple trajectories—the “plural and paradoxical maps” that contain “space in its mobile heterogeneity” (*Geocriticism* 141). Indeed, it sometimes seems that modern elegists are particularly restless, seeking to both find and escape their peacefully resting dead. The study of their movement, therefore, interrogates existing notions of elegy and the locating and distancing of the survivor in relation to the dead and the kinetic link between them, of spaces and places of mourning and loss created by the physical as well as the psychological rites of passage, and, it would quite surprisingly seem, this study must include the examination of

traditional forms of funerary movement that surface in modern and post-modern eras.

Leighton discusses movement and dynamism in terms of form rather than trope, also mentioning the convention/grief struggle:

Form, then, develops an extra resonance in elegy. On the one hand it points to the mere formalities of poetry in the face of death or atrocity. Whether as song or meditation, the poem is a useless formula, thrown by forms, by presences which, even without any supernatural intention, hover in the poem, ghosting its pronouns, ghosting even so dead a noun as “the dead”. The question of where the dead are—in the mind, in the past, the landscape or the grave—leaves them rattling around the poem’s pod, never quite “subdued”. They move there, verbally shifting between their lives and their deaths, in a space that holds them verbally, but cannot “grasp” them. (227)

Leighton’s awareness of the potential inadequacy of elegy “in the face of death or atrocity” echoes the concerns of critics Ramazani and Gilbert, and is also evident in Heaney’s dialogue with Colum McCartney in “Station Island,” while her comment on “form” and “formality” echoes Tennyson’s doubts about fitting “large grief” into an “outline.” Leighton does not place the dead within an imagined geography; she views the dead as trapped yet elusive within the form of the poem. This sense of entrapment is particularly appropriate for *Nox*, which literalises its containing element in the grey epitaph-like box that holds the long strip of paper upon which the texts of the elegy are written. I argue that the restless elegist remains equally “unsubdued” within the “poem’s pod”— the



positioning that defines the relationship between the elegist and the dead is fluid, flexible and mobile, as we have seen in the patterns of burial and recovery in the work of Tony Harrison and Seamus Heaney.

In modern elegy, this mobility is invoked through technology and the creation of fluid and layered spaces, and fragmented spaces in conflict with each other, as well as through description of movement itself. The “mobility turn”, a term used by geographer Tim Cresswell in 2006 (ix) and sociologist John Urry in 2007 (6), based on the “structure of feeling of mobility” noted by geographer Nigel Thrift in 1994 (195) in sociology and human geography offers a language and framework for analysing late-twentieth century and early-twenty-first century restless elegy.<sup>6</sup> While the “spatial turn” of the second half of the twentieth-century has increased insight into the role of the geography in evolving societies, cultures and texts, the “mobility turn” focuses this geographical energy on movement and its effects on place, and by extension its interaction with societies. Scholars of the “mobility turn” thus build on the conceptualizations of space and time of the “spatial turn.”<sup>7</sup> While Urry, Cresswell and Thrift engage with each other’s work to a great extent, and are influential in their own fields, I pause here to briefly sketch the background and theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> Geographer Tim Cresswell mentions “an important cross-disciplinary research agenda referred to as the mobility turn and the new mobilities paradigm” (ix). Sociologist John Urry describes a “mobility turn” dating from the mid-1990s, “spreading in and through the social sciences, mobilizing analyses that have been historically static, fixed and concerned with predominantly a-spatial ‘social structures’” (6). The goals of Urry’s own research, for example, include “to develop through appropriate metaphors a sociology which focuses upon movement, mobility and contingent ordering, rather than upon stasis, structure and social order” (9). Thrift borrows Raymond Williams’s terminology here, interpreting “structure of feeling” to involve the “continual mobility of modern cultural processes” (193)—instead of a “fixed form,” Thrift argues that there are “traces, and traces of traces” (193).

<sup>7</sup> Urry summarises this connection between the “spatial turn” and the “mobility turn” as follows: “In the 1980s there was a ‘spatial turn’ in the social sciences. This involved theory and research that demonstrated that social relations are spatially organized and such spatial structuring makes a significant difference to social relations [...] Now space is increasingly viewed as made up of moving elements involving various ‘power-geometries’. Most relevant here is the way that spaces are viewed as comprised of various materials, of objects and environments, that are intermittently in motion” (34). Urry’s *Mobilities* draws on work by Tim Cresswell and Doreen Massey discussed elsewhere in this chapter and thesis respectively.

framework for the recent work of all of these scholars. Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) depicts a shift in perspective from a fixed and empty "strictly geometrical space" (1) to "spatial practice", the processes involved in constructing space as a social product (3) that intersects with physical and mental space.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the connection between movement and space, Lefebvre suggests "Let everyone look at the space around them. What do they see? Do they see time? They live time, after all; they are *in* time. Yet all anyone sees is movements" (95). Lefebvre argues that the passage of time and the creation of space have become abstracted. This perception of the world through its own movement and the movement it contains, and the significance of the social dimension of space, is evident in Cresswell's emphasis on mobility in space-production, for example:

Clearly this process of the social production of abstract time and space has implications for the understanding of movement and mobility. Mobility, as a social product, does not exist in an abstract world of absolute time and space, but is a meaningful world of social space and social time. Mobility is also part of the process of the social production of time and space. (5)

In the poems I discuss in this chapter, mobility is socially produced in the sense that its purposes—the ritual of being present at the deathbed of a close relative, or visiting a grave of personal or cultural significance—are cultural constructs, while the mobile acts themselves are the products of social relationships.

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<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre defines social space as follows: "Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73).

The work of anthropologists, philosophers and sociologists with an interest in the spatial has evolved alongside and influenced the geographers of the “mobility turn” and literary critics such as Bonnie Costello and Ian Davidson.<sup>9</sup> Cresswell, Thrift and Urry are influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s ideas of the rhizome, the nomad, space as a mutating network, as they challenge conceptualisations of space as a fixed, bordered site, and Marc Augé’s envisioning of the non-place as an opposition to “anthropological place,” a centre of meaning.<sup>10</sup> The flexible and dynamic nature of the rhizome creates a space of non-linear, multiple, and constant motions with infinite trajectories and possibilities: “The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture,

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<sup>9</sup> See Bonnie Costello’s *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry* (2003) and Ian Davidson’s *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Augé (1990) contrasts place and non-place in what he calls the era of supermodernity: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places [...] Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified—with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance—by totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called ‘means of transport’ (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and the railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself” (63-64). He goes on to emphasise the role of mobility in the construction of non-places: “The traveller’s space may thus be the archetype of ‘nonplace’ (70). While the non-place can be read in the motorway rest stops in “A Procession at Candlemas,” it is eerily predicted in much of Clappitt’s poetry that mourns the lack of specificity and significance; “Westward”, for instance, evokes these ideas: “Distance is dead. At Gatwick, at Heathrow / the loud spoor, the grinding tremor, / manglings, accelerated trade routes / in reverse: the flyblown exotic place, / the heathen shrine exposed” (1-5). See “Chapter 5: Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy” for Yi-Fu Tuan’s distinction between space as emptiness and place as a centre of value (1974). Tuan’s formulation is a similar binary to that of Augé’s place/non-place, but it works the opposite way around—Tuan sees place as constructed out of space; space which acquires meaning and value becomes place. Augé, on the other hand, sees non-place as a site stripped of meaning and value, the result of a place becoming supermodernised and losing its specific character. Elizabeth Bishop, for instance, as a modern elegist uses elegy to chart the space of the unknown, recognizing the unstable and fragmented nature of both landscape and our responses to death, and incorporating these instabilities into the elegiac cartography as a coping mechanism, creating place out of space. Clappitt and Carson, however, as elegists working within (and sometimes over-writing) a post-modern cultural landscape, use elegy to resuscitate the non-place through the movement of their literal, physical travel towards a site of death, restoring specific histories to the geography of the unknown and meaning to their surroundings via their ritualised mobility. I return to this idea in the conclusion to this chapter.

offshoots” (23-24).<sup>11</sup> The nomad has points of intersection with the rhizome, and his or her existence is predicated on liminality and mobility:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, [...]. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*. Even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them. (419)<sup>12</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari’s constructions of the rhizome and the nomad have a political and economic dimension in terms of nation-state power struggles and late-twentieth-century capitalism, as does the non-place, because mobility is deeply affected by and implicated in these post-modern destabilisations of the way space is constructed and constricted, rhizomes, nomadism and non-places

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<sup>11</sup> Some of the characteristics that Deleuze and Guattari assign to the rhizome are as follows: “Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. [...] It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it overflows. [...] Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. [...] The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory” (23).

<sup>12</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of the nomad and the rhizome are invoked in Cresswell’s discussion of “mobility as becoming”—mobility as empowering, enabling a liminal existence between the lines of “controlled flows” dictated by the state. See Cresswell 47-50.

are significant for this chapter.<sup>13</sup> In particular, rhizomes, nomadism and non-places are recurring themes in the poems discussed here—they can be read into the tension between form and content within “A Procession at Candlemas” and in the fragmented spaces of memory in *Nox*, for instance, as well as forming part of the intellectual background from which Cresswell, Thrift and Urry, and other geographers and critics mentioned in this chapter and thesis, develop their conclusions.

Thrift’s formulation of the “emergent structure of feeling that is mobility” (193) envisions a dramatic shift in the connection between humans and technologies, particularly electricity and the internal combustion engine:

I want to argue that, beginning in the 1960s in most western countries, it becomes possible to begin to talk about a new synthesis of speed, light and power (which I have called mobility) resulting from the growth of what can be called “active” machinery. (212)

This “speed, light and power” is evident in the headlights and traffic of “Procession” and the photography—light writing—and travels implied in *Nox*. Mobility serves as both object of study and metaphor for Cresswell, Urry and Thrift, who interpret it in slightly different but complementary ways. While all three view place as being in a state of perpetual motion, Cresswell views mobility as a framework for modern living, Urry distinguishes between the mobilities of travel and movement, and Thrift emphasises the significance of

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<sup>13</sup> Cresswell notes the effect of these influences on the mobility turn as follows: “Most fundamental, perhaps, has been the willing embrace of meta-philosophies ranging from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of bodily perception to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics and nomadology. Mobility has become the ironic foundation for anti-essentialism, anti-foundationalism and anti-representationalism. While place, territory, and landscape all implied at least a degree of permanence and flexibility, mobility seems to offer the potential of a radical break from a sedentarist metaphysics” (46).

technology and the “speed, power and light” it generates to inform and enable modern mobilities. Mobility as described by these scholars is significant for elegy not only as a reflection of movement as a response to death, but also because of the negotiation of absence and presence inherent to movement.

Mobility as a “synthesis of speed, light and power,” is evident in twentieth-century elegy, and distinguishes the modern restless elegy from the restlessness of the mourner in the pre-World War I era, particularly in England. There is a distinction between movement, in the sense of the “displacement of an object from A to B, involv[ing] a passage of time and, simultaneously, a traversal of space” (Cresswell 4) and modern mobility.<sup>14</sup> Hardy’s *Poems of 1912-13*, for example, show traits of the restless elegy in their quest for the dead and revisiting scenes of significance:<sup>15</sup>

Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;  
 Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you;  
 What have you now found to say of our past—  
 Viewed across the dark space wherein I have lacked you? (9-12)

Here the speaker hunts for answers and resolution across both history and geography, travelling through a site of absence—the “dark space”— in order to confront his dead wife. The speaker’s mobility echoes his figuring of his wife as a ghost whose call he must “frailly follow” (24). While I describe Hardy’s *Poems*

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<sup>14</sup> Cresswell distinguishes between movement and mobility as follows: “We can think of movement, then, as the dynamic equivalent of location in abstract space—contentless, apparently natural, and devoid of meaning, history and ideology. . . . If movement is the dynamic equivalent of location, then mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place. . . . A place is a center of meaning—we become attached to it, we fight over it and exclude people from it—we experience it. The same cannot be said of location” (3). I make a distinction between movement and modern mobility, suggested by Thrift’s trio of “speed, light and power” rather than just movement and mobility.

<sup>15</sup> In “An Alternative to the Architectural Elegy: Hardy’s Unhoused *Poems of 1912-1913*” (2012), Louisa Hall describes *Poems of 1912-13* as “unhoused,” noting that Hardy almost always places Emma out of doors, free within the landscape and among the elements, as opposed to within a confining elegiac architecture. Her focus, however, is on the restlessness of the dead rather than the elegist.

as “restless,” their figuring of this restlessness belongs to the early twentieth century, the pre-First World War tradition. The “dead scenes” through which the speaker has journeyed, for instance, are decorated with the pastoral imagery of caves and waterfalls, creating a temporary return to Arcadia rather than confronting the post-Industrial Revolution Victorian era and the emergence of the modern world of transport technologies. In another poem from the sequence, although roads are mentioned, the speaker’s travel is carried out in traditional rural vehicles, intensifying the sense of returning to the past: “As I drive to the junction of lane and highway, / And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette, / I look behind at the fading byway,” (“At Castle Boterel” 1-3). Hardy’s *Poems* do, however, gesture at features that evolve during the century into the paved highway of Interstate 80 in Clampitt’s “Procession” and the networks of transport and travel in *Nox*. These include a preoccupation with roads and routes; Hardy’s “junction of lane and highway” foreshadows the Interstate 80 of Clampitt’s “Procession,” which is composed not only of paved highway but also the vehicles which move along it, which in turn echo the paths taken by migratory animals and people. In *Nox* the translations for “aequora” evoke “dead spaces” and movement across them: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons”

Traces of a life, markers of character, memory, biography and history (both personal and collective/contextual) and of emotional connection inflect the geographical imagination. The restless elegy tracks down these traces and uses them to navigate the geographies of grief. Hardy’s emphasis on following and hunting suggests an awareness of this process, as does his epigraph for *Poems*, “Veteris vestigia flammae.” Cavitch calls traces “dynamic”—I suggest that this dynamism comes from the fact that traces are not merely static

landmarks left in the wake of a life to be visited by the elegist or mourner, but active connections between present and past and encapsulations of action as well as thought. Traces are also significant in place-creation; Thrift writes of modernity: “What is place in this new ‘in-between’ world? The short answer is—compromised: permanently in a state of enunciation, between addresses, always deferred. Places are ‘stages of intensity’, traces of movement, speed and circulation. . . . No configuration of space-time can be seen as bounded” (222-3). Place here is not only in constant flux and recalibration but also constantly under siege by mobilities and marked by their traces. Place as a fluid and fragmented state that both shapes and is shaped by mobilities differs to some extent from place discussed in other chapters in this thesis, although the haunted pilgrim track of “Station Island” bears similarities to the highway of “Procession at Candlemas.” Heaney’s questioning, restless dead challenge the sanctity of the pilgrim route, however, while Clampitt attempts to engrave ritual and memory on the highway. The quest to recover the dead from spaces of emptiness and silence is evident in both “Procession” and *Nox*; both texts investigate the erasure of sites of memory, and use mobility as an inscriptive ritual of retrieval and of re-inserting the forgotten into the narrative of history by marking their geographies. The shifts and re-ordering of space in “Procession” and *Nox* is echoed in the geographies of bordering and delineation in “The ‘Chance of Space’ and the Architectural Elegy” and “Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy.” In *Birthday Letters* and *Elegies*, and in “North Haven” and “Berck-Plage,” the geographical imagination is geared towards placing the dead and their memory. Boundaries are drawn; even if they shift as in “North Haven”, their lability becomes part of the map, and even if the dead refuse to stay in their designated zone, as in “Berck-Plage”, they are still assigned a border to



cross. Addresses and structures separate the significant from the commonplace and mark sites of memory in “18 Rugby Street” and Dunn’s elegies. The living are situated in relation to these dead, distanced or immersed by perspective, and divided by walls. In restless elegy, however, the geographies are of movements in relation to each other; the dead may be still, or restless (as in “Berck-Plage”), or going in an opposite direction, but the living must always move.

The following sections examine mobility as a response to death, as a way of coming to terms with the stillness and absence of death by mapping the space around it with the marks left by movement. I begin with “A Procession at Candlemas,” where I consider the implications of the route taken, the pauses along the way, and Clampitt’s dictum that “Nothing stays put” in terms of Thrift, Cresswell and Urry’s characterisations of modern mobilities and the restless elegy. I then move on to Carson’s *Nox*, where I examine the tensions of form and content and the movements between past and present through translation, as well as Carson’s own journey to her brother’s funeral rites. I conclude by discussing “A Procession at Candlemas” and *Nox* with reference to conventional elegiac tropes.

### **“Every Trek Becomes a Funeral Procession:” Amy Clampitt’s Restless Elegy**

Candlemas is the “feast of the purification of the Virgin Mary (or presentation of Christ in the Temple) celebrated with a great display of candles” (*OED*). In “A Procession at Candlemas,” Amy Clampitt makes the connection between movement and loss explicit, stating “Every trek becomes a funeral procession” (1.11). This connection between mourning and mobility is inherent to funerary

tradition and often to elegy; procession, pilgrimage, and presence at the deathbed or the funeral rites continue as a ritualized response to loss in twentieth-century elegy, while other forms of mobility—tourism, nomadism, and migration, to name but a few—become subsumed into these conventional journeys of grief. Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” is an example of the elegiac navigation between the stillness of death and the movement of the living, and the oppositions between restlessness and stability in both the mourner’s journey and the landscape through which she travels. Through the transition from “trek” into “procession”, and the shaping of the landscape around this procession, “Procession” serves as a locus for understanding modern elegy and its positioning of both death and the mourner, as well as articulating questions of form in movement and landscape. I consider a figuring of death and dying not as crossing a bar, but rather as a state of stillness amid a perpetual moving on, focusing on the movement of the mourner/elegist/survivor as a response to the separation of death and the elegy as an attempt to navigate the instabilities in landscape that result.

As ecocritic Robert Boschman has pointed out, Candlemas or February the 2nd is not only the “feast of the purification of the Virgin Mary celebrated with a great display of candles” but the pagan festival Imbolc midway between winter solstice and spring equinox, thus evoking rites of passage and change itself: “Hence becoming, evolving, succession, memory, and amnesia are all built into Candlemas” (96). This temporal liminality observed by Boschman in the poem is echoed in the spatial layering of the road. “Change” and “becoming” are reflected in the poem’s mobilities; geographer Tim Cresswell describes “mobility as becoming” (47):

Within nomadic metaphysics, mobility is linked to a world of

practice, of anti-essentialism, anti-foundationalism, and resistance to established forms of ordering and discipline. [...] Linking all of these, perhaps, is the idea that by focusing on mobility, flux, flow, and dynamism we can emphasize the importance of becoming at the expense of the already achieved—the stable and static. (47)

The “procession” is a westward “trek”, a term with connotations of migration by wagon and “considerable physical effort” (*OED*), taken by the speaker along Route 80 in a bus towards her mother’s deathbed. While the “procession” is an ordered, ritualised, often hierarchically organised movement, by linking it to “trek” Clampitt suggests a tension between ordered and directed mobility and a more nomadic, undisciplined movement. This in turn evokes a tension between the ritualised forms and conventions of mourning and the potentially chaotic and unbridled emotion of grief; the contrast between Tennyson’s “outline” of words and the “larger grief” they contain. An eventual succumbing to the need for ritual, suggesting a distance traversed from grief, is evident as “Sooner or later, every trek becomes a funeral procession” (4-5); it is significant that the journey here is westwards, both evoking the trajectory of American pioneers and directed towards the setting sun, a classic image in elegy.

“Mobility as becoming” occurs when the vehicles shift from the mundane to the numinous:

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The journey maps a path through a fluctuating landscape. Boschmann has noted the hints of a Heraclitean worldview in its contours: "Never the same river / drowns the unalterable doorsill" (2.6-7); I would emphasise that the threshold between life and death is the only still, unchangeable structure in the poem. The poem's topography is etched with traces of the past; "Procession" is one of the first poems to showcase Clampitt's frequently expressed philosophy that "Nothing stays put. The world is a wheel. / All that we know, that we're / made of, is motion" ("Nothing Stays Put 43-45).<sup>16</sup> Comprising 48 stanzas of triplets, divided into two parts of equal lengths, the poem's layout on the page suggests stepping-stones, the space between each stanza an absence frequently bridged by enjambment:

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(2.39-44)

Although Boschman links the "dead" and "dormant" landscape with the industrial ravages of modernity, the corn-stubble also evokes Persephone and traditional elegiac rebirth, countering the "cadaverous" windmills. The "black

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<sup>16</sup> "Nothing Stays Put" is dedicated "In Memory of Father Flye, 1884-1985"; the link between death and mobility is also seen here.

creeks” with their violent action inscribe both landscape and the blank surface of the page. Inanimate features of the landscape are made dynamic here, each element interacting with the others.

The dominant themes of movement and travel (as funeral procession, migration, wandering, tourism), concern with origins and directions, and preoccupation with the nature of stability and flux both in people and topography in Clampitt’s work have not passed unnoticed by critics. Bonnie Costello, for instance, says of Clampitt’s relationship with the natural environment and creation of labile landscapes: “Against an ethos that stresses the value of deep roots and origins, she presents the virtues of rhizomatic connections, ad hoc maneuvers, and entrepreneurial actions. Her geographic restlessness becomes a model for the pulsive energy she finds in herself and nature” (17). Referring to Clampitt as a “nomad exquisite,” Costello hints at a link between restlessness and modernity:<sup>17</sup>

A mobile self is the consequence of the superfluity of human forms and the dynamism of the physical world. Poets after the modern period began to explore mobile identity as an embodiment, not just a consequence, of dynamic landscape. [...] Clampitt’s nomad imitates the restlessness of nature, relinquishing the taproot of an essential selfhood for the sporadic and rhizomatic movement of a wandering soul.” (117)

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<sup>17</sup> James Longenbach not only suggests that Clampitt saw herself as a “kind of nomad” (104) but relates this quality to Clampitt’s family background, with a focus on landscape: “Before he settled into landowning and surveying, Clampitt’s grandfather was a restless nomad, moving uneasily between Iowa, the Dakotas, and California, where he lived for two years before he thought to stand before the Pacific Ocean. By identifying with this aspect of her heritage, Clampitt can also identify with the drifters, nomads and aborigines who populate the various landscapes of her poem: it is a heritage of healthy discomfort with the land, not of dominance easily achieved” (119).

Costello's focus seems to be on how the shifting landscape and experience of nature create the nomad, rather than how movement creates landscape. Her language of rhizomes and nomadism hints at the formulations of Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>18</sup> Costello's focus is on landscape rather than geography, however, by which I mean that I view landscape as one feature of a geography, which also includes mobilities across the landscape, the way the landscape is perceived and used, and linked to other places. This focus on landscape invites a reading of Clampitt's restlessness that builds on Costello's work within the context of the recent "mobilities turn" in human and cultural geography, a context that provides concepts and terminology for the examination of the anxieties and traumas as well as the liberation inherent to mobility and its history. This recognition of collective traumas resonating in systems of travel and transport is exemplified in "Procession" by the inclusion in the elegiac narrative of the losses faced—and left behind—by the westward forced migrations of Native American tribes.<sup>19</sup> Increased mobility has not always meant increased freedom; in "Procession" on an individual level the movement of the mourner is kept on a linear path with a specific destination, meaning that the mourner is not physically a nomad in the Deleuzian sense. However, in emotional and psychological terms, the mourner is between, *intermezzo*, loss and coming to terms with it; "the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (419), and this has a destabilising effect both on linear time and space around the route.

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<sup>18</sup> Costello comments in a footnote to her chapter on Clampitt: "Landscape is, to use Deleuze's concept, the visual expression of a territorialized site. In these terms the poets in my study actively deterritorialize, not to disclose some truth behind prior arrangements, but to keep culture's process or arrangement and rearrangement fluent. While this theoretical and ideological use of the term "nomad" has rich implications for poetry in the post-modern era, it is not my emphasis here" (206).

<sup>19</sup> In poems such as "The Burning Child," Clampitt contrasts the freedom of her own ancestors to wander and settle where they chose with the "cattle cars, / the shunted parceling—links, rechts—/ in a blaspheming parody of judgement" (6-9) that took Jews and other peoples perceived as undesirable or hostile to death camps in Nazi Germany.

While mobility and death, both in terms of cause and response, are crucially paired in Clampitt's geographies, so too are the attendant couplings of mobility and absence and mobility and loss. Costello's analysis of "Procession" and other elegy by Clampitt is very brief, but she contrasts movement and space in modern and traditional elegy, suggesting that landscape is dynamic while space is permanent.

In traditional pastoral elegy the landscape is both a responsive site in which the poet enacts his grief, and a counterpoint to loss, a space of memorial permanence and of nature's regenerative powers. Clampitt's elegies tend to emphasize movement across a landscape, not only the traditional processional movement of the bereaved, as in "A Procession at Candlemas," but the inevitable drift and dissemination of the earthly which death confirms rather than arrests. (135)

Costello views mobile death and bereavement in "Procession" as a continuation of general motion in life; her use of the words "drift" and "dissemination," as well as her previous mention of "wandering," suggest randomness, but particularly in "Procession" direction as well as formality are embedded in the title; the "trek" becomes a funeral procession. Costello also distinguishes between the "space of memorial permanence" and the restless sensibility: "Clampitt's most consistent critique of the elegiac sense of place (so incongruous with the nomadic impulse) occurs in a series of meditations of vacant lots" (136) which are "layering of nostalgias in which imagination literally writes value onto the blank landscape" (136). This layering is apparent in "Procession," where history and myth are mapped along the waysides of Route 80 in the figuring of elegiac impulses, but these milestones of narrative do not contradict the "nomadic

impulse” or the impulse towards movement in general. The static landmarks of the fuel pumps become Stonehenge, for instance, connoting permanence, memorial and ritual. Nevertheless, they retain their function as feeding the flow of transport.

The impulse for movement is frequently implicated in the elegiac spaces of Clampitt’s work, and vice-versa. Indeed, the line “Sooner or later / Every trek becomes a funeral procession” (4-5) suggests not only that every journey is a leaving-behind of both spaces and pasts, but also a travel towards a funeral. In terms of the “becoming of mobility,” this line that formalises and ritualises loss is carried within the traveller as well as mapped along the route behind and ahead, illustrated through the elegy’s navigation of absences:

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(1.18-20.54-60)

Thrift argues that “The study of the modern world is a study of velocities and vectors. Rather than comparing mobility to place, mobilities are placed in relation to each other” (qtd. in Cresswell 47). This sense of relational mobilities occurs in the stanzas above, where the journey is westward; forced displacements of Native Americans in the nineteenth century are related to the speaker’s journey towards loss. The journey-descriptor “trek” here serves as a



connector, as does the fact that the Native Americans also make this trek “only once”; as Ramazani points out, the speaker’s journey is “sadly one-directional” (323). Markers of absence in these lines include the repeated negations of “without” and “nowhere,” ironically echoed with the homonym “wear” in the rest of the line, reinforcing the blankness of the space. The “nowhere oasis” of the rest stop recalls a provincial roadside version of the non-places of supermodernity, as it is a place that travellers pass through but do not live in. The impulses of supermodernity towards reductiveness and homogeneity are echoed in the built spaces of the rest stop.<sup>20</sup> One of the most ancient landmarks of the world associated with mythology and ritual is recreated and desacralized as one of the most common signifiers of modern travel, globalisation and exploitation. One of the indigenous animals of the North American continent becomes a bus, while landscape and geography are re-created in miniature consumable form:

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(1.43-48)

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<sup>20</sup> Augé describes mentions the naming of rest stops on autoroutes as an attribute of travel in supermodernity, suggesting that like airports and other nodes of travel, these are also non-places: “Words and images in transit through non-places can take root in the—still diverse—places where people still try to construct part of their daily life. Conversely, it may happen that the non-place borrows its words from the soil, something seen in autoroutes where the ‘rest areas’ —the term area being truly the most neutral possible, the antithesis of place—are sometimes named after some particular and mysterious attribute of the surrounding land: *aire du Hiboux...*” (88). Augé points out that “Certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather, imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés” (77).

“Fabricated” here combines the definitions of “manufacture” and “make up” and forge. Clampitt’s question strikes at the heart of map-making and myth-making, highlighting the subjective, fragile and ephemeral nature of both end-products. Clampitt’s poem is from 1983, predating Augé’s work by a decade, but the poem is strikingly prescient—the only trace of the Native Americans who once lived on the site is through the name “Indian Meadows.”<sup>21</sup> A cursory Google search shows that today Indian Meadows Rest Stop Service Plaza in West Unity, Ohio (along Interstate 80) has petrol pumps and American flags on the outside, and a Starbucks café on the inside, all traces of its history buried.<sup>22</sup> By emphasising the artificiality of the site and interrogating its history—and by extension what Boschman calls the “revised history” of America—Clampitt restores significance and particularity, recapturing a place from a site of “non-place.”

As a site of erasure, “Indian Meadows” acts as a signifier for a loss and substitution of identity in both land and people, while as a place-name within the cartography of the poem it serves as a marker for the mapping of the left behind and the leaving behind.<sup>23</sup> In his examination of landscapes of violence and tragedy in America, geographer Kenneth Foote notes that memorialising sites of tragedy and violence to do with minority peoples such as African Americans and

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<sup>21</sup> The dilution of meaning in historical sites and engagement with monument and memory are recurring themes in Clampitt’s work; in “Berceuse”, for instance she notes “and sleep, now the fires of Auschwitz / are all out, and tourists go there” (4-5), continuing that “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons (11-12). “Berceuse” means lullaby; the meaning is double-edged as although it is safe to sleep now that the death camp has lost its original purpose and become a museum, this sleep also means a lack of vigilance against the recurrence of the Holocaust, leading to an eventual apocalypse.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.yelp.com/biz/indian-meadow-service-plaza-west-unity>, for instance, for pictures.

<sup>23</sup> Critic J.D. McClatchy points out “[Clampitt’s] religious temperament, which seeks both to accommodate the world and transcend it, is even more strongly evident in these early poems, and focused here by the subject that has consistently animated her work: death. Because of this obsession—the fact and the idea of death, she is an obliquely “political” poet. If she deploys Greek mythology here, she also visits Attica prison. Her literary cast of mind never blinds her to Vietnam, or South Africa, or welfare hearings. But politics is only a trope for her larger sense that “nothing in the world is safely kept” (312).

Native Americans is often an issue that involves multiple contradictory narratives.<sup>24</sup> Conflicts of interest between established “local, regional, and national historical traditions” (293) and those advocates attempting to challenge and revise heroic narratives mean that sites significant to the “defeated” are often allowed to fade out of view. As Foote says of sites such as the Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee Massacres,

America’s white majority has had two centuries to develop and mark its myth of origins in the landscape. Its point of view has been etched into almost all historical memorials and markers at the local, state, regional and national levels. If whites “won,” the markers celebrate their heroism; if they “lost,” tribute is paid to their pioneer spirit of fortitude and endurance. (322)

The most visible and officially sanctioned monuments, therefore, have been built as markers of a narrative of domination and expansion. Counters to this narrative, or reminders of the cost and violence of practices such as forced migration, remain invisible; as Foote points out, “The invisibility of so many events of tragedy and violence seems to indicate a tolerance or acceptance of such events as fundamental elements of American life. These events are so common and so ordinary they go unremarked—and unmarked” (294). In the late twentieth century, several movements of social change have attempted to revise monumentalism in America to create a version of history that is more inclusive of its contradictions and conflicts rather than exclusive and divisive, to inscribe the narratives of the concentration camps for Japanese Americans,

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<sup>24</sup> Foote loosely divides the processes of constructing memorial sites and assigning significance to landscapes into four categories: sanctification (associated with heroic narratives), designation (the simple marking of a site), rectification (“removing the signs of violence and tragedy and returning a site to use, implying no lasting positive or negative meaning”) and obliteration (related to “particularly shameful events”) (7-8). With its multiple erasures, “Indian Meadows” in “A Procession at Candlemas” could be considered a “rectified site,” all historical connotations stripped of significance or remade into generic gestures towards a faded past.

Civil war prison camps and sites important to the Civil Rights Movement, and the battles of Little Bighorn and Wounded Knee into the national landscape and thereby the national history (Foote 294-327). “A Procession at Candlemas” can be read as part of a similar agenda of re-evaluation. By pausing the ceremonial movement of the procession at “Indian Meadows,” and thereby invoking the tragedies of Native American history, as well as commenting on the invisibility and re-inscription of this history, Clampitt’s procession assigns an inclusive elegiac sensibility and specificity to sites of loss. As “bad news is what you travel with”, when the procession moves on she carries these dead with her. Later she mourns soldiers dead in the service of their country at Arlington cemetery, although the military associations imply the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia rather than the Arlington Cemetery in Elmhurst, Illinois along Interstate 80. By conflating these cemeteries, and dislocating the Arlington National Cemetery, Clampitt links all the dead in America—and makes all America complicit in the deaths of the soldiers. However, if the replication and dissemination of Arlington cemeteries is regarded in the same light as the spread of Starbucks cafés, the creation of non-places, we see ambivalence in the geography and iconography of American nationhood and tradition—the sites significant to the dominant culture can also lose significance and individuality. The route the procession takes thereby brings ambivalent meaning to the geography of American nationhood and tradition by bringing past injustices into sharp focus, and restoring their visibility, but warning of the continuation and spread of this erasure.

Elegiac mobility is barely touched upon by Sacks, Jahan Ramazani and Celeste Schenck, in whose critiques the journey of “Procession at Candlemas” becomes subsumed by its destination—the idea of the mother’s body as both

destination and origin causes critics to assign a feminist interpretation to the “Procession.” Although Sacks comments that “The journey itself resembles the ritual elegiac descent, a painful entry into the dark, self-limiting state of disability that precedes any consoling revelation” (320), his focus is on the implications of the mother figure, suggesting both a resistance to “traditional elegies” that “perform a multiple exclusion or occlusion of figures representing the mother” and a “potentially consoling association between the mother and the divine figure” (323). Schenck similarly suggests a counter to masculine elegies dominated by the Freud-inspired model of poetic inheritance: “Not the least of Clampitt’s achievements in this poem is the anger she mobilizes: anger at culture’s obscuring of the original ‘wizened effigy’ of the mother, anger at the genre’s repeated and historical blindness to the ‘lost connection’ of mother and daughter” (19). Of the journey itself, Schenck observes “But the real ritual passage, the Candlemas procession of the title, is the daughter’s psychic return to her mother at the hour of death” (18), and briefly comments on its spaces:

Beneath her reconstruction of the elegiac scenario is thus a deconstruction of the masculinized form: father/son *agon* is replaced by a difficult but productive continuity between mother and daughter; transcendence, resting upon disjunction, is roundly denied, even in the spatial figurations of the poem; consolation by means of compensation, the genre’s standard mode of accommodating loss, is rendered unnecessary by the act of recuperation itself. (19)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ramazani echoes Schenck’s take on conventional compensation in “Procession”: “Clampitt recovers for the parental elegy a different economic strategy: she re-describes and re-mythologizes her mother’s bequest of an identity, thereby accepting and hoping to repay this fundamental inheritance” (325).

“Transcendence” is charged with meaning specific to elegiac terminology; it is generally associated with pre-First World War elegy and mourning practices based on what Sandra Gilbert calls “the Christian promise of transcendence and transformation through communion with a redemptive deity” (104). This consolatory promise of transcendence is usually contrasted by critics such as Gilbert and Ramazani with a melancholic turn in twentieth-century elegy, where “scorning recovery and transcendence, modern elegists neither abandon the dead nor heal the living” (*Poetry of Mourning* 4). Presumably what Schenck reads in “Procession,” however, is an emphasis on continuity between living and dead that rejects an achievement of individual transcendence of loss (and the dead) which according to Schenck “arise directly from masculine patterns of competition, separation, and individuation” (19). A rejection of this transcendence-via-replacement, then, is apparently reflected in the continuities implied by the poem’s “spatial configurations” (19). The denial and shrouding of maternal significance in Western culture and myth is evoked in tandem with the progression along the route; Athena, goddess of wisdom, springs fully formed, lacking the need for nurture from her father’s forehead (2.12), her sacred cult-object sequestered in a back room, which leads Clampitt to demand “Where is it?” (2.49) of the “thread of fire” (2.54), lost or forgotten amid the “hampered obscurity that has been / for centuries the mumbling lot of women” (2.50-51). Smothering is tripled here, with the woman remaining entrapped, unseen and unheard; “Procession” can certainly be read as a quest for a buried “thread of fire,” with its Promethean associations, and connotations of hearth and sacrifice, and also suggesting weaving both narrative and fabric. The linear Route 80 serves as a unifying geography for the histories evoked. While rejecting the schema of transcendence through separation/inheritance of masculine elegy,

Schenck does not consider other expressions of transcendence within the geography of the poem, even though the search for the “thread of fire” can be seen as a quest for it.

The procession itself and the route it takes, however, allow for transcendence, both in the ritualization of the journey and in the alliance of individual loss with collective losses.<sup>26</sup> Mobility is the factor that enables the temporary re-inscription of the surrounding landscape of grief and loss, thus briefly bringing a presence to the emptiness of “Indian meadows” and other sites of loss. This resuscitation is partly achieved via the imagery of fire and light that triumphs over the dark frozen landscape of absence and erasure, charting a space of consolation and memorialisation within the terrain of grief:

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“Candlemas” here evokes a mass of candles, suggesting that “Procession” follows what Sacks calls the “ancient rites in the basic passage through grief or darkness to consolation and renewal” (20). As the journey passes the Arlington Military cemetery, those dead in war and battle are added to the grief mediated through the ritual movement. These dead are in motion, their names both engraved in an appropriate site of memory and carried along with the mobilities of the highway (as opposed to the Native Americans forced to move westward

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<sup>26</sup> Quinn writes that “There is a lack of transcendence in Clappitt, if one takes that term to mean some kind of escape from the contingencies of the world and political engagement. But we should not lose sight of the extent to which Clappitt continues the Emersonian, and therefore Romantic, tradition of ecstatic vision and tempers it with a fine moral rage that is as intricate and multiply as the phenomena it condemns” (127). He does not consider elegiac transcendence over death and grief.

leaving behind their names, the memories linking them to specific sites allowed to fade from the landscape). Transcendence for the dead over sequestering and forgetting is therefore achieved as they remain intertwined in the “moving lights,” illuminating and mapping the highway; the ritualization involved in this transformative process also allows the speaker to transcend her own individual grief in a collective expression of mourning.

Ramazani charts a quest in “Procession” similar in purpose to that suggested by Sacks and Schenck. By referring to the “quest” (323), Ramazani not only suggests a direction and purpose that differs from Costello’s “drift” and “nomadism,” but also focuses the procession on its objective rather than its progression. He defines the procession as a “redefinition of the elegiac quest towards the womb,” “mournful quest for the mother” (323), a “revisionary theological quest” (323) and an “inward quest into the origins of her own psyche” (324). Justin Quinn remarks that “Clampitt’s approach to history could be called rhizomic: analogies and coincidences play a central role, and she has little interest in searching out root causes, and originary myths. The approach is refreshing, but it does lead to a kind of ahistoricity” (137). Clampitt’s concern with origins and points of departure is clearly marked in “Procession,” however. The very idea of “procession” implies a mapped route, and the destination in this poem is certainly the mother/origin. The poem, and procession, concludes with

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(2.69-72)

These lines sketch a space for restless elegy, created by the “novel, extensive and ‘flickering’ combinations of the presence and absence of peoples, enemies, friends and risks that new mobilities are bringing about” (Urry 16).<sup>27</sup> Stillness is surrounded by motion, created by driving vehicles and falling snow, as the lights animate the quiet dark of night. The word “fall” is repeated in connection to both snow and night, both assigning activity to the elements that make up the space, contributing to a shifting landscape, but also suggesting a blanketing and hiding of that landscape that echoes the custom of drawing a sheet over a dead person’s face and foreshadows the eventual covering with earth, even as the procession at Candlemas precedes the actual funeral procession. The stillness may reside within the daughter as she travels along a path defined by both map and illumination, or it may refer to the dead mother, separated from the moving world by more than just a curtain.<sup>28</sup>

Clampitt herself does not use the word quest to describe the passage of her bus towards her dead or dying mother. “Procession” is galvanised with various synonyms for movement and journey (trek, move, flee, clamber, straggle, stumble, fall, whirl, to name but a few), creating a sense of

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<sup>27</sup> Urry here is referring to the “interdependent digitized systems of mobility” (15) of the twenty-first century that enable both travel and the recording of traces of that travel. Clampitt’s *The Kingfisher* was first published in 1983, which means that while the potential of the Internet and globally linked IT systems for travel had not yet been discovered, enough technology was involved in the tracking and programming of travel to apply Urry’s characterisation. I appropriate the idea of “flickering presences and absences of people” to describe restless elegy, particularly Clampitt’s “Procession at Candlemas” because of the evocation of candles in Urry’s choice of words as well as the way shifting presences and absences are used to create an elegiac narrative.

<sup>28</sup> Sacks connects the curtain to commentary on the male elegiac tradition of separation and inheritance: “While Clampitt tries quite programmatically to rescue the mother figure from its secondary, cultural banishment, her work is complicated by her necessity as a mourner to detach herself from and, indeed, finally to cover over such a figure with no less of a disconnective mediating veil than traditional male elegists have used” (320).

restlessness and relentless advancement, chiming in with the sense of inevitability evoked by the circular conflating of destination with origin. Nothing stays put—except the curtained mother in Intensive Care. The movements around and towards this still destination are all contained in the “procession,” an elegiac convention which Sacks suggests marks a “sense of distance” (19). While this figuring of travel may be true of the journey of the speaker in “Procession,” the fact that most of the other features of the landscape are in perpetual motion suggests a more essential reason behind the insistence on mobilities; if the natural state of the living is to be in motion, to be dead and still is unnatural. By animating the landscape and its features, as well as incorporating the nameless and named dead into the funeral procession, Clampitt affirms both her own capacity for movement and therefore life, and also links motion with memory—she carries the dead with her and so they remain vivid.

The sense of separation where dead and living remain static on either side of a black border is in contrast to the mobility, both ritualised and based on individual impulse, around death and dying in the twentieth century, from the nostalgic and melancholic quests of Thomas Hardy in *Poems 1912-13*, the desperate need in Sharon Olds’s “The Race” for complex systems of transportation to coordinate so her father’s death-bed can be reached in time, Marilyn Hacker’s passage towards a realisation of her mother’s death in “Autumn 1980” and Clampitt’s trek/procession in “A Procession at Candlemas.” It is as if these poets, and others like them, are driven to represent their grief and loss as movement in order to combat or escape the calcifying and numbing effect of the “Hour of Lead” in Emily Dickinson’s “After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes”:

This is the Hour of Lead—

Remembered, if outlived,

As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—

First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—(10-13)

Clampitt refers to grief in similar terms connoting solidity and stasis in “Procession”: “grief a mere hardening of the gut, / a set piece of what can’t be avoided:” (ll.26.35-36), its petrifying effects contrasting with the fluid landscapes and restless energy of the poem expressing this grief. While the movement may be formalised (both in terms of ritual significance and poetic genre) in these poems, they serve as vehicles for grief that is still vivid and unpredictable. In the case of “Procession,” for instance, the realisation of loss is vivid and overwhelming enough that the speaker’s mind cannot dwell upon it, and restlessly allows for the insertion of other mobilities:

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The mother’s position in Intensive Care is mentioned twice in “Procession” and in both cases the mention is surrounded by movement; indeed, here a frenetic sense is created by the synonyms for escape—“leaving,” “fleeing” and “moving up” in quick succession. The mother’s body is the “still point of the turning world”—indeed, Clampitt uses almost the same words in the poem: “a stillness at the heart of so much whirling” in reference to magnolias covered in falling

snow, yearning for the “the rest-in-peace of the placental coracle” (l.14.72).<sup>29</sup> While her mother remains still and hidden, the soldiers and Native Americans travel with the speaker. The dead, on occasion, travel with the living, or the living move towards them, in twentieth-century elegy, as in the case of “Station Island,” where the dead approach the poet rather than the other way around. Various interpretations of these mobile dead are offered; in Natasha Trethewey’s “Graveyard Blues” the movement of the elegist walking away from her mother’s grave is mirrored in the deceased: “Death stops the body’s work, the soul’s a journeyman” (6), while Sylvia Plath famously complains “How they grip us through thin and thick, / These barnacle dead” in “All the Dead Dears.” There is an air of ambivalence about the mobile dead; Trethewey’s vision is liberating, even comforting, while Plath’s is suffocating. In “Procession” the travelling dead help the speaker transcend her own individual grief in collective loss, offering an escape from the particular self, even if only for the space of the journey. The “procession” also serves to ritualise and formalise the chaos of grief as well as the everyday traffic. The snow naturally creates a blank surface; the moving lights write upon it. In the following section I discuss the traditional form of funerary movement as invoked and revised into an urgent quest for traces in *Nox*.

### **“Carried across Many Seas”: Fragments of Funerary Tradition in *Nox***

Anne Carson’s elegy for her brother Michael is pieced and stitched together. After a photograph of her brother as a child and his name scrawled in big black letters across a page, the text begins with the Latin original of Catullus’s elegy “On the Burial of His Brother,” referred to by Carson as simply “Catullus 101.”

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<sup>29</sup> From T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton”:  
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On the left side of the following spreads are glosses on the words from this elegy and on the right side are fragments of classical authors Herodotus and Hekataios, meditations on the nature of history, memory and truth, and the surviving traces of Michael's life and wanderings. These are interspersed with photographs, extracts from a significant letter from Michael's past and stamps from postcards sent from around the world. These pieces of text and reproductions of images are pasted on to the page, surrounded by blank white or faintly discoloured paper; sometimes they overlap from one spread to the next. Marks of stitches are visible between some spreads, suggesting that the original scrapbook or artist's book was sewn together. In the published format, however, the pages are sections of a long piece of paper folded accordion-style which must be unfolded to be read.<sup>30</sup> The work is therefore both disjointed and flows in a continuous progression. The fragments are isolated from each other by their visible edges but fused into a flexible frieze by the paper onto which they are pasted. The folded paper is then placed into a cardboard box that resembles a hardback book cover, the front serving as a lid. *Nox* as an object with a function of enclosure thereby makes tangible Leighton's description of elegy as "a literary form defined by the body-form which lies somewhere within the container or reliquary of the text; but it is also a form left empty, feeling the hollow shell of its literary objectlessness" (221). Leighton emphasises the convention and form of elegy while acknowledging its dynamism; she views the work's "leisured and formal movements" (221) as a means of filling as well as

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<sup>30</sup> *Nox* first took shape as a scrapbook, later edited into the form published for the mass market. *Nox* has also been made into a dance performance: "The piece is heavy and charged with a tense male energy, but it is also tender as when one dancer lets his head start to drop as if his neck no longer has the strength to support it, another reaches out to catch it in his palms. Mitchell explores Carson's poem, but also his own reactions to death and relationships, telling an emotional story through the super-charged movements that Reiner, exquisite in performance, makes possible" (Milder 54). Here the link between emotional responses to death and movement is made explicit, as well as formalising the piece further away from spontaneity; the mobilities of *Nox*, as well as the fragments and tensions of its form are refined into a dance piece that must be rehearsed as well as performed.

containing the absence left by death: "Elegy, perhaps more than any other genre, conceives its poetic form as the relief somehow, the shaped remains, of something that has gone. It is a verse-form bound to, and defined by, being 'about'" (221). *Nox*, however, is an elegy not bound to a verse-form; its framing device is a two thousand year old poem and it encloses not absence but traces of memory.

I argue here that *Nox*, in content and form and as an object, both navigates and attempts to contain elegiac restlessness through its negotiation, translation and enclosure of mobilities. The Catullus poem describes a journey to a funeral, and the thesaurus-style translation of this poem continues its mobility, its progression into the twenty-first century, as well as its enduring ritual of the journey to the loved one's burial. These movements are echoed in Carson's own journeys, both spatial to Denmark to visit her brother's widow and hear about the funeral, and temporal to gather and preserve the traces left by her brother's life.<sup>31</sup> While the framing device of the Catullus poem situates *Nox* firmly within the Western tradition of poetic mourning, the translations and glosses split the elegy into its primary parts, the shifts between original and translation contained by the long strip of paper. The fragments of text on the opposite page intersect with the translations, creating their own dynamic interaction, annotated with the stamps and photographs that create a sense of movement and distance across space and in time. *Nox* thus becomes an elegy that is not a final product but a recording of the journey from convention to reinvention, a quest for missing pieces and lost traces that must be navigated in order to map a grief that is aware both of its absences and its inability to gloss over them with poetry, biographical data or historical truth. In this section, I first

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<sup>31</sup> Carson was told the news too late to be present at her brother's funeral.

examine the elegiac significance of the Catullus poem and its mobilities, then go on to close-read *Nox* as a spatial navigation and containment of movement.

Catullus 101 has been translated into English many times. I primarily use eminent classical scholar Guy Lee's translation; Carson herself provides a translation of the whole poem in *Nox*, but a comparison with a less personally inflected version highlights Carson's transformative strategies in *Nox*. Here is Lee's translation:

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The opening two lines emphasise distance and travel, specifically travel towards mortuary rites and a gravesite; as in Clampitt's "A Procession at Candlemas," "the trek becomes a funeral procession." Carson herself provides a conventional translation of the whole of Catullus 101, but unconventionally keeps the original word order despite its un-English syntax.<sup>32</sup> This is situated

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<sup>32</sup> I mean conventional as opposed to the word-by-word etymological and associative translation that runs throughout *Nox*. Carson's own comments on translation emphasise a subjective rather than faithful approach: "A translation usually has a specific purpose. If it is a commission for a certain theatre director or company, the translator will be given parameters as to what kind of

about two-thirds of the way through *Nox*, opposite the translation of “prisco”:  
 “Many the peoples many the oceans I crossed— / I arrive at these poor, brother,  
 burials” (1-2).<sup>33</sup> The sorrow and formality in the lines show that Carson and  
 Catullus are compelled to make their journey by duty and obligation as well as  
 love—the duty to participate in a family member’s or loved one’s funeral rites  
 has lasted for two thousand years. One reason for this continuity is the  
 imperative to witness, to be present at the burial to observe the ceremony of  
 transition from man to ash or to dust. The “gift of death” suggests that the  
 deceased cannot properly pass until the rite is witnessed, while the “bitter gift”  
 may be the form of the funeral rites—although they sadden by their purpose,  
 they also console by reminding the mourner of tradition, evoking the memory of  
 ancestors and ensuring the survival of the text if not the person.

As in “A Procession at Candlemas,” *Nox* and Catullus 101 represent  
 texts, in the form of elegy and poetry, as inheritance, words against and around  
 the stillness, silence and erasure of death; the “silent ashes” suggest  
 prosopopoeia, giving the dead a voice, a recurring convention in the Western  
 elegiac tradition. Carson may be commenting on this continuity in “perpetuum”:  
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 reasons. This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for  
 copyright reasons.” Opposite “perpetuum” are pieces of photographs stapled  
 together to form a chain, which echoes the fact that Carson’s translation of

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translation is required. If it’s a free adventure of creativity, the translator will have their own  
 attitude to that. I generally try to work first and most attentively out of the grammar, syntax,  
 allusions of the original while keeping the language alive in a way that interests me, then later  
 crazy it up if that seems appropriate.” (From “Unwriting the Books of the Dead: Anne Carson  
 and Robert Currie on Translation, Collaboration, and History”, an interview for the *Kenyon  
 Review* blog by Andrew David King. October 6, 2012. Accessed October 10, 2012.)

<sup>33</sup>Because there are no page numbers in *Nox*, I locate texts, fragments and images based on  
 the closest translation of the Latin word. Senses assigned to the adjective “prisco” include  
 “belonging to a former time, ancient;” “old as night, archaic” “conforming to a past standard of  
 morality,” emphasising the cultural and historical distance travelled between Catullus’s poem  
 and *Nox*, as well as reinforcing the themes of night, loss and darkness.



“perpetuum” is located across both space and time—the pictures represent memorialising, or history and time, while the spatial significance of the layout suggests the mapping of a ritual. “Perpetuum” is situated in the final line of Catullus 101, “And forever, brother, greetings and farewell,” a statement on the finality of grief. This salutation, *ave atque vale*, is also a statement of continuities within the poetic canon; Tennyson, for instance, alludes to both Catullus and the phrase in “Frater Ave Atque Vale”:

There beneath the Roman ruin where the purple flowers grow,  
 Came that “*Ave atque Vale*” of the Poet’s hopeless woe,  
 Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen-hundred years ago,  
 “Frater Ave atque Vale.” (4-7)

Here Tennyson appropriates the brotherly greeting, asserting a fraternity of poets linked across the centuries. The invocation of the consolatory tradition of elegy and the continuity of historical tradition is also evident here. Charles Algernon Swinburne inscribes a similarly poetic inheritance in “Ave Atque Vale,” his elegy for Charles Baudelaire. The final stanza as well as the title explicitly appropriates Catullus 101: “For thee, O now a silent soul, my brother, / Take at my hands this garland, and farewell” (188-190). *Nox* is thus not only framed by Catullus but also the chains linking Catullus to Carson; her own use of Catullus 101 may be read as a feminist attempt to insert herself into this pattern of fraternal inheritance—as Clampitt does with her concern for maternal origins in verse and voice—as Elena Theodorakopoulos writes, Carson’s *bricolage* leads to the “liberation of the poem from one of its most masculine frameworks” (159) in a way that “allows Catullus 101 to regain its fullest possible range of meaning

and resonance” (159). A sister may also grieve for a brother, as well as a mother—the emphasis in *Nox* is on familial bonds.<sup>34</sup>

While the use of Catullus 101 emphasises a temporal narrative of continuity in poetry and history that contains the mobilities between translation and original, from a spatial perspective the emphasis in *Nox* is more on revision than re-visiting—the narrative of continuity is presented in a fragmented cartography of memory and loss. Spatial layout therefore serves to challenge history, emphasising the active performance of blank spaces—similar to the determining power of silence in J.B. Harley’s view of cartography—as traces through scribbles, pastes, photographs and so on. Susan Sontag argues that “Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. . . . All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing this moment out of time, and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (15). Roland Barthes also linked death to photography, stating that “With the Photograph, we enter into *flat* Death” (92; italics in original)—by flatness means that the “horror of Death” is “precisely its Platitude” (92). Barthes suggests that “Death must be somewhere in a society; perhaps in this image which produces death while trying to preserve life” (92).<sup>35</sup> To view a photograph, according to Barthes and Sontag, is to engage with death—to place a photograph in an explicitly elegiac text that calls on two thousand years of commemorative and ritual tradition to make its case creates a tension between preservation and disintegration that furthers the sense of contained restlessness within *Nox*.

<sup>34</sup> For a feminist reading of *Nox*, and Carson’s translation poem as a feminist act, see Elena Theodorakopoulos’s “Women’s Writing and the Classical Tradition” (2012).

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert discusses the uncanny “celluloid afterlife” afforded by photographs, citing Barthes and Sontag, in *At Death’s Door* (204-242), but her work precedes *Nox*. For more on photography and elegy, see Josh Ellenbogen’s “On Photographic Elegy” (*The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* 681-700).

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The geographies of trace and emptiness on the pages of *Nox* disrupt the patterns of the form/grief tension described by Leighton as central to elegy. Leighton does, however, acknowledge that poets are continually breaking and reshaping form: "All poems, writes Donald Davie, 'are shapes cut out of lapsing time.' The conflict of shape and time, of poetry as sculpture which must be 'cut' and as music which must be timed, may be one reason why poets themselves continue to need and to redefine the word 'form'" (234). By breaking with the traditional stanzas of elegy, Carson articulates the progression rather than the end-product of grief; as Theodorakopoulos has observed, "[T]he process of understanding and translating Catullus is presented as part of her process of grieving for her brother. When she speaks of trying to piece together her memories of her brother, it becomes clear that he shares in the elusiveness of ancient texts" (158). The progression or process is not smooth, however—the

rituals of mourning are splintered into jagged fragments, riddled with tensions, and products of mobilities placed in shifting relation to each other, in a way that has its own paratactic logic. Carson simultaneously inserts *Nox* within an alternative poetic lineage, that of visual poetry, and harks back to the Catullus poem that predates the English language elegiac form, and indeed elegy as we know it today, by millennia.

The collage-structure of *Nox* emphasises the fraught relationship between grief and elegiac convention, mapping a site of struggles with commemoration and what Leighton describes as the containing form of elegy. The layout of fragments of text and image foreground the intertextuality of the work. Ian Davidson defines collage as follows:

A literary collage, made up of a variety of texts from a variety of sources, makes evident the intertextual nature of all texts. The collage can situate the everyday next to the exotic, and relationships between objects in a collage become paratactic rather than hierarchical. New forms of correspondence between ideas and objects otherwise held apart can form new types of conjunctions and disjunctions; relationships become based on principles of contiguity and coincidence rather than via syntactical structures and more formal logic. (8)

In *Nox*, the “new forms of correspondence,” the interpolation of Catullus with the personal effects of the elegist and the mourned, triggers the mobilities of the text. One form of mobility is the nomadic lifestyle of the dead brother: This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright

reasons” (Fragment 2.2). This description of the wanderer with no official, state-sanctioned identity evokes the nomad of the “intermezzo spaces” in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus* rather than the (forced) migrants, with their westward direction, of Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas.”<sup>36</sup> Carson’s own purposeful if roundabout movement towards Michael’s funerary rites creates a counterpoint to his nomadism, while the fragmented appearance of *Nox*, together with the elasticity of the paper on which it is printed, is a visual representation of the “contiguity and coincidence” of the traces left behind by Michael and the duties that follow.

Catullus’s journey to his brother’s funeral rites heightens the resonance of Carson’s quest for her brother’s life and journey towards his funeral rites and the mobilities contained therein; if considered as geographies of mobility, the non-textual elements of pictures, doodles and stamps in *Nox* are also significant in terms of moving around absence. The photographs in *Nox* are black and white, bordered with blankness and sometimes interspersed with other cuttings and texts. Some of them have captions, some are so shadowed as to be indecipherable, and some are sliced into unrecognizability. As Amanda Lim points out, Carson’s method involves

[D]efamiliarizing the methods of photography and description.

Many of the pieces are “orphan” photos or captions, seemingly

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<sup>36</sup> The collage-form and the nomad are connected to the rhizome by poet and translator Pierre Joris, whose collection of essays *A Nomad Poetics* (2003) is inspired by *Thousand Plateaus*. After stating that the modern world is one of motion, echoing the discourse of the “mobilities turn,” Joris suggests that a rhizomatic structure of flexible and sprawling unity has replaced the collage as a reflection of the poet’s movement: “A nomadic poetics’ method will be rhizomatic: which is different from that core 20C technique, collage, i.e., rhizomatic is not an aesthetics of the fragment, which aesthetic has dominated poetics since the romantics even as transmogrified by modernism, high & low, & more recently retooled in the neo-classical form of the citation—ironic &/or decorative—throughout what is called ‘post-modernism’ (38; sic). *Nox* can be viewed as rhizomatic in form because of its combinations of cultural history, language and personal experiences; Michael’s nomadism is mapped across a landscape of the non-places of hotel rooms and nameless streets.

misplaced, isolated, decontextualized, dehistoricized. Many of them are cropped and cut up in unusual ways. Carson's arrangement of these items appears to suggest that a coherent narrative is, in fact, impossible to achieve and that it is in the moments of rupture that the most is revealed. (10)

Carson said in an interview that she "Became more interested in the overall effect of the designed page than the specific content of the photograph. Realized that most photographs are better when cut. The more you cut, the more story they gather" (*Kenyon Review*; sic). By allowing the photograph to "gather story," Carson resists the "frozen moment" of the photograph. Opposite the first page of "has," is Fragment 3.1 "My brother dies in Copenhagen in the year 2000 a surprise to me"—its definition counterpart is "(indicating a person or thing that is present in place, time or thought). The definition of "has" continues onto a second page, where it is faced with Fragment 3.2, which begins "I go to Copenhagen. My brother's widow gives me some old diaries she found. From his wandering years, filled with photographs that he developed himself in hotel rooms . . . ." This fragment is framed by the upper left and lower right corners of a photograph of an interior space with two photographs on the wall on the top half and a chair in the lower. The inner edges of the picture, facing the text, are ripped, and there is empty space into which the fragment is positioned. The seemingly static photograph, then, is accompanied by journeys within journeys; the space of absence is linked to the state of presence in the translation. Like Carson, Thrift has observed that the technology of photographs, "literally light-writing," are reminders of in the modern world as the presence of the image does not require the presence of its original (203). The shadows and the jagged edges of the photographs in *Nox* certainly suggest an "absent presence." They

are also often bound to movement, even when the picture is whole. Opposite “advenio” is a picture dated 1953 of Carson’s mother and a small boy, probably Michael, sprawled on a dock by the shores of a lake. Beneath the picture is the caption “I make a guess, I make a guess,” emphasising the field of unknowing in which the elegist operates. “Advenio” is translated as: This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. The translation thus animates the scene of the photograph, which is itself a trace on the journey followed by the elegist.

“Advenio” follows “Vectus,” which is the seventh word in the poem: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1-2)<sup>37</sup>. On the double spread scanned above, the verb “vectus” from Catullus 101 is pasted onto the left spread, conjugated, and then translated via synonyms, examples of usage and different associations until “vectus” bears a multitude of meanings, all connoting movement. On the opposite page there is a hand-written elegiac question carved out of darkness, or perhaps lifted out of it by tracing over an indentation. This almost child-like writing contrasts with the formal dictionary-style entry on the left, and borders the smudged fragment “Few circles, other lesser circles, but yet circles”, apparently torn out of a spiral-bound notebook, and the numbered scene from Carson’s mother’s death-bed which introduces the significant letter from Michael. Three losses are therefore remembered and questioned on the right side of the spread; the question “Who were you?” could apply to mother, Michael or the girl who died—all are intertwined with each other in the circles and implicated in Carson’s own life and narrative. Loss is therefore spatially conceptualized between question and memory; the journey on the left side is an attempt to navigate this loss.

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<sup>37</sup> This taken from the text at the beginning of *Nox*.

The past tense and the interrogation of “Who were you?” combine the acceptance and frustration of loss. This paradox and the uncertainty surrounding it are reflected by the negative and positive spaces of the text; it is impossible to know whether the dark patches or the white lettering scratched in it are negative space connoting absence. Three meanings of “nox” in Latin are “night; darkness; blindness.”<sup>38</sup> All of these suggest the absence of not only light but also of vision and thereby ability to perceive, and are almost certainly related to the dark patches on the page. The question, then, is whether “Who were you?” is an attempt to illuminate the night, or whether the whiteness is blankness, utter emptiness surrounded by darkness. The question is never all that remains, however; there must be traces. This imperative becomes clear in fragment 2.1, where a memory is evoked and letters are mentioned. “Who were you?” provides the driving impulse for the process of reminiscence and making sense of the traces left behind by the dead. The elegiac function and progress of trace-gathering and retracing steps are made not only literal but concrete in *Nox*; as *New Yorker* reviewer Meghan O’Rourke says of *Nox*, “A mourner is always searching for traces of the lost one, and traces of that scrapbook’s physicality—bits of handwriting, stamps, stains—add testimonial force: this person existed.” Other reviewers and scholars have noted the significance of traces in *Nox*. Stephen Burt in the *London Review of Books* says that the traces paradoxically counter the attempt to record:

With its insistence on the visual, the material, the tactile, the circumstantial, on everything and anything but its mere words, *Nox* thus becomes a book, or an anti-book, about the futility of language in the face of death. The more we want words to retain

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<sup>38</sup> *Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary: Latin-English* (3 ed.) Ed. James Morwood.



their meaning, and the more we try to learn about people by means of words, the more we are arrested by fleeting, frustrating material traces. (N/A)

I would argue that instead of stopping learning, traces rather form a mosaic that fills in some blank spaces. Neil Corcoran also sees the traces as a partial reclaiming: “If a dead brother is like a dead language, he can be recovered only in traces, fragments, memorial ruins, hauntings, approximations, and vanishings” (377). The mourner’s journey in *Nox* is therefore a funeral procession with a concomitant quest for answers. While “A Procession at Candlemas” can also be seen as a quest for traces, in that poem the emphasis is on reading the cultural and collective inscriptions on the geography of the poem’s route. *Nox* draws on the cultural funerary traditions of witness, making the Catullus poem a starting point for narrowing the focus to personal and individual memory and experience, recalling Thomas Hardy’s *Poems of 1912-13* and Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters*.

Carson has also travelled to her mother’s deathbed in “vectus,” doubly inscribing *Nox* in a pattern of elegiac mobility. At the end of the “vectus” definition, Carson gives the usage example “what the transient hour brought once and only once.” This “transient hour” can be read as the hour of death—the elegy is fuelled by the desire to memorialise and preserve the witnessing of this hour. When coupled with “vectus,” however, the emphasis can also be shifted to the passing of this hour; by acknowledging the fleeting nature of the moment, Carson resists the potentially petrifying effect of grief—Dickinson’s “Hour of Lead.” This tension between transience and permanence is reflected in the contrasts of *Nox*’s construction: the flexible and mobile accordion-book contained by the solid box, likened by Carson herself and reviewers to an epitaph: “The notebook itself is that headstone; now published as *Nox* . . . it has

the squat gray aspect of a stone tablet. It is also a personal, and deeply moving, meditation on the contours of absence” (O’Rourke).<sup>39</sup> I choose to interpret O’Rourke’s use of the word “moving” as a pun; the elegy must map the “contours of absence” physically and imaginatively as the mourner journeys towards the site of loss and remembrance.

The dynamic relationship between *Nox*’s container and content fuels the opposition between the static and the mobile on the pages. In “vectus”/2.1 the fragment is a dated and placed scene by the mother’s deathbed that is almost still. The only movements are when the mother raises a finger, and the motion of her eyes: “a hard blue stare” connoting frozen rigidity, and closing them, suggesting retreat. The fragment contains the phrase “My mother on her death bed (three years ago now) stops,” and “I wait,” movement ending and movement arrested fixing the scene into the “still point of the turning world,” or the still point of the “transient hour.” The deathbed scene invokes containment within enclosure: the mother tells Carson that there is a “box at home with all your letters in it”—these letters presumably contain traces of Carson’s own life, which are within a box within a house which is another kind of box, and the whole is within the box that is *Nox*. This box contains networks of geographies as well as intertwined biographies, as the letters signify the wider world and the complex systems of transportation necessary for their delivery. The copies of stamps in the spread between “advenio” (the spread following “vectus”) and “fragment 2.2” are vestiges of these signifiers. As Thrift says, “The emphasis on ceaseless mobility can be coupled with another related characteristic of the contemporary world, its indirectness. As Derrida and others have been

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<sup>39</sup>King concurs in describing *Nox* as an epitaph: “The work, as an ‘epitaph,’ performs the labor of a monument but refuses to ignore the inevitable effacement all monuments, no matter how sturdily built, will sustain.” King does not make it clear how *Nox* deals with “effacement.” After all, *Nox* is built around a poem that has survived 2000 years.

concerned to show, indirect communication, symbolised by the telephone, the postcard and various other ways of communicating at a distance, is a fundamental constant of contemporary everyday life” (221). The words and the small, private movements that briefly break the stillness of the deathbed scene thereby both hint at distances and contain them in a box. These containments are juxtaposed with travel by vehicle and crossings of land and sea in the translations of “vectus” on the facing page: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.” As Corcoran points out, carrying and progression are linked to the memorialising function of elegy: “But there is in *Nox* the play of language, form, and material structure which themselves, and of themselves, make it clear that something, at least, may be carried over, carried forward, translated, something that may supply ‘a lock against oblivion’” (378).<sup>40</sup> Taking this insistence on activity here further, I suggest that the repeated modes of motion in the translation extend the incremental movements and make explicit the hints of travel in the fragment, while the variations on carrying suggest that grief for the girl who died, Michael, and Carson’s mother are loads to be borne, obligations to be fulfilled, just as the letters must be carried and delivered.

Scholars and reviewers hold differing views of the nature and function of the translation/fragment interfluence in *Nox* and the ways in which they inform each other.<sup>41</sup> Corcoran notes the mental agility necessary to read the spreads, and comments on the effect the fragments have on the translations:

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<sup>40</sup>The phrase “lock against oblivion” is a quotation from fragment 3.3. in *Nox*: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (“frater”/3.3.).

<sup>41</sup>Although *Nox* is the first of Carson’s works to have an unusual non-bound-book format, Carson’s previous work contains similar elements to *Nox*, including their allusions to history, Greek and Roman life, literature and mythology interpolated with modernity, and the

The necessity that we read both texts more or less simultaneously means that our reading is constantly interrupted or disrupted by oscillations of attention. The glosses read very slowly, as glosses do, with their briefly declarative explications and phrasal exemplars, while the commentaries are much faster and their sophistications of syntax always have a certain rhetorical element. Language itself, with its slippery provocations and dispersals, is therefore heavily foregrounded in this work. We gradually come to realise, though, that the moods and emotions of the commentaries bleed into, or contaminate, the glosses.

Corcoran discusses the relative speeds necessary for reading the translations and the fragments, suggesting movement between reader and each text as well as between the texts themselves and recalling Carson's own statement on translating from Latin: "Nothing in English can capture the passionate, slow surface of a Roman elegy." Indeed, the reader can choose to vary the velocity of their reading by manipulating the folds of the book—if spread out and read as a frieze it may be a faster experience than if the paper is kept folded and read turning the "pages" as a traditional book. The flexibility of *Nox* thereby not only mirrors the restlessness of the elegiac processes within its content, but also allows the reader to be implicated in this restlessness to their chosen extent. While Corcoran's view is that the fragments affect the translations, King (also invoking movement), suggests that the texts are a separation rather than a joining: ". . . and "translation" comes to indicate not just the endeavor to move from one expression to its contextual equivalent, but to separate the

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juxtaposition of diverse materials on the page. *The Autobiography of Red*, a "novel in verse" for example, portrays the Greek mythical monster Geryon as a young gay man of the twentieth-century, and the sequence "Hopper: Confessions" from *Men in the Off Hours*, for example, includes meditations on the nature of time from St Augustine's *Confessions* along the bottom of the page.

inseparable, to parse the influx of history into the present and the present back into history.” O’Rourke makes the elegiac function of Carson’s translation explicit, suggesting that: “Translation, the act of renaming, is clearly crucial to Carson’s method of coming to grips with loss.” O’Rourke goes on to say that “There is always some ritualized distance between author and reader. As a writer who trained as a classicist, she is accustomed to shuttling among stories and idioms; the classicist has to learn the concepts or attitudes that have been lost with the years, and that must, like a decayed bridge, be reconstructed before the ravine can be crossed.” This “ritualized distance” also recalls the gap between grief and the writing of elegy.

The comments made by scholars and reviewers on the significance of the dictionary parts of *Nox* use movement as a metaphor for the interaction of the original text and the translation, as well as the processes needed for the reader (and perhaps the author) to comprehend these. However, they do not take into account the overall direction of this movement, nor its relationship to the poem as an object or artefact. As I have demonstrated in my close reading of “vectus,” the interaction and intersection between translation and fragment occur in both directions; they exist in a state of constant mutual intervention contained by the box. The fragment thus does not merely “bleed into” the translation—phrasing suggesting accident and gradual spreading rather than planned movement—and is not solely a brick in a static bridge. Rather, the fragment stands sometimes as an opposition to the translation, as in “vectus,” as well as a vehicle for it, a way of carrying it forward and of coordinating the direction of its movement. This controlled trajectory occurs in “vectus,” as I have demonstrated, as well as in “frater”/3.3., for instance, where the insistence on family ties in the translation (“a son of the same father or mother, brother; . . . a

full brother; . . . of a kindred race”) is carried into nothingness in the fragment, which undermines the reliability of biography and its connection with the elegiac agenda. Fragment 3.3. begins with a musing on the desire for “other people to have a centre, a history,” because “it forms a lock against oblivion.” This is followed by the question “Does it?” and an indented quotation of Herodotos’ first sentence [sic]: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons (1.1).” Herodotos here seems concerned with the didactic as well as preservation functions of historiography; Carson critiques both: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” Even the connection between historian and becoming absent has vanished because as Carson points out, the verb is missing from the first sentence of the Herodotos interpolation. The brother in “frater,” which came into being through bonds of kinship, must also vanish, and the historian is inadequate to explain the loss. “Vanishing” is a theme that progresses throughout *Nox*—“to vanish by night into nothing,” from “vectus” is reflected in “et”/4.3 in both translation: “and do you still doubt that consciousness vanishes at night” and fragment: “From her point of view, all desire left the world.” Absence in Carson’s elegy is therefore not merely a static centre or a result of a death; it is an active process assigned verbs rather than adjectives or nouns.

Restlessness therefore occurs between existence and vanishing, presence and absence. Movement must happen in space as well as time—as Thrift writes, “First of all mobility takes up both space and time, one of the elementary insights of a time-geography now either forgotten or misunderstood” (218). The elegist must therefore be geographer as well as historian. If the elegist-as-historian questions the “why” and its relevance, admitting the

inadequacy of historical narrative to explain the cause and vanishing, the elegist-as-geographer must answer “where,” admitting the potential of cartography to only border rather than map absence. The dynamic translations and fragments, and the spatial layout of the traces pasted on the page, function as a cartographical representation of both the journey from the past to the present, from cause to vanishing, but also the journey of the mourner from ignorance to knowledge to graveside, a journey that has echoed in the Western canon for millenia.

### **Mobility and Melancholia**

The primary concern of this chapter has been to investigate the dynamic processes and progression of the elegies towards the funerary rites—the linear but layered westward journey towards the setting sun in “A Procession at Candlemas” and the fractured travel between past and present, and absence, traces and presence, in *Nox*, within the framework of the “mobility turn.” Here I contextualise the restless elegist within ideas of the sequestered dead and the modern melancholic mourner and criticism of modern elegy, and conclude by considering the destinations of these journeys—does the restlessness of the elegist translate to the deceased, is the space created for the dead galvanised by relative mobilities?

Jahan Ramazani describes the modern mourner as melancholic, shaped by scepticism towards the consolatory powers of religion, commemoration and elegy itself, bitterness, guilt and ambivalence towards both self and the dead, and modern elegy as an expression of the “open wound” of the melancholic rather than the process of healing and detachment of the “normative mourner”— the modern elegist remains “immersed” in loss rather than

attempting to transcend it" (4-6). He views "A Procession at Candlemas," however, as something of an exception to this characterisation. While Ramazani notes that Clampitt "is still vigilant in qualifying" apotheosis, he suggests that

she, more than Lowell, or Plath or Sexton, tries to balance the claims of transcendence and oblivion in this elegy, as in her many subsequent elegies for family and friends. . . . While this departure may reflect personal differences, it obviously resonates with a broad cultural shift from a more rebellious to a more accommodating historical climate, traceable in many other genres. (332)

In his "Coda" to *Poetry of Mourning*, Ramazani comments further on the "persistence of the traditional elegy within the modern" (361), conceding that "In Heaney's and Clampitt's elegies, the dead once more become tutelary beings, discretely honoured and idealized. Perhaps encomium has become possible again, after great revulsion against it; or perhaps Clampitt and Heaney, as some critics suggest, belong to an aberrant literary traditionalism" (361). In contrast with Sylvia Plath's "Berck-Plage," for instance, where the funeral ceremony becomes "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons." (7.15-16) and "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons." (7.17-18), "A Procession at Candlemas" ritualises the everyday in an attempt to lighten the darkness; the dead soldiers whose names become flames, evoking an answer to Wilfred Owen's question "What candles may be held to speed them all?" (9). While "A Procession at Candlemas" certainly thus evokes the ritualised inflections of traditional funerals and elegy in its negotiation of absence and erasure, and



revelation and remembrance, Ramazani's statement can be complicated by viewing the elegy from a geographical rather than history-bound perspective.

The landscape through which the procession travels is melancholically saturated with signifiers of death and trauma, as well as frozen in a state of decay rather than vivid with potential renewal as in the pastoral tradition. The deaths and losses left behind by Native Americans and by westward-travellers are imprinted on the American topography, which is also scarred by marks of industry and human habitation. While collective loss is mourned in the poem, the significance and lasting impression made by individual lives, deaths and remembrance are called into question:

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This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. (2.1-6)

The tension between normative mourning and melancholic mourning in "Procession at Candlemas" can only be resolved through movement, through a literalising of the restlessness of the elegiac tradition within the present as well as the journey towards stillness where there was once life-giving origin. The poem begins: "Moving on or going back to where you came from , / bad news is what you mainly travel with" (1-2)—even "moving on," the normative process of healing and detachment, is linked to "bad news" and a travelling backwards, suggesting that the journey is circular rather than progressive. The moving procession serves as a vehicle for the transfigurative properties of grief, marking the transition from awareness of having a mother, a living link to

previous generations, to the loneliness when these fade to “half-noted presences in darkened rooms.” Clampitt here writes against the idea that the dead are sequestered entirely from the living and insulated from memory, suggesting that traces always remain. The geographies of death in “A Procession at Candlemas” are peculiarly modern in their patterns of simultaneous resistance to death and their acceptance of it, and correspond startlingly to Thrift’s introductory image of modernity:

“My thoughts on ‘modernity’—a word which, by the way, I dislike—have been crystallised by consideration of a commonplace, even banal, image; an urban landscape at night through which runs a river of headlight. This frozen image of mobility summarises a number of themes that I want to take up in this paper—speed, light and power [...]” (191)

The “river of headlight” here brings to mind the final lines of the poem: “of moving lights along Route 80, at nightfall, / in falling snow,” while the “frozen image of mobility” evokes not only winter landscape but the static place created for death in “A Procession at Candlemas”— the dead mother behind the curtain at the hospital, and the blank spaces once inhabited by Native Americans. Clampitt’s elegy is therefore not simply consolatory; the journey encompasses the melancholic. Melancholia is not allowed to overwhelm, however, as it is contained and charted. Death is the ultimate expression of stillness, particularly in Clampitt’s world where “nothing stays put”; death is placed within darkness but grief creates a blazing power of light.

The intensifying emphasis on night, shadow and darkness in *Nox* seems at first glance to evoke an imagined geography of melancholia. History and

biography are uncertain and questionable; the white space of the page is smudged and the textual and graphic places are bordered by frayed and jagged lines. There is little trace of the figurings of conventional elegiac consolation from the English tradition—no sunrises or flowers or rebirth. There is, however, a reference to Michael’s funeral service and a reading from Romans 8 and “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (“frater” (2)/Fragment 10.2.” Romans 8 is a reminder of the resurrection of Christ, ending with the consoling “Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*KJV Rom. 8:39*). What Carson chooses to focus the page on, however, is Romans 8:36: “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” The first six words of this verse are carved in capital letters out of black background of “Fragment 10.2,” negating its consoling message and creating a space of bleak destiny and effaced hope.

*Nox* does not end there, however. The journey continues to the next page “ave”, translated as “Fare well! [...] (on sepulchral monuments) now it is night.” Though resurrection may be denied, the rites of burial and the survival of memory-traces inherent to monumentalism are still allowed. The translation of the final word, “vale” contributes to this sense of something surviving, as one of the usage examples given is “*quid amor valeat nesciam* why love prevails I have no idea;” although the translation ends in “(but we call it night).” The facing page contains the typed phrase “He refuses, he is in the stairwell, he disappears”, a white fragment pasted on white paper. There is then a sliver of a photograph of a tree, and the final page is black (not coloured black, as in the background to “Fragment 10.2” but smooth-surfaced black paper). On this is pasted a faded and stained, practically illegible version of her translation of

Catullus 101. I have gone into detail about this ending here, as the final pages carry implications that complicate *Nox* as a melancholic work of mourning.

The ending of *Nox* echoes the unity of origin and destination in “Procession.” Lim suggests that the conclusion means a melancholic turn: “Her ending of the book refuses complete closure, refuting the idea that history, memory, and language can have an ‘end.’” The reader, stymied even upon reaching the end, never achieves full closure or disclosure. . . . Carson’s blotting out of her own translation, are the most ‘faithful’ translations and therefore fitting tributes of Michael that there can be—leaving the room of interpretation open and the light flickering and prowling the dark” (12).<sup>42</sup> While I agree that *Nox* ends with a flickering light rather than the blaze of “Procession,” and that its narrative is propelled by an epistemological anxiety (if “Procession” is concerned about winners writing histories, *Nox* questions whether histories assuming knowledge can be written at all), I would challenge the idea that the ending of *Nox* refuses closure, and by extension consolation. For one thing, the mobilities contained within *Nox* allow for a more flexible, dynamic approach to the melancholic/normative division often postulated regarding post-First World War elegy. The sense of journey and distances crossed is so firmly layered over the fragments and translations of *Nox* that even if there is a melancholic pause, the momentum carries the narrative onwards, towards a more meditative mood. Indeed, “night” begins to seem a place of release rather than disappearance. In Fragment 7.1., for instance (opposite “indigna”), Carson ends her discussion of the process of translating Catullus 101 with “I guess it never ends. A brother

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<sup>42</sup> Lim bases her paper on melancholia in *Nox* around the unknowability and unreachability of its central figure Michael and the impossibility of exact translation: “Much of the melancholia in *Nox*, then, is centred around Carson’s difficulty in giving Michael a coherent account and narrating what his life was like. Michael remains intractable even in death and *Nox* illustrates Carson’s pursuit in chase of his story” (3).

never ends. I prowl him. He does not end.” Much like the comment about “love prevailing,” this suggests an enduring relationship that can be viewed as a melancholic fixation but also as a comforting sense of attachment, or an acknowledgement that the dead do not vanish entirely. Then the narrative moves on, to the brother disappearing from the stairwell, and then to the tree—perhaps a symbol of the consolation of nature after all—and then the final fragment. The last words, the almost illegible inscription marking the end of the journey suggests to me that the mourning process is finite; the duty of witnessing has been fulfilled and the funerary ritual is complete—the words that shape the journey are allowed to fade.

As I have reiterated throughout this chapter, the procession in Clampitt’s poem and the various journeys of Carson’s work have a strong ritual function. Despite their interrogation and rejection of orthodox Christian consolation—shown in “Procession” via Clampitt’s sardonic protest of the idea that mothers need “purifying” after childbirth and Carson’s focus on the bleak rather than hopeful Bible verses of her brother’s funeral service—both poets appear to believe very strongly in ritual itself. If travelling to a deathbed or a burial site is ritualised, as in “Procession” through the transformations effected by the “mobility of becoming” and in *Nox* through anchoring the present loss into the collective culture of mourning, it is enough in itself to sanctify. The geographies of “Procession,” the dead snow-covered scenes and the non-places of rest stops and erased histories, could be seen as post-modern. Similarly the blank spaces on the pages of *Nox*, as well as the sliced and spliced collages of photographs and unintelligible texts, can be viewed as a representation of the sort of post-modern landscape found in “Procession.” In these landscapes the dead are nameless and forgotten. What the journeys and concomitant

formalities of “Procession” and *Nox* achieve, however, is a restoration and recording of specific identity and experience, and thereby significance to their environments, even if the poems are not, and cannot be, complete accounts. In the next chapter, I examine the geographical imagination of the elegist at work in the static settings and reified narratives of the architectural elegy; Douglas Dunn and Ted Hughes seek traces of the lost but inscribe their quest on the streets and buildings of specific towns.

#### 4. The 'Chance of Space' and the Architectural Elegy

Part of the purpose of the elegy is to commemorate; part of its geography is mapping the terrain of grief by marking it with monuments. Amy Clampitt and Anne Carson do so by inscribing the traces of collective and individual pasts amid modern mobilities, Tony Harrison and Seamus Heaney investigate memory and history via the act of burial and the communication with the dead and absent, and Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Bishop challenge memorialisation by placing the dead within and outside fluctuating borders and labile landscapes. Douglas Dunn and Ted Hughes assign monumental significance to everyday built environments and structures through their elegies by writing of streets, municipal buildings and domestic dwellings outside the explicitly memorial zones of the cemetery and other self-consciously monumental sites of memory. The architectural elegy, I argue, navigates personal memory and collective history on urban streets and spaces, as well as private histories behind walls and doors, inflecting these structures and interior and exterior sites with a sense of elegy by reifying gaps in narrative and resisting the relegation of narratives of memory into history by insisting on the simultaneity of past and present.

Henri Lefebvre argues that although “Monumental ‘durability’ is unable, however, to achieve a complete illusion” (221), “Only through the monument, through the intervention of the architect as demiurge, can the space of death be negated, transfigured into a living space which is an extension of the body;” (221). He goes on to discuss monumentality in terms of power structures and signifying practices, but the emphasising of the “illusion” of durability and the process of transfiguration—of living spaces into spaces of death here—is similar to the strategies used by Dunn and Hughes in *Terry Street* and *Elegies*,

and *Birthday Letters* respectively. I have chosen these collections as examples of the architectural elegy because they centre around poems that represent and reify narratives of both collective and individual death, loss, grief, and trauma in homes, streets and other built environments. Both Dunn and Hughes used architecture to explore and reify narratives of national nostalgia, the traumas suffered by communities in the wake of the World Wars, and the changing cityscapes and countryside of Great Britain. These narratives of loss and change shadow the background of the suffering in the elegies Dunn and Hughes wrote for their wives, and this meeting of public and personal is inscribed and shaped by the settings of these elegies.

I have chosen *Elegies* and *Birthday Letters* as examples of the architectural elegy not only because both collections share the intimacy of marriage, reflected in a shared history and the concomitant shared geography and memoryscape that must be navigated after the death of the wife, but because of the fact that Lesley Balfour and Sylvia Plath died in their own homes. This means that their deaths were “out-of-place,” challenging the idea that modern death occurs sequestered in hospitals, hospices and nursing homes, and provoking both poets to re-evaluate the concepts of home and familiarity. The different circumstances of these deaths—Balfour died of cancer and Plath killed herself some months after she and Hughes had separated—evokes distinctive reactions. Grief-stricken but ultimately resigned reflection by Dunn contrasts with melancholic and guilt-ridden musing by Hughes, demonstrating the different emotional affects that elegy can use to shape its architectures, as well as different ways of remembering and framing unknown and missing elements of memory. Although *Elegies* and *Birthday Letters* are often



mentioned in passing by critics of elegy as examples of elegies for wives, they have not been compared or studied in any great depth.<sup>1</sup>

While this chapter thus engages to some extent with ideas of monument and history present in the preceding chapters, its starting point is different. Peter Sacks opens his study of the English elegy by noting that Wordsworth asserted the poet's "disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802). Sacks notes that in Wordsworth's own work, "poetic language resembles . . . the snagging troublesome marker that gives presence to a strongly felt absence" (xi), and links this function of poetry to elegiac "spaces of absence and dislocation" (xi) which invite the "use of language to redress and appease" (xi) this awareness of loss. This "making the absent present" through elegy is evident in the "Indian Meadows" stanzas of "A Procession at Candlemas," where the memory of long-gone Native Americans is returned to their original home-site, the preoccupation with blank spaces and uneasily corresponding traces in *Nox*, and in the erasures of voice and text in Heaney's and Harrison's poetry, for example.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, however, I argue that elegy can also be used to create absence out of presence, to inscribe emptiness, loss, dislocation and loose ends in narrative onto structures that seem whole to others beside the elegist, and to superimpose or uncover a map of gaps that undermines the cartographies of memory and biography.

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<sup>1</sup> Iain M. Twiddy discusses both *Birthday Letters* and *Elegies in Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (2012), but does not compare the texts. His focus is on the continuity of the pastoral tradition in modern elegy, and he therefore examines elements of nature and other pastoral convention within the built environment.

<sup>2</sup> Seamus Heaney's "The Redress of Poetry" (1995) discusses poetry in terms of justifying its usefulness and the different external pressures that poets face. Stephen Regan discusses the "redress of poetry" in the elegiac sense meant by Sacks in "Seamus Heaney and the Modern Irish Elegy" (2007).

The theoretical framework of this chapter combines the history and philosophy of architecture, particularly as they relate to memory, with Doreen Massey's concept of simultaneous narratives. Massey critiques binary-oriented and bordered views of space as empty and place as inscribed, held by human geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan, whose work I discuss in "Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy."<sup>3</sup> In *For Space* (2005), she not only portrays this opposition of space and place as reductive, but also links it to a politically conservative mindset, posing the question: "And what if we refuse that distinction, all too appealing it seems, between place (as meaningful, lived and everyday) and space (as what? The outside? The abstract? The meaningless?)" (6).

Influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, among other post-modern and Marxist thinkers, Massey proffers several different answers, but the main thrust of her argument is that rejecting the bordered and fixed space/place opens up the possibility for a discourse of space as an ever-mutating network of simultaneities and interrelationships:

Not only history but also space is open. In this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established), relations which

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<sup>3</sup> Massey is a Marxist-leaning geographer whose work examines connections between place and capitalism, gender and globalisation. Her interventions in the debates and trends of the 'spatial turn' emphasise open-endedness, diversity and fluctuation: "In this case, the argument is that the very possibility of any serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity itself depends on a recognition of spatiality. The political corollary is that a genuine, thorough, spatialisation of social theory and political thinking can force into the imagination a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell. The imagination of globalisation as a historical queue does not recognise the simultaneous coexistence of other histories with characteristics that are distinct (which does not imply unconnected) and futures which potentially may be so too" (11). While a great deal of Massey's more overtly political work is not directly applicable to this chapter or thesis (notwithstanding the fact that we have seen that elegies can have political inflections as well as personal reflections), the articulation of multiple coexisting histories and narratives, grounded in a shifting and constantly developing sense of space, can be related to the idea that geographic narratives in elegy serve to challenge and diversify the history-based sweep of "normative mourning" to "melancholic mourning" (Ramazani 4).

may or may not be accomplished. Here, then, space is indeed a product of relations (first proposition) and for that to be so there must be multiplicity (second proposition). . . . This is a space of loose ends and missing links. (12)

Massey thus imagines place as an event created by both geography and history, in the intersection of specific temporality within a specific history to shape the articulation of a “here and now” within these constantly fluctuating networks:

“Here” is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctions, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities (so “now” is as problematical as “here”). But where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history . . . weaving a process of space-time. (139).

The insistence on process echoes the emphasis on mobility in the work of Nigel Thrift and Tim Cresswell, while the pointed inclusion of space in history reflects the preoccupations of the spatial turn. “Weavings and encounters” is easily linked to the geographic imagination of the elegist, as narratives and confrontations gain elegiac resonance in terms of foreshadowing death and absence.

It is not only current and contemporary narratives that contribute to this process of space-time and the configurations of narratives; in Massey’s view absence is also significant: “And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place” (130). By contrast, Tuan’s view of space that becomes place as the blank slate of conjectured space becomes

meaningful as it is colonised by the “explorer,” and Brian Harley’s and Denis Cosgrove’s perspectives of mapping imaginary geographies are based on deciphering, inscribing and describing absence and the unknown so that they become present and known. Massey’s insistence on simultaneities offers an alternative vision of the construction of place; rather than static layers of inscription, Massey’s envisioning offers a release from linear chronological boundedness and the need to master the territory, presenting a rhizomatic rather than palimpsestic view of space-creation:

However, it is not just buried histories at issue here, but histories still being made, now. Something more mobile than is implied by an archaeological dig down through the surfaces of the space of today. . . . In spatial configurations, otherwise unconnected narratives may be brought into contact, or previously connected ones may be wrenched apart. This is the chance of space; the accidental neighbour is one figure for it. (111)

Massey’s emphasis on narratives in the creation and reading of space makes her work easy to apply to literature, if “narrative” is taken to mean the poetic representation of space-creating events, emotions and memories. The “missing link,” the “loose end,” and the “accidental neighbour”—with their connotations of coincidence, chance, emptiness, unpredictability and unknowability—can be read to signify death and loss in elegy, both the loss of the loved one and the loss of memory. If Massey’s perspective of space-time as a process is applied to death and elegy, the following significant elements emerge: the inclusion of narratives of absence as a constructive factor of place; the emphasis on simultaneous narratives that undermine the enabling of the past to become the past, to become buried; the insistence on a multiplicity of trajectories involved in

the following and crossing of multiple narratives; and the “chance of space” which allows for unplanned meetings of narratives of life and death. The detailed confessional elegy of Dunn and Hughes, particularly in *Elegies* and *Birthday Letters*, can be read as an attempt to counter potential amnesia through recording the moments of living together and grounding them within specific spaces, creating what Massey calls the “event of place,” a conflation of space and time. Nevertheless, reading the architectural structures and built environments of the poems reveals “loose ends” and “missing links,” as well as the narratives of absence that help to construct them, much as the silences of cartography shape the representations of the map.

Theories linking architecture to emotion and imagination reveal the built environment to be responsive in the sense that its purpose and function depend on individual perception, memory and imaginary geography. Denis Cosgrove notes the significance of emotional affect and “imagined geography” that takes cartographic “representation well beyond mere transcription of spatial and environmental facts” (3); similarly, architectural historian Shelley Hornstein emphasises that buildings and cityscapes are not merely bricks and mortar, asserting a psychological interplay in that “architecture captures and triggers memory” (1). The creative and emotional sense of architecture is thus implicated within the material; as Hornstein elaborates, “Architecture is the built environment, indeed a constructed environment—whether in natural, manufactured, or imagined materials—that demarcates space. In this way, architecture is the mapping of space—physical, mental or emotional” (4). Architecture thereby serves an elegiac purpose, mapping both the imagined and physical terrain of grief as the built environment reifies narratives of mourning and memory.

Inspired by Freud's linkage of mourning and melancholia and Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire*, artist and philosopher Victor Burgin contrasts "monuments of mourning" and "monuments of melancholia" (26). While the former are "official sites of remembrance—monuments, memorials or museums more or less well conceived architecturally, more or less well received publicly" (26), the latter are structures that "fail to make their case. The documentation is incomplete, witnesses are missing or unreliable, it is not always clear what is to be proved, and there is so much that has been forgotten" (26). The repeated reference here to the gaps and empty spaces that challenge and shape the purpose of the monumental environment, as well as its structure, suggests the "missing links" and narratives "wrenched apart" as well as connected in Massey's conceptualisation of space. "Monument of melancholia" also evokes the modern melancholic elegy discussed in Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning*, recognisable through traits such as ambivalence and self-reproach, as well as the rejection of conventional consolation and memorialisation. Melancholia and missing links are also reflected in the elegiac perspective which focuses on fragments and shadows; as architect Edwin Heathcote writes in *Monument Builders: Modern Architecture and Death* (1998), "Thus, in the shadows we can see another side to the world, in the negative world of the unknown and of death. The shadow, like the fragment, denotes the absence of the object as much as it signifies its presence" (21).<sup>4</sup> Twiddy notes a similar absence/presence paradox of the memorial in *Elegies*: "An action against loss actually involves loss, since these memories are memorials, things which stand in for what is really gone" (*Pastoral Elegy* 237)—this echoes Carson's questioning of memory as a "lock against oblivion" in *Nox*. The instability of

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<sup>4</sup> This property of the fragment is also evident in the photographs and scrawls of *Nox*, which are an extreme version of the elegy as what Louisa Hall calls "this monumentalizing genre" (208).

fragment and memorial, and the imagined contact with the “world of the unknown,” mean that elegiac architecture is viewed through a glass darkly; we see this in Tennyson’s “dark house . . . in the long unlovely street,” (*In Memoriam* V.1-12), for instance.<sup>5</sup> In “The Art of Grief: Douglas Dunn’s *Elegies*” (1991), J. M. Lyon notes of Dunn’s “The Stories” that “It is as if memory has merely symbolic status in life, but becomes fully itself only in art: indeed, Dunn is reminding us that memory is an art” (53); this art links memory to the shadowed “negative world” in some of the *Elegies*. Dunn uses interior spaces to counter a traditional time of light and growth in “A Summer Night:” “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (13-15), and connects them to uncanny remembering in “Reincarnations:” This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons,” (5-6). Hughes fashions shadows into doorways and structures in “Badlands” and “The Gypsy,” demonstrating how elegiac architecture need not be created out of bricks and mortar. Thresholds between life and death, and between remembering and forgetting, construct significant features of elegiac architecture; both Dunn and Hughes use doorways and windows in a way that creates a sense of haunted houses and that reifies the interplay of memorial traces and blank spaces.

Specifically elegiac geographies of the built environment have not been examined in detail, but criticism of city poetry often links the urban with the violent and soul-destroying. Sandra Gilbert, for instance, links cities and death by correlating post-industrial revolution urban spaces with sites of twentieth-

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<sup>5</sup> Twiddy compares *In Memoriam* to Dunn’s *Elegies*, writing: “Transcribing these memories does more than simply demonstrate love and anguish at their loss. In the same way that Tennyson outlines the character and thoughts of Arthur Hallam in *In Memoriam*, describing numerous details such as the holidays they shared and where Hallam lived, Dunn seeks to put down permanent reminders that act against time” (*Pastoral Elegy* 236).

century mass deaths such as the trench networks of World War I and the Nazi death camps of World War II, considering the latter “cities (or perhaps, more accurately, antocities), eerily modeled on the great factory towns that had sprung up everywhere around Europe’s dark Satanic mills, with their highly specialized divisions of labor, their elaborate manufacturing equipment, their squalid housing for workers” (141). Gilbert suggests that these places of inhumanity and horror possess the power to corrupt their originals: “the city of the war permanently contaminated those peacetime cities of which it was a murderous reflection” (149).<sup>6</sup> Gilbert offers T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) as an example of this dystopian vision, arguing that the poem is an elegy to a friend killed in the trenches (as well as a comment on the decline of Western civilisation), and foregrounding the significance of the “rats’ alley / Where the dead men lost their bones” (113-14) and its superimposition on the London scene. The structures of London support collective mourning:

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many. (63-64)

The World Wars altered both the physical and imagined geographies of cities in England and across the world, with a far-reaching influence on twentieth-century elegy as poets mourned parents who experienced the wars or were lost

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<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, John H. Johnston connects the urban with a dystopian vision, arguing in *The Poet and the City: A Study in Urban Perspectives* (1984): “In war, the outward sign and scene of technological power transmuted into violence is the battlefield, where violence is delivered, concentrated, distributed, expended, and consumed. In peace, I reasoned, the outward sign and scene of technological power is the city, where the multiform physical products of that power are likewise delivered, concentrated, distributed, expended and consumed” (xiv). He goes on to mention that the clichés of “mass organization, mechanization, depersonalization, uniformity, anonymity—have become stale with repetition and semantic inflation” (xiv).



in them, as well as lived through the social and cultural changes that followed. This history is not the whole story, however. The architectural elegy is more than a representation of a post-Industrial Revolution, Post-War, modernist or indeed post-modern dystopia.

As well as serving as a space (as in network of narratives) of engagement with communal and national loss, the architectural elegy foregrounds the built environment as a site where narratives of collective loss and trauma are reified to heighten individual grief. Eliot's term "unreal city" is a fitting description for this effect. As Twiddy writes, "For Dunn, the present world seems unreal, and the past seems to be the real: in Freud's scheme, the successful mourner must not believe in the unreality of the death, but must maintain faith with artificiality of another kind, the substitutive image" ("Dunn's *Elegies*" 128). There are further implications to this "unreality" in the geographic imagination of elegy. If perceived via an elegiac lens, the built environment can be simultaneously a distressingly real reminder of loss but also, while the grief is still fresh, the sensory experience of it can seem unreal—it is hard to internalise the fact that familiar associations are made different by loss. Paul Monette's "Half Life" (1988) uses the city to describe this divided—or doubled—perception of the world after loss: "I open / the door to the morning and half the city's / Capri and half Buchenwald how is it you / so vanished" (18-21).<sup>7</sup> While poems such as "Your Paris" in *Birthday Letters* and "Ships" in *Terry Street* specifically connect Paris and Glasgow with war and the traumas inflicted on the cities and their inhabitants, these references to collective loss become subsumed into an elegiac narrative. In "Your Paris," Hughes's elegiac vision

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<sup>7</sup> See also Robert Pinsky's "City Elegies" (1996) which heightens the experience of the mourning individual in the city:

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notes traces of the war in streets and buildings: “I read each bullet scar in the Quai stonework / With an eerie familiar feeling,” (9-15). Hughes’s preoccupation with the architecture of the city as a “ghost-watcher” (33) means in the poem that he misses warning signs of Plath’s imminent breakdown; the narrative of collective trauma becomes elided with Plath’s personal history of Paris as a site of a missed assignation with a lover and her subsequent distress.<sup>8</sup> In the Glasgow of Dunn’s “Ships”, fathers and uncles are lost and forgotten in the wake of departing ships:

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This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons (9-12)

The collective trauma of the war has been reduced to artefacts and decorative items, their memorial purpose and signifiers of the loss and devastation behind them “fading.” Elegy for those lost in the war is combined with the awareness that the generation who disappeared with the ships forged a link between the shipbuilding industry of the city and the unemployed next generation, a link that is now missing. Although industry in this poem despoils nature and causes the departure of the men of the town, shipbuilding itself is also mourned as what is left behind after its decline is a sense of nostalgia and absence: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

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<sup>8</sup> In “Poetics of Melancholy and Psychic Possession in Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* and Other Haunted Texts” (2003), Dianne Hunter observes the uncanny element of the haunted settings in “Your Paris”: “Plath’s ruthless ambition, and various demonic images of cruelty and sacrifice that Hughes associates with her connect with Hughes’s haunting memory of World War I. In ‘Your Paris,’ for example, Hughes writes, ‘I was a ghostwatcher. / My perspectives were veiled by what rose / Like methane from the reopened / Mass grave of Verdun’ (33-35). Though the setting of the poem is 1950s Paris, and we hear about the German Occupation and French Collaborateurs, the allusion to the Battle of Verdun evokes 1916” (131).

” (13-16), signifying a loss of local identity and purpose.

“Your Paris” moves from public narratives of destruction to a private story of self-destruction and “Ships” keeps its focus communal, but both poems illustrate how absences and “missing links” shape the cityscape, as well as how memory is reified within architectural environments, making them responsive to elegiac narratives of loss and memory. The city in their work is therefore not solely the monstrous, monolithic entity of Gilbert’s dystopian vision, but also a monument of melancholia, a responsive surface that allows traces of personal and public pasts to be inscribed. A classic example of this theme is evident in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*:

Dark house, by which once more I stand

Here in the long unlovely street,

Doors, where my heart was used to beat

So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasp'd no more—

Behold me, for I cannot sleep,

And like a guilty thing I creep

At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away

The noise of life begins again,

And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain

On the bald street breaks the blank day. (V.1-12)

Absence and parting are closely connected to architecture and emphasised with recurring negations: “unlovely,” “no more,” and “cannot sleep” all underline the ultimate “not here” of the dead. Tennyson’s friend Arthur Henry Hallam is not “here” on the street where he should be, leaving the street desolate and empty; without the transforming vision of grief, the street would be innocuous rather than shadowed. Even dawn brings not resurrection and renewal as in the pastoral elegy, but rather a new day of grief. The melancholic “dark” and “unlovely” houses reinforce the transformation of the poet into an insomniac “guilty thing.” The doors are thresholds between awareness of loss and memory, while the “bald street” and “blank” day signify a pervasive emptiness; indeed the scene is responsive to the poet’s mood to the extent that a “pathetic fallacy of the city’s lament” is implied. W. David Shaw comments that Tennyson’s negation in “Canto V.” “takes us on a tour of a linguistic graveyard, of a landscape filled with the corpses of words that have lost their power to memorialize the dead because they have lost their power to signify” (219); the elegy undermines the meaning of both architecture and the conventional discourse of commemoration.

The violence, conflict and destructive technology that Gilbert finds pervasive in the urban environment is a facet of what Peter Barry calls “the ancient dichotomy between country and city” (30). He suggests that at the heart of this division lies the enduring notion that “the countryside is the “locus of thought” while the urban “interferes with thought” (29), a position that, according to Barry, “is surprisingly consonant with the attitude towards the city seen in the first-generation Romantic poets” (29) as well as found in the work of post-World

War II poets such as R. S. Thomas and Seamus Heaney.<sup>9</sup> However, Barry challenges the relevance of the country/city binary in contemporary poetry, and questions the logic behind it: “One reading of the situation, then, is that the town/country dichotomy has progressively been eroded for many generations, and is now virtually meaningless” (30). This is because “the countryside can never be wholly nature nor the city wholly culture” (30) and although the countryside is marked by human intervention, making it partly a “synthesis and construct” (3), the city is also shaped by the topography of the landscape. Barry goes on to remind us that built-up zones in late twentieth-century Britain are as likely to be made up of “suburban generic space” (30) than infernal city wastelands.

In terms of location, *Birthday Letters* and Dunn’s poems fit into the scheme of interfluence between the modern city and the countryside; neither is sealed off. The border between the natural and built environments is as porous as the border between land and sea in “Berck-Plage”; nature and concrete are mutually encroaching, with disturbing results. Hughes’s urban settlements in *Birthday Letters* contain vegetation, animals and birds as well as architecture; his rural sites, particularly in England, are often fenced off or marked by cultivation and building. Urban and rural geographies and inhabitants (both human and non-human) are made equally shadowed and hostile by the elegiac and melancholic vision; teenagers destroy flowers in a city park in Boston (“Child’s Park”), villagers are seen as unfriendly and intrusive peasants (“Error”), bees are associated with the menacing figure of Otto Plath (“The Bee God”), a

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<sup>9</sup> Barry echoes Raymond Williams here, who observes that “A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times. Yet the real history, throughout, has been astonishingly varied” (9). He insists that “The country and the city are changing historical realities, both in themselves and in their interrelations. Moreover, in our own world, they represent only two kinds of settlement” (347).

night camping—infiltrating the wilderness—is made unsafe by scavenging bears (“The 59th Bear”), and a bat bites Hughes on Boston Common, a site where nature is domesticated for recreational purposes (“9 Willow Street”).<sup>10</sup> In “Child’s Park,” for example, Plath’s encounter with the teenagers who cut armfuls of azaleas ends in devouring flowers: “I watched you as you climbed it all on your own / Into the mouth of the azalea” (33-34), and the park becomes a site where the pastoral ideal is contaminated: “your whole Eden radioactive” (43).<sup>11</sup> In “Error,” architecture and vegetation combine: “In a gloom orchard / Under drumming thatch, we lay listening / To our vicarage rotting like a coffin, foundering under its weeds” (24-28), an image of decay that reinforces the motif of an unavoidable destiny of separation and death in *Birthday Letters*. Dunn also uses the intersection of natural and built environments to connote decay and construct uncanny liminal sites. In “Close of Play” from *Terry Street*, set in a middle-class suburb: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1-2), evoking graveyards.<sup>12</sup> Although “Close of Play” is not usually considered an elegy, it employs the elegiac images of nightfall, silence, darkness and ending: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (13-14), and “it is getting dark”

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<sup>10</sup> The most striking conflict between town and country attitudes comes in “The Rabbit Catcher,” in which an attempt to get “back to nature” (20) and its revitalising powers ends in Plath’s destruction of a trapline of rabbit traps in a cliff-top wood; Plath “saw baby-eyed / strangled innocents, I saw sacred / Ancient custom” (54-56). This poem does not deal with architecture.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes frequently subverts the trope of vegetation and the cycle of the seasons signifying renewal and rebirth in the pastoral elegy in *Birthday Letters*. As Twiddy points out, in “Daffodils” (which harks back to Hughes’s poem “Daffodils” in the 1986 collection *Flowers and Insects*): “Rather than the reassuring regeneration signified by the red anemones that figure the dead Adonis, in both poems, these flowers mark the wounding plenitude of Plath’s absence. Pastoral elegy generically moves from barrenness to fertility, from loss to consolation, and Hughes’s poems record grief’s barren kind of fertility, fertile in producing pain, but unable to yield relief and progression” (*Pastoral Elegy* 82).

<sup>12</sup> The title “Close of Play” recalls the opening of W. B. Yeats’s “Easter 1916”: “I have met them at close of day / Coming with vivid faces / From counter or desk among grey / Eighteenth-century houses” (1-4). The sense of ending as nightfall evoked in “Easter 1916” by the lines “What is it but nightfall? No, no, not night but death; / Was it needless death after all?” (65-67) is echoed in the twilight and night of “Close of Play.” Yeats mourned an end to heroic dreams with those dead in revolutionary activity and their transformation into legends of “terrible beauty,” but Dunn uses the ending of a day to show the ending of a certain kind of civilisation, represented through a built environment and the patterns of living that occur there.

(15). The night brings destruction and decay: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (28-30). Here architecture is fragile, unable to withstand devouring nature, which echoes the “menace of unplanned shoots” to the comfortable conformity of the middle-class life portrayed. In other poems, such as “Birch Room” from *Elegies*, nature is consolatory—although Twiddy argues that “The regeneration of spring is presented as a death,” (229), the ending of “leaf-light” (16) and the ambiguity of whether the dying or the living surrender to “the story of the Spring” (7), as well as the arrangement of the environment by the elegist, suggests that nature’s renewal prompts the managing of grief rather than despair. Dunn and Hughes illustrate how the elegiac vision can draw from both sides of what Barry called the country-city dichotomy; indeed, human imprint on nature and nature’s encroachment on homes and urban sites add strands of specificity to the multiplicity of narratives that make up space in the architectural elegy, as well as supporting or challenging elegiac conventions.

Architecture on a smaller and more individual scale in elegy—the interiors of houses—is little discussed by critics, particularly with relation to domestic settings. Although Diana Fuss notes the long history of the deathbed elegy and the “dual temporality of the deathbed itself, poised on the threshold between two worlds” (879), she makes no distinction between deathbeds at home and in hospitals.<sup>13</sup> This differentiation is significant, particularly with regard to criticism of modern elegy, as one of the features assigned to twentieth-century treatment of the dying is the sequestering of the dying and the dead from the buildings of everyday life to hospitals, hospices, morgues and funeral parlours. Ramazani opens *Poetry of Mourning* by asserting that “as mourning

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<sup>13</sup> Fuss’s focus is on the notion of the “good death” (dignified and peaceful) and the importance assigned to “last words” by poets..

rites were weakened and the ‘funeral director’ professionalised, as the dying were shut away in hospitals and death itself made a taboo subject, poetry increasingly became an important cultural space for mourning the dead” (1).<sup>14</sup> Gilbert devotes the chapter “Technologies of Dying” in *At Death’s Door* to considering the inhumanity, de-individualisation and fundamentally uncaring nature of the hospice and hospital space which she calls the “hospital spaceship” (164) because of its detachment from everyday life (164-203). The separation of modern life from the process of dying is thus a dominant narrative in the criticism of elegy, and indeed the hospital space is a major theme in the genre, usually connoting helplessness in the face of pain, disease and the impersonal machinery of both bureaucratic systems and medical technology. In Thom Gunn’s “Lament” (1994), dying in a hospital is a nightmarish experience both for witness and patient:

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The “rage” here echoes Dylan Thomas’s urging of his father to “rage against the dying of the light;” part of this rage is induced not only by the foreknowledge of death but of the seclusion required. The hospital doors, never fully shut, are a threshold into what Gilbert calls the patient’s “exile from normalcy” (176). The confines of the hospital environment in modern elegy provoke narratives of

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<sup>14</sup> Heathcote echoes the idea of the exclusion of death as taboo: “Death has no place in a society which is obsessed with youth and vigour; it has become taboo, and the art of expressing death has suffered deeply. . . . The churchyards used to be at the heart of the settlement, but the cemetery is now usually on a ring-road or by-pass, accessible only by car. Death has been torn out of the heart of the city and a significant part of the city has died as a result” (8).



witnessing pain and indignity, and mourning for the loss of individuality; their insistence is on separation and ending.<sup>15</sup>

The architectural elegies of Dunn and Hughes do not limit grief and memory to a specific site. Because their wives died at home, in places familiar to their husbands, there is no sharp break between memory of the living and the dead; there is no time in a space beyond “normalcy” where the death occurs. The memories of Lesley Balfour’s lingering death permeate their home as in “Birch Room,” intertwining with memories of their life together; Hughes inscribes his perception of Plath’s death into the structure of their entire history (and hers), to the extent that he walls himself into her mortuary architecture: “Blinded I struck a light / And woke upside down in your spirit-house” (“God” 74-75). The reification of shared memories in these poems by husbands for wives (and indeed the writing of an elegiac sequence for a lost wife) have a precursor in Thomas Hardy’s *Poems 1912-13*; indeed, both *Elegies* and *Birthday Letters* are frequently mentioned as Hardy’s successors.<sup>16</sup> *Poems 1912-13* is haunted by the elusive presence of Emma, to whom he remained married for decades despite their estrangement, but curiously the only explicitly architectural piece is from her perspective rather than his. In “His Visitor”, Emma returns to the house they lived in, and exclaims at the changes:

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<sup>15</sup> This detachment is also evident in the “mother curtained in Intensive Care” of Amy Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas.” See also Roy Fisher’s “As He Came Near Death” (1996) in which “And he, too slept little, the morphine and the pink light the / curtains let through floating him with us (5-6).

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert, for instance, notes in connection with her discussion of gender and masculine “grief-work” that “Douglas Dunn, Peter Davison, Paul Monette, Ted Hughes, Donald Hall—these are only a few of the recent male poets who have elegized lost beloveds, and especially the latest of these writers—Monette, Hughes, Hall—have at times strained with a passion very like Hardy’s to address the invisible dead” (31). J. M. Lyon points out that “Both Hardy’s and Dunn’s poems are marked by a strong sense of place, and are concerned with memorial recreations in such contexts” (49). Erica Wagner in *Ariel’s Gift: Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and the Story of Birthday Letters* (2000) suggests that “there are close—some might say, eerie—parallels between *Birthday Letters* and Thomas Hardy’s *Poems of 1912-13*” (22), going on to cite the estrangement of the married couples and the husband’s preoccupation with remembering as instances of similarity.

The change I notice in my once own quarters!  
 A brilliant budded border where the daisies used to be,  
 The rooms new painted, and the pictures altered,  
 And other cups and saucers, and no cozy nook for tea  
 As with me.

. . .

So I don't want to linger in this re-decked dwelling,  
 I feel too uneasy at the contrasts I behold, (6-10, 16-17)

The uneasiness here is Hardy's; it betrays discomfort with change and moving on, and guilt at redecorating, erasing the shared past in favour of the taste of his new wife Florence. This particular poem was written during the year after Emma's death; the abruptness of the change in the former home and the removal of familiar objects is disorienting for the poet. Unlike in the elegies of Dunn and Hughes, where artefacts are haunted, in "His Visitor" it is their absence that evokes the uncanny—the lack of shadow invites the shade.

Memory and haunting are linked throughout *Poems 1912-13*, as they are in *Birthday Letters* and to some extent in *Elegies*. Haunting is not limited to buildings; the natural environments of these texts also have their ghosts. Louisa Hall approaches a definition of the architectural elegy by examining the natural environment in Hardy's elegies, but examines Hardy's elegies for his wife Emma that were not "architectural." She describes the "architectural elegy" as an inherent part of "this monumentalizing genre" in which "the desire to preserve a passing spirit within a physical, understandable space has often

found urgency” (208).<sup>17</sup> Hall suggests that writing an elegy is like building a “poetic tomb or house for the dead,” and that

[T]hese poems are particular kinds of monumentalizing poems. They not only seek to commemorate the dead, but they also seek to create a space (such as a tomb, a room, or a house) in which the spirit of the dead might reside, accessible to the living. . . . [T]his strain of elegy strives for the solid enclosure of a monumentalizing poem that is architectural, more than one-dimensionally commemorative in its potential for containment. (208)

The enclosure of the dead in order to keep them close can certainly be a function of the elegy—as Angela Leighton writes, the form of the elegy “leaves [the dead] rattling around the poem’s pod” (270)—and this form and function is reified in architectural elegy. In the architectural elegy the dead remain obtrusive, in contrast with the elegy of burial, where the dead are often secured in cemeteries, away from everyday life, and the traditional pastoral mode in which the dead are placed at a distance from the living, secured in a static Arcadia. Hall views architectural bordering and monumentalism as potentially consolatory, referring to Hardy’s outdoor elegies for Emma as an alternative to the “solid comfort of a spirit-containing, architectural elegy that is visible and solid” (219). As Hornstein’s and Burgin’s perspectives on architecture suggest, however, an architectural structure is not necessarily “solid,” but can be made fragile via projected melancholic affect. A building can house uncanny, even harmful spirits as well as lingering loved ones; the homes described in Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* contain decidedly *unheimlich* memories and entities, from the

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<sup>17</sup> Hall’s analysis of *Poems of 1912-13* primarily uses architecture as a metaphor for prosodic elements connoting a solid structure, rather than as a geographical element.

Ouija board spirit Pan to the perceived household deity of Plath's father Otto, even before Plath died and Hughes wrote the "monument of melancholia" that is *Birthday Letters*. Architectural structures create thresholds that allow passage as well as walls that contain and enable the inscription of memory. And as some of the poems by both poets show, buildings are not permanent; bricks, paving and concrete are vulnerable to war, town council planning and development, rot and decay, and invasive vegetation. This recognition of ultimate fragility is amplified by the instability of the memorial, but also encourages these poets to write architectures that carry scars, further augmenting the elegiac impulse of the poem. Elegiac narratives deal with the lost, the ended, the missing, the parted, and the inevitable gaps in knowledge and memory as to how these came about; architectural elegy is shaped around these absences.

### **"The Tired City": Douglas Dunn's Elegiac Architecture**

The melancholic properties of Douglas Dunn's cities are enhanced by simultaneous narratives of connection and division. Architecture marks the estrangement between the bereaved poet and the community, as well as the distance between the dead and the living. Architecture also evokes memory and reifies narratives of the past, maintaining their simultaneity with the absences of the present, contributing to the frequent sense of dislocation in Dunn's poems. This disorientation, not only spatial but temporal, is apparent in the individual, domestic loss of "The Kaleidoscope": "To climb these stairs again, bearing a tray, / Might be to find you pillowed with your books" (1-2), the title of the poem highlighting shifting memories and the past and present. In "Ships," city and river framed a generation gap as well as highlighting the absence of those dead in the wars. In "The River through the City," from *Happier Life* (1972), the flux of the river meets static architecture, creating a subtle moment of elegy:

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This poem emphasises the multiple simultaneous narratives of the city and the connections and gaps between them. The wavering reflections of the lights forge a fluid connection between the artificial and the elemental; civilisation and technology create “neon flowers” for suicides, an intangible funerary rite that reflects the placing of flowers on the grave.<sup>18</sup> Dunn gestures towards classic elegiac tropes with the “god in an oilskin coat”, a modern Charon on the River Styx. In pastoral elegy the dead are removed from the realm of the living; here the city bestows its own memorial, binding suicide and city together—the memorials of the neon flowers last as long as the city does, so their narratives remain simultaneous. However, there are also spaces of disjunction between the dead and the city; “points of silence” mark the spot where the suicides become submerged, and the river-deity passes unobserved. The poem ends

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<sup>18</sup> These coloured lights fuse everyday technology with a sense of the numinous, creating a similar effect to the moving headlights of Clampitt’s headlights in “A Procession at Candlemas.”

with a final severing: “Iron doors bang shut in the sewers” (19), a reminder of structures beneath the city and suggesting an underworld.<sup>19</sup>

Dunn’s simultaneous evocation of the floral and classical, and the modern and technological in “The River Through the City” emphasises that the urban and pastoral/rural modes of thought are not automatically antithetical. Criticism of Dunn’s work, however, tends to focus on his approach to a perceived urban/pastoral divide. David Kennedy, for instance, notes that “the middle generation” of poets that includes Dunn, Harrison and Heaney, are influenced by Philip Larkin in their portrayal of the built environment: “The communities living in the shadow of Larkin’s cooling tower, in the blighted urban pastoral of its industrial froth and dismantled cars—and, in Heaney’s case, beyond the immediate metropolitan landscape—are explored as rich resources of affiliation, tradition and symbolism in their own right” (*New Relations* 15).<sup>20</sup> Later he asserts that

The relocation of the pastoral in the urban is, of course, an easily identifiable phenomena in late twentieth century British poetry: it can be traced from Larkin’s “The Whitsun Weddings” through Dunn’s “Horses in a Suburban Field” (1969) to more recent poems like Sean O’Brien’s “The Park by the Railway” (1982), Simon Armitage’s *Xanadu* and many of Glyn Maxwell’s celebrations of life in Welwyn Garden City. (126)

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<sup>19</sup> A similar gap between the dead and the living is evident in Dunn’s “Winter Graveyard” (1974): This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1-2, 12-13). The emphasis on neglect and lost communication with the dead anticipates Tony Harrison’s *V.*, but “Winter Graveyard” is abandoned and taken over by unbridled nature rather than actively re-inscribed and desecrated by graffiti and vandalism as in *V.*

<sup>20</sup> Fiona Stafford in “A Scottish Renaissance: Edwin Morgan, Douglas Dunn, Liz Lochhead, Robert Crawford, Don Paterson, Kathleen Jamie” (2007) also links Dunn to Larkin and other urban writers: “The voice of the young Scot in the south often conveys perplexity in the face of the mundane not unlike that of the later ‘Martian’ school of Craig Raine, although Dunn’s insistently urban images can also be seen in relation to Larkin, Baudelaire and Laforgue” (230).

Anticipating Barry's comments on the mutual influence of the natural and built environments, Kennedy provides a generally positive view of the interaction of the urban and the pastoral.<sup>21</sup> His evocation of sites where the urban and pastoral combine and intersect rather than occlude each other contrasts with Gilbert's modern anti-city and the death of the pastoral.<sup>22</sup> Dunn's architectural elegy maps sites where tradition and modernity coexist, creating elegy where geography serves as a nexus of both the traditions and the innovations of the genre.

The emotional affect and memory reified by Dunn's geographic imagination sometimes subverts the individual conventions of the pastoral; in "Ships" the "Swans in the reeds, picking oil from their feathers" (2) on the Clyde counter the rejuvenating springs of "Lycidas" and the "sparkling Thames" of Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar-Gypsy" (202). In the "The River through the City," the river is a repository for the "secrets behind sordid events" (12) such as "where Hitler is hiding" (11) as well as the water deity. The pastoral is nevertheless a presence in these poems, a narrative that maps their elegiac geography, reinforcing absence, loss, gaps in narrative and the uncanny unknowability of things beneath the surface as well as urban pollution and

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<sup>21</sup> Kennedy's mention of Dunn's "Northern anti-pastoralism" (*New Relations* 46) is jarring considering the rest of his discussion of Dunn's work.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly allowing for an overlapping of the pastoral and the urban traditions and defending the city as a source of inspiration, Neal Alexander and David Cooper build on Barry's definition of the loco-specific geographical poem (a concept discussed in the introduction to this thesis) to note in their introduction to *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-War Poetry* (2013) that although the loco-specific poem is often given a titular "place name" that is linked to a pastoral tradition including the "Romantics to Thomas Hardy to Edward Thomas to A.E. Housman," poets such as Douglas Dunn have "fed off, and back into, this placename tradition by focusing on the distinctly non-pastoral topographies of England's (post-)industrial cities. The constantly evolving nature of built environments, then, continues to provide the actual and imaginative material for the ongoing rejuvenation of the English place name poem" (8). Sean O'Brien has a chapter titled "Douglas Dunn: Ideology and the Pastoral" in *The Deregulated Muse* (1998) which discusses Dunn's "garden poems" from the perspective of the public and the private, in the context of Dunn's political and national identity as "left-leaning Scottish republican" which is "predicated on a dream of social unity, an egalitarian reasonableness" (74).

decay. Critical discussion of place and geography in Dunn's work is not usually framed in terms of specific locations and their spatial narratives; Kennedy, for instance, positions Dunn's concern with geography and environment as markers in conflicts of class, political and national identities as well as debates on language and authenticity, but does not examine geographical representations of responses to death and absence, or how the built environment reifies narratives of mourning and memory with everyday life and routine (*New Relations* 26).

Transfiguring and transformative vision in Dunn's poetry are a recurring theme in criticism, but have rarely been applied to the intersection of Dunn's elegy and his architecture.<sup>23</sup> The elegiac vision in Dunn's poetry transforms the quotidian into the monumental, causing architecture to frame absence as well as marking presence and memory. As Rebecca E. Smalley argues, "personal expressions of feeling found in poetry can be read as more than 'human documentaries' and the 'human appeal' of confessional poetry need not obfuscate the reader's evaluation of the art of poetry" (1).<sup>24</sup> The transformative power of Dunn's vision and sense of detail, and their translation into the "art of poetry" has been noted by critics such as Fiona Stafford, who notes that despite the fact that "the visual detail creates a vivid sense of the street" (238), a

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<sup>23</sup> Lyon notes in his discussion of the relationship between craft and the seeming artlessness of Dunn's "extreme and documentary-like accuracy" (49) that "Dunn's achievement lies in his power to express death's comingling of the mundane and the inexplicable—'Sensible, commonplace, beyond understanding' ('The Clear Day')" (51).

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca E. Smalley discusses the connection between *Terry Street* and *Elegies* further in her (unpublished) thesis "The Role of Memory in the Poetry of Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison with Specific Reference to Elegy" (1991). She not only points out that "the combination of Dunn's solitude with the dejected 'reflection' on reality which we read in *Terry Street* hints that the roots of the successful elegiac art we find in his later work are present in this first collection" (9). Her work on narratives and memory differs from mine in that her focus is on social and moral implications to the poets' portrayal of loss and grief, "This thesis intends, then, to show that Harrison's and Dunn's writing demands a qualitative response to the way their poetry integrates personal memory with mindfulness of social and moral existence" (15) rather than analysing the connections between architecture and elegiac narratives of memory and absence.



“certain pessimism emerges through unambiguous assessments of ‘the street tarts and their celebrating trawlermen’ as ‘agents of rot’ or of the Terry Street children, ‘grown too old to cry out for change’” (238), but nevertheless, the everyday can become “oddly marvellous” (238). This sense of the “marvellous,” the angel in the details, applies to funerary ritual as well as celebrating the beauty in the “least promising things” (238). Stafford suggests that Dunn succeeds in crafting this perspective as one of the “pioneers of a photographic poetry that captures the details of life in a modern city with provocative clarity” (238). She continues the theme of transformation in Dunn’s work, using the same descriptor of “vivid” to describe Dunn’s navigation of narratives of hopelessness and loss. Stafford refers to *Elegies* as “Dunn’s finest volume,” saying that the experience of losing his first wife through cancer

transformed both his life and his poetry, which suddenly found an intense vividness different in kind from the earlier photographic or meditative poems. . . . Photography is now transfigured into his late wife’s “Writing with Light”, a redemptive art that shines on the poet’s grief. The entire volume is a homage to Lesley Balfour Dunn and seems to fulfil the advice she herself gives in “Tursac”:  
 “Write out of me, not out of what you read” [14]. In writing out of his wife, however, Dunn is also adopting a highly literary and self-conscious poetic form, and demonstrating its validity in the modern world. (242)

Stafford’s correlation of Dunn’s engagement with a broad cross-section of working-class urban life in *Terry Street* and other collections, and the specific intimacy of the events related to the death of his wife through the use of such terms as “vivid”, serves to reinforce my conception of the architectural elegy

informed by Massey's idea of place as "an event, the articulation of a "here and now" within networks of time-space processes, or simultaneous narratives—a focusing on a knot within the tapestry. Just as Dunn's scenes of streets and deathbeds are related, the elegy not only permits a pause to engage with a specific moment, but also serves to link that moment with other simultaneously occurring narratives elsewhere; architecture both defines the boundaries of this moment, creating a space for memory, and reifies the narratives meeting within it.

Nevertheless, Dunn does not always "write with light," but with shadow; as Twiddy points out in his Freudian reading of *Elegies*, in many of the poems Dunn describes his "resistance" to "giving up the dead, returning to the real" ("Dunn's *Elegies*" 127). Dunn's scrutiny of his surroundings uncovers the melancholic as well as the marvellous, often simultaneously. Smalley comes closest to my theme by connecting history, memory and landscape: "The fast fading signs or traces of history are reconstituted out of the dynamics of the poet's own mind or a character's memory. The poet meditates on events within landscapes symbolic of forgetfulness, emptiness and nothingness" (118). Smalley's discussion of this dynamic between trace and forgetfulness is based in the obvious memorial site of "Winter Graveyard"; although she notes the "bitterness" of the tone in this poem, her argument is that the "forgetting and neglect are deliberate abnegations of a social and moral code" (119). She does not discuss how built environments become sites of memorial or melancholy; what I must emphasise is that the "traces of history" and the empty landscapes are connected through the elegiac imagination of the poet; they shape each other even as the river through the city influenced town planners and the city overshadows and pollutes the river. In "Sunday Morning among the Houses of

Terry Street,” for instance, on the surface Dunn maps “A street of oilstains and parked motorbikes, / Wet confectionary wrappers becoming paste, / Things doing nothing, ending, rejected” (4-6). The sense of ending dominates this poem; nothing on the street is fulfilling its function. Beneath the surface, connected by “antique plumbing” (25), we find “Hull’s underworld, its muddy roots” (27). As in “The River through the City,” the urban narrative comprises an intersection between everyday life and a post-death site, the traces and emptiness of the surface reflected below. The geographic imagination of the elegist is in control of both individual and collective “traces of history,” it is true, but also of mapping terrains of absence and weaving the narratives that combine them, or in this case building or shattering the walls that divide and enclose absence and presence.

The tension between public mourning and private grief are expressed in poems set in public sites such as “Second Opinion” and “Arrangements,” where personal narratives come into conflict with the decorum and appropriate behaviour expected within the locale; of the doctor’s office where the verdict of cancer was given, Dunn writes of his response: “No leaves rustling in sunlight / Only the mind sliding against events / And the antiseptic whiff of destiny” (“Second Opinion” 19-20). The elegist’s articulation of the narratives of “here and now” are anchored to a specific building and a moment when death becomes inevitability; the rebellion of the mind is against both the inexorable future, its bleakness augmented by the medical smell of the place. As Twiddy points out, here “Nature has no grasp of the ironic, and even if art may eventually come to produce imaginative support or comfort for the poet, its consolation is too remote in the immediate loss of the real” (*Pastoral Elegy* 234); both the outside world and the possibility of pastoral consolation are excluded

as the narrative focuses on the interior of the building. In domestic spaces, the familiar and loved becomes alien as attempts at orientation are shaken by death and grief. Narratives of past and present collide and sometimes overlap, and absence and dislocation rearrange the seemingly solid. Smalley suggests that “In ‘The Butterfly House,’ Dunn’s combination of mourning and domestic realism opens up a new world of emotional responses. Dunn finds no ‘comfort’ for his wife’s death in his room of material comforts” (161); I would argue further that as in the case of Heaney’s melding of the familiar and the *unheimlich* in the bog poems, the domestic site actually heightens the expression and performance of mourning—nowhere is safe from the transformative property of grief and the elegiac vision that accompanies it. I would also challenge Smalley’s “domestic realism” in that poem; normal objects and settings soon become unusual and dislocated. As Twiddy writes of “The Butterfly House” (its name emphasises fragility and transformative processes): “In celebrating harmony—organic and inorganic, physical and metaphysical—Dunn is aware that it is threatened by loss: what seems temporarily like transcendent freedom can be dragged back down again, from air to water” (“Dunn’s *Elegies*” 130). Twiddy’s work is informed by Freud’s conception of the stages of grief, but here I identify the simultaneous narratives that disrupt the initial state of “harmony” with the “chance of space.”<sup>25</sup> In “The Butterfly House,” the initial location ratified by the “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (8-9) contributes to the sense that this “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (13-15). This is the

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<sup>25</sup> Twiddy tracks the stages of grief in *Elegies*, primarily informed by Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia*: “Proceeding through the stages of grief involves the idyllic location being steadily diminished, as the mourner retreats less frequently to it, and although this process is painful and bewildering, involving, as Freud states, ‘great expense of time and cathectic energy,’ Dunn will come to accept the loss of the ‘artificial’ past, and become reconciled with a substitutive image of the dead” (“Dunn’s *Elegies*” 130).

quiet before the storm. Knowing that this is an elegy transforms the naively materialistic statement of comfort into a cry of bitterness; we already know that the trappings of middle-class domestic life cannot ward off disease or tragedy. The objects in the house are repositories of a life lived as a couple—“ This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (24-26). As the poem progresses in its litany of everything in its right place, the interior of the house begins to take on connotations of the temporary and the transformative.

Rather than a solid enclosure, the “Butterfly House” is a nexus of intersecting geographies; a bowl of fruit represents “four countries” (29), and the speaker gradually realises:

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The realisation that the house, which seemed to have a single, unified location in the eyes of bureaucrats and government officials, is in fact a network of simultaneous narratives, foreshadows the destabilising effect of death upon the house and the speaker’s comfortable life. Everything in the house has an origin elsewhere, outside the confines of its postcode and the jurisdiction of “HM Government” (7)—and there is an implication that it is in fact where it does not

belong. This foreshadows at least one returning; the speaker's wife returns to dust. The impermanence of the fruit and the fragility of the stained-glass image that gives the Butterfly House its name foreshadow this ending. The poem ends with the fluidity of a river undermining both the architectural structure of the house and the composition of the speaker's body:

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Here both body and architecture are linked to the earth. The speaker is caught between his home on land, with its shifting spaces and treacherous objects, and the sea, which "flowing in its own shapes" is not imported from anywhere and is always at home.

The regular form of "Thirteen Steps and the Thirteenth of March," a poem of fifty-two lines comprising thirteen quatrains, attempts to contain intersecting narratives within the confines of the house. Dealing explicitly with the weeks leading up to Lesley Balfour's death, the precise time and space in the title of the poem, inflected with doubled bad luck to the superstitious, provides the

“here and now” that creates the articulation of a “space-time event” in Massey’s definition of place. The narrative trajectories that meet in this place are convention—both elegiac and cultural—and the “conspiracy of women” (36); markers of these trajectories are the “Doorbells, shopping, laundry, post and callers” (9) looked after by the speaker, who serves “Tea, sherry, biscuits, cake, and whisky for the weak . . .” (17) to visitors who bring flowers. These indicators of nursing duties and accoutrements of sickbed or deathbed visitors frame a conventional narrative of the dying person setting their affairs in order:

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This narrative of the public brave face, the duty of the dying person to make an organised death and their nurse to make it easy for them, is under-cut by the narrative of private grief. The brief interjection of the caesura “It tore my heart out” among the enjambments that form the framework of the conventional narrative recalls the chaos lurking behind the orderly façade—much like the “*Write it!*” in the parentheses of Bishop’s “One Art.” The tension between the emotion and the convention of the “public brave face” disrupts the orderly quatrains and undermines what Fuss identifies as the tradition of the “good death”—she observes that Dunn as a “good Protestant mourner, pronounces his wife’s slow wasting a sad but nevertheless ‘beautiful’ death” (879):

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copyright reasons. (41-44)

Time here is figured through the characteristics of a suburban built environment, as if time is Massey's "accidental neighbour" and can be refused entry to the "stillness in the world." In these lines anonymity becomes a blessing, as if time cannot catch up with the speaker and his dying wife as long as they are masked by words and music; their private communication occurs in "candle-shadows" (38).

Unfortunately, symbols of affection and social convention cannot halt or hide from the passage of time forever; although the "cyclamen and lilies" (7) and the visitors are "trusty tributes holding off the real" (8), their warding power is limited. Again invoking weddings, and indirectly the "till death do us part" vow of the Christian ceremony, the wedding ring gains significance:

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The narrative breaks off between ceremonial image, between letting go of the wedding ring and the funeral. We are left to infer that the blank space on the page is an elision for dying, that the "accidental neighbour" has managed to climb in through the back window. The final lines of the poem echo the preoccupation throughout the collection with custom and convention; the



ceremonies of grief, with reception and flowers, form a dark reflection to those of the wedding.

If Dunn's interior domestic structures contain conflicting narratives of intertwining and parting, convention and chaos, the urban sites in *Elegies* are more uniformly melancholic, reflecting to some extent Eliot's "unreal city." In one of the later poems of the collection, "December," the connection between mourning and city is made explicit. As Smalley points out, "Dunn makes the town a part of his mourning and by doing so he makes the town an extension of himself and his private grief" (158). In the final lines conventional images of pastoral pathetic fallacy shift into the melancholic monument of urban architecture, heightening the connection between poet and environment:

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Twiddy suggests of "December" that "Dunn's confusion does not so much suggest a pathetic fallacy, that the city is mourning the death, rather that in this place he cannot make grief retreat" ("Dunn's *Elegies*" 128), going on to say that "the poet is frozen, unable either to return to the lost world, or to accept the slide towards artifice, the regeneration or reconstruction of memory and poetry implied by the resisted spring" (128). Rather, the elegiac vision does transform

the city into a version of the pathetic fallacy; the “barren orchards” are implicated in the urban environment. It is true that there is an element of stasis in “December,” but as in “A Procession at Candlemas,” the poet actively inscribes the elegiac narrative across the imagined geographies of the surroundings, making absence and stasis out of presence and movement, “reality” is a narrative of the past and an “unreal city” a space of the present.

One of the hardest things about the “unreal city” to face, and thereby a recurring preoccupation for elegists who locate their mourning and memory within the built environment, is the simultaneity of narratives that comprise it. The elegiac cartography that maps fragment and absence out of completeness and normality is perhaps most painful when juxtaposed with the images of people unaffected by grief—until the realisation that in fact, as Eliot mourns, “death had undone so many.” In “Arrangements,” these bleak epiphanies occur in a building that “stinks of municipal function” (11), its public nature having seeped into its walls. The title “Arrangements” suggests the ordering of grief into the practices of mourning—the inevitable bureaucratic matters that follow death. This routine is disrupted, however: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1-3). The fluidity of the repeated “w” sound begins to evoke water and weeping, as the bereaved enters the simultaneous narrative of merriment, in a macabre echo of the wedding ceremony: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (8-10). Indeed, the typical wedding vows include the phrase “till death do us part”—the elegiac vision works retroactively. A clerk eventually informs the speaker “You came in by the wrong door” (14), reinforcing the ending to the story that began even before “the antiseptic whiff of destiny” in the doctor’s office of “Second Opinion.” As Twiddy observes of the ominous

overtones in “The Butterfly House:” “the anticipation reveals that in the experience of death there is no loss of faith, no unforeseen knowledge” (130). In *Birthday Letters*, an overriding sense of fate and doom are motifs that shape the entire collection; Dunn’s “wrong door” here is comparable to Hughes’s attempt to retrace his steps in “Error:” “What wrong fork / had we taken?” (24-25). Reified into specific thresholds and paths, both elegists accompany these intimations of foreordination—the “chance of space”—with overtones of guilt and bitterness, as well as rebellion against losing control over the narrative of their lives.

The transformation from poet to elegist, husband to widower, is portrayed by Dunn as a diversion of his narrative into a parallel with other mourners. In “Arrangements,” Dunn finds a bleak connection with a widow on similar business who also went through “the wrong door” to the wedding as “a flake of confetti falls from her shoulder” (21):

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The placement of the “fictitious clinics” on the “edge of town” emphasises the marginalisation of the mourner from everyday life and the wedding celebrants in the next room. The reference to shared birthday and predestination echoes the

sense of fate by invoking horoscopes. Mourning and the attendant formalities are compared to built structures here, with the “promenades” (referring to both verb and noun) reminiscent of Emily Dickinson’s “After Great Pain” in which “The Feet, mechanical, go round—/ A Wooden way” (5-6). The emphasis in both poems is on routine and a lack of individuality, a reducing and freezing of the self; not only is Dunn’s grief conflated with the widow’s, but the registrar official has seen so many grieving relatives that his attitude is impersonal.

The bureaucrat’s desk becomes a threshold. Through his inscription “The local dead walk into genealogy” (44), relegated to the past and becoming history.

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The bureaucrat is not only not a “cipher” in the sense that he “fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a ‘mere nothing’” (*OED*)—the word cipher has further connotations of emptiness and nothingness; mathematically it is “An arithmetical symbol or character (0) of no value by itself” (*OED*) and in physics the word has meant “The zero-point, or zero, of a thermometer” (*OED*). To be a “cipher of history” is to be something of a vacuum, where “names and dates and causes” disappear—because the bureaucrat specifically is not one, he is assigned the power to shift the dead from the sites of un-self-conscious and organic memory, into inscribed and documented history, according to Nora’s formulation of the *lieu de memoire*. Instead, it is the mourner who seems to disappear, willingly, in a process very similar to that described by Julian

Wolfreys writing of the modern urban uncanny: “The city effectively spectralizes the philosopher [Descartes] therefore. Making him invisible, it erases, in his reflection on the condition of urban living, his material and corporeal presence, to leave behind only a disembodied cogito” (174). In “Arrangements,” the speaker is made invisible as he leaves the municipal building:

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Tears and rain are a classic conflation in the “pathetic fallacy of nature’s lament” (Sacks 21); by making the rain “ubiquitous,” grief permeates the cityscape, as “small pools are gathering in the loving bouquets” (55) of the wedding parties. This elegiac vision causes a specific part of the mournful cityscape to leap into focus for the first time: an “undertaker’s / Sub-gothic premises with leaded windows” (59-60), which the speaker had passed “hundreds of times” (59), paying no attention: “Not once did I see someone leave or enter, / And here I am, closing the door behind me” (63-64). Again the erasing of the mourner is emphasised; as a continuation from the speaker’s desire to hide his sorrow and his sorrowful purpose, it is perhaps suggested that other mourners had themselves hidden from his eyes as a passer-by. The rain serves to mask the mourner; anonymity and a rejection of individuality and visibility are predicated on the urban site and experience here.

In “Arrangements,” the title refers obviously to the necessary formalities of death in modern time in the Western world, but it also evokes the process of ordering grief into mourning. To go through each door here is to leave

something behind and to enter a new state, a classic ritual function of the threshold. In this elegy these arrangements are structured around the architectural frameworks of doors; the “chance of space” that meant entering the municipal building through the wrong door and creating a nexus of coinciding narratives of mourning and celebration, the door from the waiting room into the office where loss and widowhood become concrete through their ratification by the official and where the dead woman is relegated into the past, leaving through the “taboo and second-rate” (51) right door, and closing the undertaker’s door, where burial is arranged. As the mourner goes through each door, the dead recede into the distance, but signs of loss become increasingly pronounced in the city. Twiddy suggests that “elegy does indeed aim to distance the poet from sorrow” (126), but the architectural punctuation here reinforces the process rather than progress; “Arrangements” maps the distance between poet and sorrow, as well as between the mourner and the dead.

### **“A Knossos of Coincidence”: The “Chance of Space” in *Birthday Letters***

Built environments in *Birthday Letters* are constructed to reflect and inscribe loss, remembrance, and uncertainty by reifying and enclosing spatial narratives and narrative trajectories.<sup>26</sup> A central and recurring image in *Birthday Letters* is the labyrinth; viewed as an architectural space, the “Knossos of coincidence” (15) from “18 Rugby Street” suggests a reification of the struggle to know

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<sup>26</sup> An early version of my study of Ted Hughes and architectural elegy was published in the Ted Hughes Society Journal as “A Knossos of Coincidence: Elegy and the “Chance of Space” in the Urban Geographies of *Birthday Letters*.(February 2013)

chance and choice from fate and powerlessness. The myth of Theseus, Ariadne and the Minotaur in the labyrinth, while reflecting the role of accident and resulting tragedy, also suggests the power of accumulating narratives and the way they create space and shape our understanding of it—according to art historian Hermann Kern in *Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings over 5000 Years* (2000), it took centuries before the different parts of the myth coincided into the form we know today.<sup>27</sup>

Architecture in *Birthday Letters* records memory associated with specific spaces, thus transforming common dwellings and streets into monuments, but also functioning as a mapping device that directs trajectories of narrative and imposes a pattern on chance. In “9 Willow Street,” set in an apartment block in Boston, the very address of the house suggests the weeping willow, a pastoral elegiac image. The house itself is an unstable structure surrounded by emptiness:

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<sup>27</sup> Minos, King of Crete demanded an annual tribute of youths from Athens; these were sacrificed to the half-man, half-bull monster the Minotaur who lived in a labyrinth/maze beneath the palace of Knossos. Theseus, the son of the king of Athens went himself as a tribute, killed the Minotaur and found his way out of the labyrinth with the help of King Minos’s daughter Ariadne. During their escape back to Athens, Theseus left Ariadne behind on the island of Naxos—either by accident or deliberately, according to different versions of the myth.

Emotion and architecture are mutually unsettling here, while the passage of time is conflated with the enclosing framework of the fire-escape. The positioning of the fire-escape, an actual feature of 9 Willow Street, between “nothing” and “nothing,” suggests a missing link in a narrative—and its trajectory is bleak. At the end of the poem, Hughes realises, or decides, that the ending must be fated: “The myth we had sleepwalked into: death” (101). Individual memory and specific architectural structure are here subsumed into a general meditation on the power and irony of fate—the missing links are filled in by myth, here perhaps meaning the way in which critics, biographers, and even novelists have latched on to strands of Plath’s and Hughes’s narrative, as well as the patterns of tragic irony in Greek drama and mythology.

*Elegies* roughly charts the progress of mourning from the diagnosis of cancer to the anniversaries of death, but the overarching narrative of *Birthday Letters* stretches from Hughes’s (probable) first awareness of Plath’s existence, to Hughes’s awareness of the critics who dissected her work posthumously. The collection resonates with recurring narratives of tension and opposition—the simultaneous, mobile, narratives of Massey’s theory of space. These narratives include the conjunction of hindsight and foreshadowing represented by Ouija boards and astrologies, attempts to pattern chance events according to archetypal mythologies, intertextual engagement with Plath’s work, and employing 1950s England and New England as representatives of post-war trauma and squalor and shiny comfortable capitalism respectively, to name but a few. As well as creating spaces of memory and mourning, these conflicting narratives reinforce the interrogations of regret, lost potential futures and the nature of reminiscence and biography itself in the sequence, and have been discussed by critics such as Heather Clark, Erica Wagner, and Edward Hadley.



The connections between geography and narratives of tension and opposition have not been extensively studied, particularly the intersection between memory and the built environment, which is understandable considering the primary focus on the natural world in Hughes's body of work.

Fatalism imposed on tragic events by the images and structures of classical myths, astrology, references to destiny, and the fixed parts and speeches of theatre, form a significant motif of *Birthday Letters*. Lynda K. Bundtzen frames the collection within the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, arguing that Hughes "eventually challenges Plath's grieving verse with his own poetry of loss. By opposing her, he also releases himself from the melancholic and doomed poetic identity of Orpheus to complete a normal mourning process, simultaneously bidding a last farewell to his dead wife" (205). Twiddy observes that "In certain parts of *Birthday Letters*, where Hughes refers to the agency of 'fate', this may not be so much an abdication of responsibility, as a simple admission of incapacity" (89). Hadley notes in *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (2010) that intertextuality in the poems between Plath's verse and journals and *Birthday Letters* contribute to "what is probably the most suspect feature of the poems, that Hughes is a reluctant participant in the story of his own life, at the mercy of a written fate which governs his actions often portrayed in an elaborate 'acting' conceit" (123). Similarly, Heather L. Clark places *Birthday Letters* within the context of Plath's *oeuvre*, observing that "Yet, like *Ariel*, *Birthday Letters* is driven by equally rivalrous and elegiac impulses . . . .Through his revision of Plath's poems and person, Hughes rewrites (and attempts to re-right) not just her story, but his part in that story" (223). In "The Deterministic Ghost in the Machine" (2004), Leonard Scigaj discusses "cultural and genetic determinism," observing that

The central structural design of *Birthday Letters* concerns an obsessive equation of Otto and Sylvia Plath with King Minos and the Minotaur of Cretan mythology. . . . In this contemporary recension, Hughes casts Otto Plath as the self-absorbed Minos (133), given his autocratic *pater familias* behaviour acquired from his Germanic roots. In her self-destructive indulgence in anger and emotional tirades, Plath apes her father as she becomes the Minotaur. (2)<sup>28</sup>

Much more is common knowledge about Plath's life, ancestry and legacy than about Lesley Balfour Dunn's; the reader of *Birthday Letters* has far greater access to the narratives Plath created for herself, in her poems, fiction, letters and journals. When we read what Lesley Balfour Dunn said in a particular room in a particular house in *Elegies*, we have to accept Dunn's version of events; by placing his wife and his memories of both their time together and his grief, Dunn crafts and inscribes a monument. Hughes, however, engages with the narratives left behind by Plath; he fits them around his own version of events—and over-writes them if he deems it necessary. *Birthday Letters* are part dialogue—with his own memory, with Plath's work, with critics and friends—and part re-inscription. While part of the emphasis on fate is the natural impulse of the elegist, particularly if grieving a loved one, to figure out what went wrong and what could have changed the ending, a major figure in the patterns imposed by Hughes is a result of the tendency observed by Hadley and Scigaj to re-inscribe existing narratives by and surrounding Plath.

What these critics have not examined in detail is the extent to which architecture and the built environment are profoundly implicated in both

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<sup>28</sup> The poems referred to by Scigaj are "Setebos" and "The Minotaur" respectively.

Hughes's attempts to evoke the tension between chance, choice and destiny in *Birthday Letters*, and the multiple narratives of mythology, Plath's work, Hughes's memory—and the gaps in that memory—that are accommodated, revised and erased in the collection. The “loose ends and missing links” that form part of Massey's definition of space make it particularly appropriate for elegy in general, and *Birthday Letters*, with its preoccupation with the inevitable fallibility of memory and the ensuing gaps in narrative in particular. The narratives of uncertainty and blankness that intersect and intertwine with presence and traces of memory are not merely recorded in *Birthday Letters* but manipulated; in “Fate Playing,” the chance of a missed meeting is wrenched into a saga of destiny fulfilled. The poem maps a frenetic London created by simultaneous trajectories and passages of traffic and pedestrians, with the chance of space a defining feature of the urban geography:

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The train station, as with other hubs of transportation and travel, functions as a nexus of connecting and disconnecting narratives: literal crossed and parted paths. Coincidence here is created by the coordination of complex systems of transport and technology infused with the mythical-historical infusion of gods

and goblins and chariot races to create a liminal space between chance and fate on King's Cross platform that transcends the quotidian. The chance of space is connected to the chance of time, marking the "here and now" of place; any earlier or later and the "miracle" would not have occurred. As in "9 Willow Street," however, the trajectory of these narratives ends with ominous overtones: "And everything holds up its arms weeping" (53); as Twiddy remarks of the ending, emphasising the sense of being locked into narratives, "Hughes finds himself suddenly hauled into a simile depicting emotions he does not feel, or he becomes suddenly aware of a huge , previously unknown need" (*Pastoral Elegy* 93-94).

The urban spaces of *Birthday Letters* are precisely mapped and positioned according to street-names and architectural sites, reinforcing the spatial dimension of remembrance. The first lines of "Fulbright Scholars," the first poem in the collection, for example, link memory with the city of London: "Where was it, in the Strand? A display / Of news items, in photographs" (1-2). Hughes recalls the place where he saw a photograph of recently arrived students from America, but he cannot recall whether Plath was among them, and thus whether this photograph, and by extension the Strand, was the point of origin of their intertwined narrative.<sup>29</sup> Hadley suggests that the opening line of the poem serves to "blur the locale" (126) of the poem, and thereby to reinforce "the apparent uncertainty of the poet's personal recollection displaces the accuracy and verifiability of the elegy's report" (129), meaning that "the factual nature of elegy which hides behind the poem's artifice is disrupted by Hughes" (126). This distinction between report and artifice can be read as an instance of Massey's missing link and Burgin's "monument of melancholia" with its

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<sup>29</sup> The ekphrasis of the photograph here and the uncertainty of the events surrounding it recalls the shadowed and fragmented photographs of *Nox* and the blank spaces around them.

“incomplete documentation.” Hughes further comments on the strangeness and fallibility of memory; he remembers “walking / Sore footed, under hot sun, hot pavements. / Was it then I bought a peach? That’s as I remember” (22-24). The sensory experience of the city in the summer is emphasised here, while the first fresh peach he had tasted (recalling the austerity of post-World War II England) eclipses any memory of seeing Plath’s face for the first time. *Birthday Letters* as a whole challenges the “accuracy and verifiability” of any kind of report, biography, poetry and journal as well as memory, making the blank spot in “Fulbright Scholars” relate to history rather than geography—the spatial is remembered, but the event is not. Charing Cross Station is another specific location in “Fulbright Scholars,” and supports the significance of *where* by marking the point of origin on the map, and undermines the importance of *when* or how this point of origin occurred. Charing Cross Station also evokes narratives of connections and partings, in the same way that King’s Cross and Victoria Station reify these in “Fate Playing.” As well as a marker in a mnemonic map, the stations of *Birthday Letters* thus perform an elegiac function as a site and foreshadowing of absence—even when the lovers are reunited, by chance, in “Fate Playing” the consequence are tears.

Hughes’s cities are constantly restless with traffic and pedestrians, and he moves through the flux; in “Fulbright Scholars” he is walking, as well as commuting between Slough and Holborn. “Epiphany” is also precisely located and mobile; set in “London. The grimy lilac softness/Of an April evening” (1-2), it describes an encounter during a walk ‘over Chalk Farm Bridge / On my way to the tube station’ (2-4). The architectural surfaces of Hughes’s cities—the pavements, roads, parks and buildings—are impressionable; not only are they imprinted with Hughes’s routes, mapping the narratives of Hughes’s and Plath’s

relationship, through Hughes's own memory, but also with the traces of collective memory and history. In "18 Rugby Street," Hughes observes a "bombsite becoming a building site" (126), evoking a process of narrative re-inscription that mirrors the attempt of *Birthday Letters* to intervene definitively in debates over the Plath-Hughes story, as well as questioning the permanence and thereby the monumental capacity of buildings. Interior spaces, in contrast to the bustle of cities, are often sites of stillness in *Birthday Letters*. Once the threshold is crossed, both time and people slow down. "18 Rugby Street" is described as house of "Victorian torpor and squalor" (2), a static centre of entrapment and stagnation within the 'revolving, rumbling city' (39) of London. "Revolving" here could mean a repetitious circling without purpose or progression; similarly, "Boston clanged / All its atoms below, through all its circles" (36-37) around "9 Willow Street." These choreographed movements or patterns in the cities reflect the prescribed encounters of the interior spaces—the tragic fate in "9 Willow Street" and the performances of "18 Rugby Street," referred to at times as a stage-set.

As well as a theatre, 18 Rugby Street (London) encloses other layered spaces, including "auditorium" (4), "laboratory" (9), "labyrinth' (14)," a carpenter's room with "a hacked, archaic, joiner's bench" (18), the mortuary structure of the "catacomb" (26), and a prison. David Berry describes 18 Rugby Street in "Ted Hughes and the Minotaur Complex" (2002) as a "haunted house" which "once Plath had crossed its threshold, took on the aura of catastrophe" (546), suggesting that Plath's presence served as a catalyst for the transition from the Gothic and the carnivalesque to the tragically ordained—"catastrophe" can mean both "disaster" and the denouement of a dramatic piece. The dominant architectural motifs of the site thus intimate performance, disaster and

imprisonment—it is perhaps no coincidence that another street mentioned in the poem is Fetter Lane. The spatial image of the labyrinth combines performance and entrapment, being used as a space to enact tropes of sacrifice in the Theseus and Ariadne legend. Rugby Street’s labyrinth is a fatally alluring deadly space—the “chance of space” has drawn in both the narrative of Hughes and Plath and that of an upstairs neighbour inveigled into a confrontation with her own Minotaur (leukaemia). Berry examines the labyrinth in “18 Rugby Street” from the perspective of the Minotaur and its recurrence in Hughes’s work, but the labyrinth as an architectural construct lends significance to its mythological and psychological connotations.

The labyrinth is entered in the first stanza, which describes the performances of its inhabitants intersected according to a narrative in which “limbs and loves and lives” (8) are entangled:

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The possibility of building becoming text here foreshadows the poem; the poem itself is architecture with multiple purposes, its lines attempting to capture fleeing memory and hindsight. The repetition of “amaze” in the last line suggests not only spell and enthrallment but also a pun on the word “maze,”

linking it to labyrinth, words often used interchangeably. According to Kern's definition of the labyrinth, a maze is a "tortuous structure with many paths, dead ends or blind alleys" (23), while a "labyrinth's path is not intersected by other paths. There are no choices to be made, and the path inevitably leads to, and ends at the centre. Accordingly, the only dead end in a labyrinth is at its center" (23). This juxtaposition between single-pathed labyrinth and the multi-pathed maze in the poem may seem a paradox in architectural terms (and Kern suggests that the structure at Knossos was a labyrinth rather than a maze). However, the maze and labyrinth reify the tension between choice and inevitability—the possible futures suggested by the maze gradually resolve themselves into the single path of the labyrinth. If the various coincidences of the poem—Plath and Hughes's meeting, Plath's projected rendezvous with a man in Paris which never took place (a narrative of absence and missed connection, to use Massey's terms), and the lives of the other residents which form the intersecting narratives of the house, are taken to be structural elements in the walls of the labyrinth, only one path can remain. Kern further points out that the "most important feature of the labyrinth are not the lines that form the walls but the negative space of the path formed by these lines, which determines the pattern of movement" (23), going on to remark that this path was considered in initiation rites to lead to the bowels of the earth or underworld—a victorious emergence suggests rebirth and transition into another state (23). This is only made possible by retracing the steps taken, however, as there is only one way out—an image reinforced by the chronological ordering of memories and dwelling on coincidence, decision and mistake as a series of steps towards a tragic end that make up *Birthday Letters*.



If the walls of the labyrinth are built and shaped by memories arranged as narratives, the negative space between them is the forgotten and unknown: the missing links. In this poem, the date of Plath's encounter with Hughes is known—a date laden with foreboding: "April 13th, your father's birthday" (52). However, negative spaces remain, reflected in breaks in movement. Midway through the third stanza, Hughes pauses in his vivid account of Plath's arrival to the flat, the effect caused by the enjambment that jars rather than joins—it seems as if the hurrying figure climbing the stairs has stopped dead:

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The journals reveal Plath's "torture" in Paris, but conceal these answers; the negative space remains "blank." Negative space is echoed in repetitions of "black," "night" and "darkness," throughout the poem, as well as the negated adjectives; the lavatory is "unlit and unlovely," (perhaps echoing the "unlovely street" and "blank day" of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*). Indeed, the frequent indications of darkness and shadow in the buildings of *Birthday Letters* emphasise Heathcote's observation that in mortuary architecture, "The shadow, like the fragment, denotes the absence of the object as much as it signifies its presence" (21). "18 Rugby Street," like other poems in *Birthday Letters*, is built of traces and blanks, of intersecting presences and absences, the chance of space serving as mortar joining them.

The "accidental neighbour" of death also enters 55 Eltisle Avenue—indeed, it seems as if the more specific the address, the easier it is for death to

find and enter. Plath and Hughes lived on Eltisley Avenue in Cambridge (UK) as newly-weds, while Plath finished her degree at the university. In “55 Eltisley,” as in “18 Rugby Street” and “9 Willow Street,” the crossing of the threshold into the house directs the narrative trajectory towards tragedy; the distinction between the hopeful idea of the couple’s “first home” (1), furnished with second-hand furniture, and the *unheimlich* notions of haunting and evil fate is erased via Hughes’s hindsight. Hughes is preoccupied with a bloodstain on a pillow, an omen of death and grief, and a vestige of an intersecting narrative: “Their whole story / Hung—a miasma—round that stain” (9-10).<sup>30</sup> This bloodstain returns us to the idea of traces versus blankness; Hughes’s and Plath’s lives have made no impact on the house:

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The personification of the house fulfils something of the conventional elegiac function of nature—it remains while people are ephemeral. The house triggers memory in the beholder in a complex engagement with memory and reification. As opposed to the narratives of “18 Rugby Street” which exist preserved within a memorialised past, Hughes’s visit to 55 Eltisley Avenue causes what Aleida Assmann calls a “spatial metaphor, or animatorical remembering, which initiates a momentary collapse of past and present by forcing past and present, distance and proximity into a single point that is exploded out of a linear and narrative

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the significance of this bloodstain, and other haunted traces in *Birthday Letters*, see Dianne Hunter, “Poetics of Melancholy and Psychic Possession in Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters* and Other Haunted Texts” (2003).

time construction” (60).<sup>31</sup> This collapse of the distance between past and present recalls Massey’s idea of simultaneity in narratives of space-construction—rather than one narrative being relegated to the past and replaced, multiple narratives remain current and vivid. In “55 Eltisley,” and throughout *Birthday Letters*, this network of multiple shifting strands is caused by mingling tenses—the projected future is already past, so foreshadowing meets hindsight. Indeed, in “55 Eltisley,” past and future collide as Plath is figured gazing into a crystal ball heirloom—an inherited device for telling the future.

Like 18 Rugby Street, 55 Eltisley Avenue is a nexus of simultaneous narratives that are reflected in its architecture. The house serves as a “shipyard” for the “ritual launching of the expedition” (33-4), referring to its status as Plath and Hughes’s first home during their marriage. This expedition is already “beyond the Albatross” (38)—the house becomes the scene of the crime of the Ancient Mariner, and associated with his. And yet, Hughes and Plath themselves have left no trace on the external walls to haunt the lives of future occupants. This may be because of the function of the house. Hall describes the purpose of the elegiac building as “a space (such as a tomb, a room, or a house) in which the spirit of the dead might reside, accessible to the living” (208). While this has been the case for Hughes—at least in his uncannily inflected memory—in that the previous occupants are “accessible” to his perception, for Hughes’s own ghosts the house serves more as a site of effacement. References to mortuary architecture in “55 Eltisley” are repeated; it is not only a “crypt of old griefs” (23) but England is also (via Plath’s perception) “part nursing home, part morgue /for something partly dying, partly dead” (14-

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<sup>31</sup> Paraphrased and translated by Susan Küchler in “The Place of Memory” (1999).

15).<sup>32</sup> The link between house and grave is ancient, according to architectural historian Michel Ragon, who remarks in *The Space of Death: A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism* (1983):

In Assyro-Babylonian literature the grave is called “house” or “residence,” “the house from which he who enters does not leave,” “the house of the shades,” “the house of dust.” . . . But it is always a house-prison, a house intended to make the dead man disappear and to prevent his return. (206)

The house-grave fulfils its function of “making the dead disappear,”—the walls facing the street bear no trace of its inhabitants; their lives are “slight” and therefore erasable. Their narratives, however, have become highly and widely visible text; the inscription outlasts both lives and monument. Ragon’s list of euphemisms recalls the entrapment and fatalism, the trajectory towards death, of the architectural sites in *Birthday Letters*. Mortuary imagery is repeatedly linked to Plath and Hughes’s homes in *Birthday Letters*—as we have seen, it occurs in “18 Rugby Street,” but also in “Error:” “the vicarage,” “aimed at a graveyard”(13) is “rotting like a coffin” (27) and “The Prism:” “In my crypt of dream, totally dark, / under your gravestone” (31-32). The custom that many ancient cultures had of burying (or burning) the dead person’s possessions perhaps inspired the catalogued “memory objects” within the poems of *Birthday Letters*—as well as the pillow stained with the dead man’s blood, a “This

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<sup>32</sup> Hall notes the presence of houses for the dead in the elegiac tradition in her article on Hardy’s *Poems 1912-13*, citing Lawrence Lipking’s “*tombeau* tradition” in *The Life of the Poet* (1981). In *Birthday Letters*, while physical spaces are important in terms of remembrance, memory itself is engaged with in a more ambivalent fashion than is often the case in traditional conventional English elegy, and the main function of the houses is to reify this ambivalence towards preservation, while reconstructing narratives of the past; poet and reader are implicated in the process of this building as well as in the finished product.

quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (31-32) and kitchen gadgets furnish “55 Eltisley.”<sup>33</sup>

18 Rugby Street, 9 Willow Street and 55 Eltisley Avenue are static sites, entered as if they are mental museum displays, with furnishings, inhabitants and structures preserved in the late 1950s and early 1960s, or stage sets, waiting for audience and actors to play their designated parts. They are haunted in the sense that traces of memory linger in and around them. In non-domestic spaces, however, the effect the passage of time has on architecture is depicted via sites of ruin and decay. In “Stubbing Wharfe,” the lines “And around us / This gloomy memorial of a valley . . . / A gorge of ruined mills and abandoned chapels” (18-20) evoke a geography of collective loss. Ruins—fragmented structures that mark both absence and presence—are also linked to writing and monument. “Wuthering Heights” inserts Hughes’s narrative of Plath’s literary ambition and the early days of their marriage into the traces of Emily Brontë’s life and work, evoking the resonance of a life—and literary output—tragically cut short, but also the fictional doomed but passionate lovers Heathcliff and Cathy. As Hadley has remarked, Hughes also depicts Plath’s attempt to “interpolate herself in the Bronte legend” (129), noting that Hughes’s “doubling” in this poem acts to “subtly layer the elegy with a predetermining fate” (130). Like “18 Rugby Street”, “9 Willow Street” and “55 Eltisley”, the interior space of “Wuthering Heights” conjures up a scene from the past; the couple’s guide “effervesced” (6) with

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<sup>33</sup> Jenny Hockey and Elizabeth Hallam discuss memory objects as items of symbolic significance in *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (2001): “Tracing continuities and discontinuities, we note that death-related objects from the past may be used, over time, as a creative resource in the present, constituting relations of distance and proximity with the past” (10).

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(8-12)

While this list of relics echoes the memory objects in other poems set in domestic dwellings, here they seem mythical and insubstantial, reinforcing the idea that these items are accoutrements to legend rather than historical artefacts related to an actual life. It is hard not to read a comparison here with the mythologisation of Plath and her life in both academic and popular contexts; fact becomes memory becomes myth, and every material vestige becomes grimly significant.

“Wuthering Heights” is primarily preoccupied with memory as fallible and temporary, as opposed to the enduring and ever-evolving nature of myth. This tension between the narratives that evolve through the passage of years and the modern absence of factual knowledge to counter them is evident in the landscape and architecture of the scene (“she” here is Emily Bronte and “you” is Plath):

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(20-24)

This presents a mythologised version of Bronte’s life, called into question by the sharp “probably”, emphasising the inevitable “loose ends” and “missing links” to

narratives. Hadley's assertion that "The self-consciousness of Hughes's elegy announces itself with the line, 'The book becoming a map,' which gently mocks Plath's willingness to forge a truth out of fiction" (130) in turn suggests that the engagement with mythologised architecture works two ways, creating truth out of fiction as well as fiction out of truth. The novel *Wuthering Heights* becomes a map in the same way that Plath and Hughes's work has been read as a way of giving directions to the narrative trajectories of their lives, and in the same way that *Birthday Letters* charts the geographies of memory and monument. *Wuthering Heights* is inscribed upon the landscape that inspired it, while the monumentalised remains of the buildings where its creator lived preserve her traces.

The fact that these buildings are portrayed as traces themselves underscores the limits of the monumental potential of architecture in the physical sense, but this does not affect their significance in psychological terms. As Hornstein writes, "architecture, whether or not it still stands, can exist or be found beyond the physical site itself in our recollection of it. ... That place is the symbolic construction that connects our idea or image of a place to its physicality" (3). However, this recollection is not always easily retrieved; anxieties related to the phenomenon of disappearance versus monumentalism, as well as the power of artefacts as vehicles of recall, are evident in the depictions of architecture and the narratives enclosed by and inscribed upon buildings in *Birthday Letters*:

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Once living memory is over, all that remains is to “imagine” and speculate what has gone before. Inscription serves as an attempt to outlast monument. The Brontë narratives are no longer enclosed within the building, but have been allowed to escape and become fragmented, fused with fiction, as the framing structures of the house have been repurposed for other narratives. Even with the inscriptions of Hughes’s and Plath’s words, we find it “hard to imagine” what life in 55 Eltisle Avenue really was.

A major source of ambivalence in *Birthday Letters* is the process of memorialising itself—while “18 Rugby Street” and “55 Eltisle” become publicised products of memory with the publishing of *Birthday Letters*, they are also described in terms of crypt and morgue, and thereby assert a desire for burial. Melancholic monument and melancholic elegy in *Birthday Letters* are mutually inscriptive, and act as a means of mapping, if not accepting, the chance of space and the coincidences involved. Regarding the destruction of one of Plath’s journals, Hughes famously wrote that “in those days he regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival” (xiii).<sup>34</sup> On a social and national level, the dilemma of forgetting versus survival has been essential to the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Relating the word “amnesia” to the word “amnesty,”

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<sup>34</sup> Foreword to the abridged *Journals of Sylvia Plath 1950-1962* (1982).

<sup>35</sup> This debate is inherent to the cartographies of silence in Irish nationalist elegy and to some extent evident in Seamus Heaney’s bog poems, for example; see “Mapping Conversations with the Absent” and Edna Longley’s work on the Northern Irish elegy.



architectural historian Adrian Forty writes that despite the “colossal investment in museums, heritage, memorials and archives,” signifiers of remembrance, “the relative stability of Western Europe since 1945 has in part been due to a colossal act of collective, consensual forgetting . . . it is clear how necessary to stable political life, as to healthy individual life, a degree of amnesia may be” (7-8). Hornstein similarly notes a “culture of amnesia,” related to buried or destroyed buildings that persist as traces of wars and divisive tensions (9). *Birthday Letters* engages with these themes through its interrogation of memory, witnessing and planned and unplanned forgetting; the very existence of *Birthday Letters* as a whole clearly contradicts the possibility of complete forgetting. The poems document individual memories, they intersect with national and collective memories, and they engage with the memories and textual evidence left behind by Plath—a re-tracing of steps that involves the gathering of traces. However, these traces of narrative are not only reified and invoked through architecture, but are also intertwined with narratives of absence—blank spaces of amnesia, ignorance and unknowability are built into the structures, which are haunted by the possibility of coincidence, or the chance of space that changes everything.

### **Building Emptiness and the Uncanny**

The idea that the dead and dying are sequestered from the living in the modern Western world, and the resulting compensation of elegy to fill this gap is common currency in the scholarship of the implications and practices of death. This view is held by Ramazani, among others; anthropologist Taussig concurs that “[death] seems to have disappeared from sight and there is an

awkwardness all round about what to do and say” (310), going on to highlight the significance of poetry in recovering the visibility of death:

I would like to say—from the fullness of my naïveté—that poetry fills this vacuum, that poetry is forced to fill this vacuum, and that poetry does this because it is the most mimetically nuanced form of verbal representation and expression there is, breaking up language no less than composing it, exquisitely self-aware while at the same time resolutely on the march with something to say.  
(310)

The modern elegy offers an ambivalent negotiation of this pattern of disappearance/textual recovery. Harrison’s *V.*, Heaney’s “Bog Queen” and “Station Island,” Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas” and *Nox* all chart vanishing and erasure as well as commemoration and rituals of remembrance. All of the elegies I discuss in this thesis acknowledge that, as Taussig writes, “After all, that’s what being dead is supposed to be about. Disappearance. But then there’s this stuff that can’t be quite contained creeping round the edges” (308). The simultaneous narratives of the modern architectural elegy, exemplified here in the poems of Dunn and Hughes, enable the embracing of the stuff “around the edges,”—melancholy, sudden sorrowful memory, and backsliding into grief, in their intersection with narratives of the present. These simultaneous narratives offer a release from the enclosures of the pastoral mode, as well as a way of resisting the sequestering of the dead and indeed the mourning.

Dunn explicitly comments on the hiding of the mourner from the rest of society in “Arrangements” as he exits the death registrar’s office by the “A small

door, taboo and second-rate” (51). Hughes presents death as a hunter that dogged the steps of his life with Plath in the guise of her father, her traumatised past, his own inadequacy, and ultimately fate, and transforms cities and landscapes into death’s hunting-grounds as well as anchors for his memories of Plath. Interior spaces as well as cityscapes are affected by this transformative process; as social anthropologist Jenny Hockey and others observe, “Arguments which suggest that both the dead, and the grief which may be felt for them, have been marginalized or sequestered ignore evidence of the contemporaneity of the dead and the living, particularly within the domestic spaces of the home” (139). This “contemporaneity” recalls Massey’s “simultaneity”; we see this intersection of current narratives in objects and spaces that are repositories of emotional affect and trigger memory.

The shifting and transforming of geographies that is involved in constructing sites of mourning and shaping architecture around the dynamic binaries of absence/presence and memory/forgetting has overtones of the uncanny. Instances of the *unheimlich* are foregrounded particularly in *Birthday Letters*, with its framework of astrology and prophecy, its thresholds into the underworlds of Greek and Egyptian mythology, its ghostly figures, but also in the black river of Dunn’s “The River through The City” and the intimations of the invisibility of mourning and a dark fate in *Elegies*. Wolfreys argues for a fundamental connection between architecture and the urban and the “uncanny experience” (170):

In this, and in all motions associated with spatial orientation and disorientation, structural, topographical, and, inevitably (on occasion), architectural figures and tropes serve to illustrate what takes place. Topography becomes or is already haunted by

tropography. Space, place, and displacement vie uneasily in the same location, situation, site, or locus. As soon as there is a form with repeatable if irregular shapes, the experience or occasion of the uncanny has its chance. (170)

Wolfreys's work here is on the modern city, but his description applies equally as well to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Ted Hughes's "9 Willow Street." The architectural figures in the poems I have discussed here serve to reinforce the uncanny as well as the elegiac vision, suggesting a connection between them. "Form with repeatable and regular shapes" can be applied here to the genre of the elegy and to architectural structures. Although the elegy is constantly re-cut to fit individual patterns, similar figures recur throughout the history of the genre—the sun in Dunn's "December," for example, as an allusion to the pathetic fallacy, and the choking weeds in "Error" as a subversion of the vegetation and springtime of the pastoral mode. Indeed, the intersection of pastoral and urban motifs frequently contributes to the sense of the uncanny, the "unreal city" created by the geographic imagination that re-orders or undoes or inscribes the solid and seemingly permanent. By obeying the imperative to "*Write It!*,"—and both Dunn and Hughes self-reflexively write about writing the elegy in their work—these poets build flexible and individual monuments to grief. The flexibility and specificity of memorial is not limited to the built environment, however—the geographic imagination can destabilise landscape as well as bricks and mortar.

## 5. Locating Death in the Bordered Elegy

“A Procession at Candlemas” tracks the space between grief and mourning, using its ritual journey to reinscribe sites of erased grief and loss with meaning, while *Nox* traces a life that is “vanishing by night into nothing” using photographs, artefacts, guided by the ancient imperative to be present at a funeral. *V.* maps the social and cultural implications of the neglect and vandalism of graveyards onto the communication between the living and the dead, and Seamus Heaney examines the disruption of elegiac cartographies of voice and silence when the dead re-emerge. Douglas Dunn and Ted Hughes reify absence, grief and intimations of mortality into the melancholic monument of the architectural elegy. In these texts, although death is a constant presence, it is attached to the individual geographical narratives of the elegies. Rather than the deceased being placed into a site of death, death comes to the deceased—in the hospital room of “A Procession at Candlemas,” and the homes of *Birthday Letters* and *Elegies*, for example, death is an event or a personification of a dark destiny rather than a geography. Here, however, in my concluding chapter, I turn to the site that all of these elegies have approached—the border between life and death. I chart a site traditionally associated with death and unknowability; the border between death and life figured through the geography of the seashore. The ocean and the littoral zone figure frequently within both the traditional elegiac imaginary and literature about death; here I map the sea in two modern iterations of this theme.

Sylvia Plath’s “Berck-Plage” and Elizabeth Bishop’s “North Haven” present distinctive navigations of the elegiac littoral zone that reflect the multiplicity and diversity of elegiac narratives in the post-war era. While the sea

creates a natural border that reflects the boundary between life and death in both elegies, the diverging geographical imagination of the poets engages with the same landscape from different perspectives on death, dying and the resulting elegiac representation, thus creating contrasting sites of loss. Plath's elegy is for Percy Kaye, an elderly neighbour of hers and Hughes's in Devon, whom she visited a great deal as he lay dying of cancer. Perhaps because of the short time they knew each other, the speaker in the elegy is more of an observer—and a limited, fallible one at that—than a mourner. Nevertheless, she ends the poem helplessly drawn into a scene of death and a meditation on mortality. By contrast, although Bishop's "North Haven" is for her old friend Robert Lowell, the elegist cultivates a carefully detached tone—only a few moments of grief leak through the studied lines. Geography, I argue, is an integral part of how these contrasting perspectives of grief are shaped, and how death and grief are approached and mapped. The shoreline is an important site for the scholarship of elegy because of its inherent composition of physical borders; its binary topography of land/sea allows enquiry into the construction and crossing of metaphoric boundaries and binaries—absence/presence, known/unknown and past/present, as well as life/death. Although the sea as a site of death, or as a connective entity between life and death, and the shore as a liminal, even uncanny, zone have been examined in terms of cultural imaginings of the ocean and nautical literature, elegy-specific criticism that examines the connection between the ocean and death has yet to be developed to any great extent.

This gap in the criticism of elegy is surprising both because of the diverse and ancient linkages between water and death in literature, and because the multiple inflections of these narratives fit into existing scholarship on the elegy.

Ellen Zetzel Lambert does note the significance of the Greek mythological river of Acheron that “separates the world of the living from that of the dead” (19), and observes that navigating water and death is inherently ambivalent. Of Theocritus’s (300 BC – ca. 260 BC) *Idyll I* “Thyrsis,” for instance, she observes of the phrase “Daphnis went to the stream:” “the image suggests at once the finality of death, a passing beyond the borders of this world, and a reabsorption back into the stream of life” (19). In her reading of “Phyllis” by Renaissance Italian poet Jacopo Sannazzaro (1456-1530), Lambert articulates a crucial trope in the elegiac littoral imaginary: “And this shore, elsewhere a setting for the elegist’s frustrated desires, is here the starting point for an unprecedented imaginative journey in which, through the transforming medium of the sea, the boundaries between this earthly world and the next are dissolved” (77). Jahan Ramazani describes twentieth-century elegy as “unresolved, violent, ambivalent, questioning the dead, the self and tradition” (4), and suggests that the elegist “instead of resurrecting the dead in some substitute, instead of curing themselves through displacement, modern elegists ‘practice losing farther, losing faster’ so that the ‘One Art’ of the modern elegy is not transcendence or redemption of loss but immersion in it” (4).<sup>1</sup> These elements of the modern elegy are reflected in Plath’s littoral poems, which focus on the ocean as a violent force that overwhelms the speaker and the land; “Berck-Plage” uses the destructive potential of the sea to break through the border between life and death, making the poem literally a textbook example of “immersion” in death and mortality that challenges conventions of commemoration and consolation. Immersion and transcendence are not the only possible elegiac narratives, however, between them lie acceptance and management. “North Haven”

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<sup>1</sup> Ramazani refers to Bishop’s poem “One Art,” but does not discuss her work in detail.

creates order out of chaos by arranging life, death and memory in appropriate places around the littoral zone.

This distinction in spatial perspective and strategy between the poems can be traced to the multiple inflections of the ocean in Western culture and its literary tradition, which can be read via human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's conceptualisation in *Place and Space: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) of space as a site of unknown, blank territory, and place as a site that accrues significance via experience.<sup>2</sup> Tuan writes that "Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning, it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed" (54). Place is constructed when meaning is assigned to space, again implying an order/chaos binary: "Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values" (83). The space/place binary is relative and shifting; Tuan's explorers, for instance, would view uncharted territory as space, even though any native inhabitants of the same area would consider it place. When the same explorers acquire experiential knowledge of an area it would become place to them, although their acquaintance with it would differ from that of those born and living there, as it would be mediated through their perspective. With "Berck-Plage" and "North Haven" I read space as death and place as life, with the ocean as space and land as life. The implications of this bordering are

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<sup>2</sup> Tuan's work predates that of the other geographers (Harley, Cosgrove, Thrift, Cresswell, and Massey) discussed in this thesis. Massey explicitly writes against binary formulations of place/space and local/global, arguing for a space comprising active simultaneous narratives and place as a moment within this network (*For Space*, 2005). Tuan's awareness of emptiness seems similar to Harley's "cartography of silence," but Harley includes silence and absence within the map as a shaping force, as opposed to an area that must be mapped in order to have significance. Like Massey, Thrift considers space to be open and fluctuating, created by "'stages of intensity', traces of movement, speed" (222). Tuan, on the other hand, thinks of "space as that which allows movement" (6) and place as pause in that movement, not allowing for the inscriptive potential of mobility that I discuss in Chapter 2. Although all of these geographers engage with absence, Tuan is the only one who views it as something to be mapped and made knowable, making his theories suitable for applying to elegies that confront death as a spatial concept instead of a foreshadowing or an event.



multiple, as the states of life and death are simultaneously divided and joined by the borderline; they cannot exist apart from each other. From an epistemological perspective, the state of death is the ultimate unknowable—if this is figured geographically as the ocean, it becomes a space of blankness, and the elegy becomes an attempt to map the site, to turn it into a place of significance, and thereby to place the death and the dead into a known, familiar environment.

The fixity of the life/death border in “Berck-Plage” is disrupted by the encroaching ocean and in “North Haven” by shifting islands. The unknowability of where and when death will occur also serves to prevent the border from being static—and this unknowability can also be articulated in spatial terms. According to Tuan, around and intersecting with space, is mythical space; this is “a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known” (85-6). If the sea is space to one sailing upon it for the first time, then what they are sailing towards, or in search of, is mythical space:

Europeans once held tenaciously to the reality of places like the Northwest Passage and a terrestrial paradise. . . . Such places had to exist because they were key elements in complex systems of belief. To discard the idea of a terrestrial paradise would have threatened a whole new way of looking at the world. (85-6)

Cartographic representations of mythical space, according to Tuan, include the fantastic large-scale imaginings born out of wondering “what lies on the other side of the mountain range or ocean” and yearning to find out, but also the “hazy ‘mythical’ space that surrounds the field of pragmatic activity, to which we do not consciously attend and which is yet necessary to our sense of

orientation—of being securely in the world” (86). This space comprises reference points we are aware of but cannot directly perceive; what is behind us, or out of earshot, or on the other side of walls, or too far away to see clearly—like death. Barbara Comins summarises the ocean as a site of enigma and contradiction as follows:

Throughout the history of Western literature, the sea has been portrayed archetypally as feminine, its saline environment imaginatively likened to the womb. . . . Perhaps because so much of what is beneath the ocean’s waters is unknown, invisible, the sea epitomizes that which is secret or unseen, like the reproductive organs of a woman. An enigmatic, seductive, dangerous element that lures sailors to their doom, the sea to many male writers has come to symbolize female mystery. (187)

In pastoral elegy, the nymphs, muses and deities that govern the sea mourn and guide the deceased. The ocean or its far shore acquires a double sense of the mythology if “mythical space” is considered. Neptune and the Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, Atlantis and Ultima Thule, the Elysian Fields and the Isles of the Blessed are imaginative ways of gaining control over the unpredictability and concealments of the ocean.

The mythical space beyond the edges of the familiar can be either threatening or consoling, depending on the cultural connotations with which it is inscribed. In the elegiac imaginary, the associations and mood are related to how the physical geography of the shore is interpreted—as a threshold to a better world or a gateway for the unpredictable and hostile to enter land. The

long tradition of elegiac narratives of the littoral is informed by this ambivalence.

In his cultural history of the sea, John Mack remarks that

The beach is an ambiguous place, an in-between place. . . . The tides create a shifting boundary between sea and land. Their effect is to emphasize the liminality of the beach as parts of it are successively revealed and then swamped by tidal action. The boundary between sea and land alters on a daily basis. It is a neutral space, neither properly terrestrial nor yet thoroughly maritime, awaiting a metamorphic role. (165)

The neutrality of the space means it awaits transformative inscription and inflection.<sup>3</sup> The shore can become a site of uneasiness, a site where the poet struggles to attain mastery over the sea and all it has devoured, or a site of reflection, where the transformed and purified return. The hostile littoral is connected to a destructive ocean; as historian Alain Corbin observes in *The Lure of the Sea: Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (1995), representations of the Biblical flood in the mediaeval and Renaissance periods meant that the ocean was viewed as a “realm of the unfinished, a vibrating, vague extension of chaos, [which] symbolized the disorder that preceded civilization,” and therefore felt to be an “instrument of punishment” and “the remnant of the disaster”(2). We see this destructive power in the metaphor of the sea as overflowing tears in John Donne’s “An Elegy on the Lady Markham” (1633), for instance:

Man is the world, and death the ocean,

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<sup>3</sup> Landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn similarly traces the fluctuating elements of the structure of the shore: “Shape may shift while structure remains constant.[...]So, too, the shape of a beach shifts, daily, seasonally, over the years; its structure (the relation of sediments to water level, wave height and length) endures” (104).

To which God gives the lower parts of man.

This sea environs all, and though as yet

God hath set marks and bounds 'twixt us and it,

Yet doth it roar, and gnaw, and still pretend,

And breaks our bank, whene'er it takes a friend. (1-6).

The boundary between the devouring ocean (a recurring trope in littoral and oceanic elegy) and the land is fragile; although the topography here has been marked by God, the “as yet” suggests an imminent rush of salt water.<sup>4</sup> Corbin suggests that according to the dominant mood of the time, the “coastline was nothing but ruins” (4) which explained their irregularity, and “the ocean was nothing but an abyss full of debris” (4). Corbin’s repetition of “nothing” and use of “abyss” evokes the emptiness of Tuan’s concept of space, but shades the neutral tone of Mack’s definition of the shore with a sense of destructive power.<sup>5</sup> Sandra Gilbert describes the sea in in “Berck-Plage” as a “gaping wound—an abyss, a death” (311); for Plath the “debris” of the abyss are fish that become limbs.<sup>6</sup> The image of a sea full of bodies dates back to Greek mythology and the Bible; in *Revelations* 20:13, the predicted Apocalypse includes the following conflation of the sea with death in spatial terms: “And the sea gave up the dead

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<sup>4</sup> The association between the ocean and tears is a recurring feature in elegy, evident in the pathetic fallacy as well as in the use of the ocean as metaphor for other bodily fluids; the sea breaking on Dover Beach contains an “eternal note of sadness” and the ocean “swells and sobs” (37) by the “haunted heights” (18) in Thomas Hardy’s “I Found Her Out There.”

<sup>5</sup> Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) combines the lure of the sea with associations of emptiness; her heroine commits suicide by swimming until she drowns: “The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude” (127).

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert notes that Marianne Moore’s “A Graveyard” is a precursor to “Berck-Plage,” particularly in its line “the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave” (5).

which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”<sup>7</sup>

The sea as a depthless abyss, a deadly force, and a repository for the dead are not the only cultural and social imaginings of the ocean. Even as the sea is transformative, it is also malleable—Christ performed miracles such as calming storms and walking on the surface of the Dead Sea. Water is used in Christian rites of baptism, for example, and is associated with cleansing and purification in non-Christian ritual. This aspect is also evident in literary imaginings of the shore; for example, in contrast to Donne’s “An Elegy on the Lady Markham,” we have John Keats’s “Bright Star”: “The moving waters at their priestlike task / Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores” (5-6) links the motion of waves and tides to perpetual purification rather than erosion or threat.<sup>8</sup> On a more practical level, coast-dwellers and island inhabitants throughout the world have always used the sea as a medium for travel and trade, despite its dangers; Catullus travelled “across many seas” for his brother’s funeral rites, for instance. Amy Cutler points out in her discussion of British littoral poets (skipping centuries of seafaring for conquest, exploration and tourism) that “Monastic understandings of the coastline as the threshold between the earthly and the heavenly also conflict with the modern globalised understanding of it as integral to traffic and shipping needs” (120). Although there is little—if any—uncharted mythical space in the ocean left in the real world, and guiding nymphs and deities have been replaced by satellite navigation, the coastline retains its imagined identity in literature as a site of liminality and uncertainty, even as the sea retains a sense of the unpredictable

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<sup>7</sup> Dylan Thomas’s “And Death Shall Have No Dominion” counters the idea of the sea as a site of permanent death: “And death shall have no dominion. / Under the windings of the sea / They lying long shall not die windily;” (10-12).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Bishop cites “Bright Star” in her short story “The Sea and its Shore.”

and potentially apocalyptic or the healing and purifying. Likewise, the littoral sites in modern elegy are frequently mapped as liminal and fluctuating, inscribed with encounters between life and death, as in “Berck-Plage” and “North Haven.”<sup>9</sup>

Encountering death is a disorienting experience for the survivor; perhaps it is so for the deceased in the mind of some elegists. The elegy can thereby function as a navigational guide not only for the living but for the dead. The border between life and death in this particular imagined geography of place, space and mythical space is therefore not a fixed line between constant points; it shifts as the space of death is mapped, and as the placing of life is challenged, making the distance between the living and the dead flexible instead of static. Because of the shifting landscapes and borders of the terrain, as well as the multiple convergences of religious, mythological and literary narrative that inscribe the littoral topography, any attempt to map the shore as a site of mourning means navigating an elastic relationship with the deceased—whether he or she is brought closer with the advancement of the sea, as in “Berck-Plage” and other poems by Plath, or detached through the elegist’s own distance from the scene. This flexible distance between the littoral elegist and the deceased is partly caused by the transformative and unpredictable powers of the ocean; the dead in the sea do not remain fixed or stable, and their state changes. “Ariel’s Song” from *The Tempest* is a crucial text in the narrative of metamorphosis associated with the shore and the sea:

Full fathom five thy Father lies,

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<sup>9</sup> See also Carolyn Kizer’s “The Great Blue Heron,” an elegy for her mother, for instance: “As I wandered on the beach / I saw the heron standing / Sunk in the tattered wings / He wore as a hunchback’s coat. / Shadow without a shadow, [...] I wondered, an empty child, / ‘Heron, whose ghost are you?’” (1-5, 14-15).

Of his bones are coral made:

Those are pearls that were his eyes,

Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich, and strange:

Sea-Nymphs hourly ring his knell. (1.2.397-403)

Ian Baucom notes in “Hydrographies” (1999) that “Ariel’s idiom, we realize on re-examining his song, is not coronary but cartographic—or to be more precise, hydrographic. And it is because his snatch of singing baptizes a science of observation, a mode of mapmaking, and an ontology—or more properly, a morphology—which are now becoming hegemonic” (302). Baucom maps a fluid identity onto the corpse that echoes the shifts of the sea:

What Ariel has found drowned is not something deceased but something liminal. This mutating subject merges with its new oceanic space of inhabitation. As its boundaries collapse, it liquefies, becoming a catalog of the things that wash over it. If, at first, there appear to be at least two subjects here—the sea-changed body and the changing sea—the border between these two remains far from clear. (303)

Baucom’s emphasis on dissolving boundaries between body and ocean echoes the crossing of the border between land and sea. If the land is meaningful place and the sea is empty space, and crossing them implies a progress or a switch from one to the other, the same process occurs with the body in the sea—the sea erases anything meaningful from the body (what Baucom calls “identity

liquefaction" [303]). However, the body, albeit briefly, marks a space in the sea, similarly to how the bog bodies and the bones of Holbeck Cemetery map their surroundings. Although Lambert comments that part of the terror of "Lycidas" is that the body "might be anywhere beneath its whelming tide" (175), she goes on to map the journey his body takes:

And what this voyage out into the open waters triumphantly reveals is that the poet can give a name, even to his deepest fears. For as his imagination follows Lycidas out into the sea, "where ere thy bones are hurled," landmarks are also being erected: the Hebrides Isles to the north, St. Michael's Mount at the southwestern tip of Land's End, looking toward Spain. (175)

This "giving of a name" is cartography; it helps to order and manage death, to resist immersion. Lambert maps the sea into a place for the body, but it is also the case that the body maps the sea by its very nature of being a centre of meaning within the emptiness. Because the sea is shifting, and the body travels with it—either towards Ultima Thule or back to the beach with the tides—the place created by the body is temporary, as the sea returns to emptiness and meaninglessness after it passes. The spatial coordinate of "full fathom five" thereby not only signifies a cartographic location for the body, as Baucom points out, but is created by the body within it. Sylvia Plath resurrected a father figure in "Full Fathom Five": "Old man, you surface seldom. / Then you come in with the tide's coming / when seas wash cold, foam-capped: white hair, white beard" (1-3). The consequences here are disastrous; the speaker concludes that "Father, this thick air is murderous. / I would breathe water" (44-45)—because



the body reverses its normal course, out of the obliterating power of the sea, the elements become inverted.<sup>10</sup>

Although both “Berck-Plage” and “North Haven” cover the terrain of the littoral, the particularity of their sites on the coast of France and off the coast of Maine respectively means contrasting engagements with the littoral landscape, and by extension with the mythical space of death and the placing of loss. In addition to the topography of the scene, the elegist’s vision and powers of perception are significant in articulating its geography. Tuan makes a distinction between approaching a landscape as a cartographer and as a landscape artist:

The map is God’s view of the world since its sightlines are parallel and extend to infinity; orthographic map projection dates back to the ancient Greeks. The landscape picture, with its objects organized around a focal point of converging sightlines, is much closer to the human way of looking at the world, yet it appeared in Europe only in the fifteenth century. (123)

Tuan’s depiction contrasts the state of being all-seeing and outside temporality with limited vision and engagement with time and distance. Cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove describes a similar detached deity as he compares viewing a globe, or the earth from space, to “Apollo’s eye”: “Separated but not disconnected from the earth, Apollo embodies a desire for wholeness and a will

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase has acquired layered resonances in western literature; the body sunk in *The Tempest* resurfaces centuries later in the Dublin of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1921): “Five fathoms out there. Full fathom five thy father lies. At one, he said. Found drowned. High water at Dublin bar. Driving before it a loose drift of rubble, fanshoals of fishes, silly shells. A corpse rising saltwhite from the undertow, bobbing a pace a pace a porpoise landward. There he is. Hook it quick. Pull. Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor” (45). Joyce deglamorizes the ocean’s transformation here—the corpse is “saltwhite” rather than “rich and strange,” and accompanied by fish rather than sea-nymphs. Lycidas, the subject of Milton’s eponymous pastoral elegy for a friend who died in a shipwreck between England and Ireland, and sank “beneath the watery floor” (167) in the “remorseless deep” (50) unprotected by heedless nymphs and muses, is also located by Joyce here.

to power, a dream of transcendence and an appeal to radiance” (*Apollo’s Eye* 2). I connect Ramazani’s idea of “immersion” in loss with the human way of looking at landscape, and “transcendence” with the “god’s view of the world” afforded by cartography. While “Berck-Plage” holds up a distorting and fractured mirror that transforms a beach scene into an immersive landscape marked by mortality, “North Haven” uses cartographic strategies to order the coastline and islands of Maine into a map of loss, and thereby comes closer to the management of grief. This difference in perspective is closely associated with particularity of site. “Berck-Plage” paints a landscape shaped by domestication. The speaker/observer is temporally and spatially present within the landscape, and thus views the scene from a human perspective, navigating the constant presence of death and disease: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (15-17); she is involved physically, psychologically and emotionally with her environment, rejecting or unable to assume the wholeness offered by the cartographic perspective. By contrast, in “North Haven” the death has occurred already, and although the poem ends on a mournful note that reiterates loss, suggesting that transcendence is not achieved, mourning is managed through the processes of ordering and selection that map the scene. The final line “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (30) therefore connotes acceptance rather than immersion or defiance.

Narratives of mastery and acceptance, as well as immersion, have a long history in the literary navigation of the geography of the ocean. Both the encroaching, unpredictable ocean of “Berck-Plage” and the serene sea of “North Haven” have their precursors in the elegiac imaginary, challenging the idea of a definitive break in elegiac tradition in the twentieth century argued by

Gilbert and Ramazani. Lambert emphasises that the pastoral elegy can map unstable, destructive spaces; Milton's "lines express the terrifying randomness of the sea's movement, its power to displace all we know and cherish" (175). Lycidas's burial at sea "beneath the watery floor" (167) sets the precedent for what David Kennedy terms a "recurrent trope," (*Elegy* 6)—the ebb and flow of the elegiac ocean throughout the centuries in Thomas Hardy's "A Singer Asleep" (1914), T. S. Eliot's "Death by Water" section of *The Waste Land*, and in "Berck-Plage" and "North Haven". As Kennedy summarises: "The sea figures in the words of Ariel's song from *The Tempest* the possibility of a 'sea change' into a 'rich and strange' consolatory apotheosis. It is a possibility with which later elegists have sought positive and negative feedbacks" (6). Kennedy does not explain further what he means by "feedbacks," but presumably it is something similar to the potential for immersion or transcendence in dealing with loss. His overarching chronological contextualisation does not allow for differences in perspective and geography. Tennyson's "tide as moving seems asleep, / Too full for sound and foam" (5-6) in "Crossing the Bar" (1889) for instance, and the emptied out "Sea of Faith" in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1851) with "Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, / Retreating;" (25-26), differ in the particularities of their shorelines. Although both draw the topographical features of a shore as a boundary between life and death, Tennyson's forbidding of mournful farewells as he faces his voyage towards the sunset is predicated on a calm "hope to see my Pilot face to face" (15), whereas the "eternal note of sadness" (14) of the sea on Arnold's beach rejects consolation and highlights confusion and disorientation in a world that is a "darkling plain" (35).<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Smith's "The Sea View" (1797) encompasses both serene pastoral and war-torn melancholy within fourteen lines. "The upland shepherd" (1) gazes on "the summer-sun in purple radiance low, / Blaze on the western waters; the wide scene magnificent, and tranquil" (5-7) until "war-freighted ships" (11) appear:

contrast of these two poems also serves to emphasize the multiplicity of elegiac narratives throughout the history of the genre, rather than the development towards melancholy suggested by critics such as Gilbert and Ramazani, while providing precursors for “North Haven,” with its still seas and “Berck-Plage” with its “great abeyance” respectively.

### **Sickness on Berck-Plage**

The littoral sites of Plath’s work are threatening—and threatened—unstable border zones. The sea is a site of death, its influence spreading far inland, while the speaker on the shore is overwhelmed by symbols of mortality and corruption. Plath’s intimate involvement with imagined and physical topographies of the sea and its shores in their aspects as leisure-site and devouring ocean is visible throughout her poetry, prose and journals. In *The Bell Jar* (1963), the shore is a site of considered suicide. In “Channel Crossing” (1956), for instance, “our blunt ship / cleaves forward into fury;” (2-3), facing the “hungry seas advancing” (8). In “Blackberrying” (1961), Plath presents the ocean in its aspect as uninscribable and empty: “the face is orange rock / That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space / Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silversmiths / Beating and beating at an intractable metal” (24-28). Here the repeated negations emphasise the blankness of the space. In “Finnisterre” (1961), similarly, we find the ocean both empty and devouring: “This quotation

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And fierce and red,  
Flash their destructive fire.—The mangled dead  
And dying victims then pollute the flood.  
Ah! Thus man spoils Heaven’s glorious works with blood! (11-14).  
The sea here is part of Heaven rather than the apocalypse, which is brought about by man disrupting the works of God and nature. The shift between pastoral and melancholic foreshadows the war poetry and melancholic elegy of the twentieth century. In “Written in the Church-yard at Middleton in Sussex”—a very precise geographic location—Smith charts the collapse of a graveyard into the ocean, concluding on an envious note: “They hear the warring elements no more: / While I am doom’d—by life’s long storm opprest, / To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest” (12-14), a further connection between devouring ocean and sense of melancholy.

has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons. This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1-5).<sup>12</sup> Here the sea is all abyss; Plath rejects any possibility of any further shore, and even the ostensibly guiding statue of “Our Lady of the Shipwrecked” (19) is deaf to prayers, in love with “the beautiful formlessness of the sea” (27), a term that evokes Tuan’s definition of space as “a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed” (54).

In “Berck-Plage,” although the beach is a domesticated space, unlike the bleak coastlines of “Finisterre,” the sea is devouring: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons—” (2.9-10). Out of the poems mentioned above, only “Berck-Plage” is specifically elegiac, but the other poems draw on the spatial imagery of the elegiac destructive ocean that keeps its dead. Plath is preoccupied with borders between land and ocean; they are sites where land ends, and what is beyond them resists mapping—and indeed, attempts to erase marks made by humans. The positioning of Plath’s oceans within the tradition of the oceanic/littoral elegy harks back not only to the transformative powers of “Ariel’s Song” but also the more nebulous, shifting elements of pastoral elegy; Lambert’s description of Sannazzaro’s submarine spaces could apply as well to Plath’s work: “In this Protean world beneath the sea, pagan and Christian images of the life after death meet and merge” (80). The place/space border in “Berck-Plage” is precarious—in keeping with the tradition of the littoral elegy, the devouring sea may take bodies, but unlike the customary scenes of burial at sea, it also gives them back, rejecting the coordinates and marks they provide and attempting to spread nothingness over the land. The speaker’s mortal, human perspective on the liminal site of the

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the pairing of “Blackberrying” and “Finisterre,” see Tim Kendall’s chapter “Among All Horizontals: Plath’s Landscapes” in *Sylvia Plath: A Critical Study* (2001).

shore serves to emphasise both its fragility in the face of the elements, and highlight the shifting borders between life and death, mortality and memory, presenting an “immersion” that, according to Tuan’s formulation, embodies the perspective of the landscape artist rather than the detached cartographer.

The recurring spaces of the littoral and the oceanic in Plath’s oeuvre have excited critical attention. Rather than positioning these scenes within the long tradition of the destructive/purifying ocean in literature, the common cultural conceptions of the littoral geography as liminal and often uncanny, and the interrogations of death and the elegiac made possible through the juxtaposition of emptiness/inscribed place, scholarship of Plath’s seas tends to be informed by biography. Critics who discuss the littoral motif often conclude that the fascination and dread of the ocean evident in Plath’s writing is connected to her childhood by the ocean in New England, and the ending of that remembered idyllic phase with the death of her father.<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Lowe, for instance, asserts that “In her poetry a seascape may serve both to recall past happiness and also to posit a (re)union with the absent father figure which would help Plath come to terms with what she now lacks” (22), explicitly linking both the ocean and Plath’s oceanic poetry to her attempted suicide by drowning and eventually successful suicide. To back up this connection between lost father figure and ocean, Lowe cites the following passage from Plath’s journals:<sup>14</sup>

["Full Fathom Five"] has the background of *The Tempest*, the association of the sea, which is a central metaphor for my

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<sup>13</sup> Plath’s father died of complications from a diabetes-caused foot amputation when she was eight, leaving her family in less affluent financial straits and Plath with a complicated relationship to both his memory and his absence. See, for example, Anne Stevenson’s *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (1990).

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert also uses this passage in her discussion of “Berck-Plage” in *Death’s Door* (313).

childhood, my poems and the artist's subconscious, to the father image—relating to my own father, the buried male muse and god-creator risen to be my mate in Ted, to the sea-father Neptune—and the pearls and coral highly-wrought to art: pearls seachanged from the ubiquitous grit of sorrow and dull routine. (“Seascapes” 30, *Journals* 381)

The ocean in Plath's work draws on the mythological and literary imaginary of the ocean as a site of strangeness and peopled with deities and other mythological creatures. Yearning towards the ocean and its mythical spaces in Plath's poems is usually self-destructive rather than inquisitive, such as the desire to “breathe water” in “Full Fathom Five,” but in Plath's journals the beach is a site of health and happiness, of leisure and pleasure in sand, sun and sea rather than a site of death.<sup>15</sup>

As well as Lowe, Sandra Gilbert, and Jack Folsom have contributed extensive analyses within the biographical framework, noting that the beach is an edge dividing life from death (Lowe 23), but their critical emphasis has been on historicising the poem. Lowe emphasizes a “markedly bleak” (41) tone and “absence of hope” (41) for resurrection or renewal, reinforcing the critical notion that modern elegy is hostile to consolation. Folsom similarly notes unstable oppositions: “Beside the sea, the locus of beauty and the source of life, we are made to watch a deathscaped travesty of spirituality and procreation reminiscent of Eliot's *The Waste Land*” (536). Gilbert describes the

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<sup>15</sup>Plath wrote in her *Journals*: “Sunday was heaven: a mark in life, a clear line on a clean page: we were rested, writing free, tan, quite enchanted with our work, the sky, and our finding a sandbar, all smooth and shallow to bathe on between Nauset Light and Coast Guard beach: we played [...]” (280). This relationship of mingled dread and enjoyment is portrayed in Ted Hughes's “The Beach” as an addiction: “But now you needed a beach / Like your drug. Your undertow withdrawal / Blinded and choked you. It darkened a darkness darker. / England was so filthy! Only the sea / Could scour it. Your ocean salts could scour you” (8-11).

development of Plath's oceanic imaginary as a "sea-change" from "something rich and strange" to "a dark water of annihilation" (314); while her reading is informed by biography, she extends the poem's connotations and its setting "between life and death" (330) to World War II cultural traumas and Cold War anxieties (329). Maeve O'Brien attempts to broaden biographical readings of "Berck-Plage" by further studying the historical influences of the poem:

"Positioning the focus of 'Berck-Plage' away from supposed nightmares about hospitals and medicalization perhaps reveals a wider interrogation of cultural and historical world issues, such as comprehending mass-scale deaths in a post-WW2 world" (96). While the aforementioned critics discern the liminal potential and layered individual and collective histories of "Berck-Plage," they do not translate these to the physical geography of the site, nor to the dynamics of space and place in the littoral elegy. Folsom notes the speaker's attempt to "control what she sees by the transforming power of her language" and observing that "Her technique resembles that of cinematic montage, which juxtaposes and thereby fuses diverse visual images in a meaningful way, beyond the normal parameters of space and time. In this way, Plath's lens can both record and transcend the literal immediacy of what she witnesses, thereby creating order out of chaos" (523). I argue rather that the transformative perspective of the speaker-observer creates chaos out of order, or at the very least a restless juxtaposition of images that augments the uncanny liminality of the shore and thereby the border between life and death. My focus on the particularity of the site magnifies the human perspective of the landscape painting in "Berck-Plage," emphasized through imagery related to fragile eyes and fallible vision, as well as the *memento mori* on the beach. As an imagined



elegiac geography, this beach simultaneously severs and maintains connection with the dead—in common with the littoral spaces of Arnold and Tennyson.

Although Percy Kaye, the subject of “Berck-Plage,” died in the inland village of North Tawton, in Devon, England, “Berck-Plage” opens on Berck-Plage, a seashore resort and sanatorium on the French coast visited by Hughes and Plath in June 1961. The opening three sections, each of nine couplet stanzas, deal with the dual nature of the resort/sanatorium on the beach, the social space, superimposing scenes of holiday-making with markers of disease and disability; bikinis, icecream vendors and fish are viewed as obscene, ghostly and as dismembered body-parts. As Christina Britzolakis observes in “Ariel and Other Poems” (2006):

For the melancholic, the status of language is profoundly ambiguous. If on the one hand, as Freud argues in his essay, excessive or pathological mourning produces exacerbated linguistic activity, on the other, it undermines the symbolic order, blocking communication and turning language in upon itself. In “Berck-Plage” and “The Munich Mannequins,” for example, a surrealist cross-cutting of images, and a hermetic elaboration of the isolated detail, produces a radically estranged landscape of menacing and petrified part-objects. (119)

Britzolakis does not consider the history of the seashore as an imagined geography of uncanny liminality when connecting “Berck-Plage” to the Freudian notion of the melancholic mourner, but her point about the speaker’s divisive vision is important for the landscape of the poem. Unlike the all-seeing cartographer/speaker in Bishop’s “North Haven,” Plath’s observer is at the

mercy of relentlessly shifting visual effects. This transformative perception implies immersion in death via the human point of view and sensory experience; as phenomenologist geographer Edward S. Casey writes, “Maps aim (at least officially) at representing the exact contours of land and sea masses and the precise distances between them—a cartographic concern—whereas landscape paintings attempt to convey the sensuous aspects of the environing place-world” (xiv). The beach itself is bordered on one side by hotels/hospitals, and then some way into the ocean by a breakwater, which is usually designed both to moderate the effects of tides and waves, and to prevent the removal of sand and pebbles. The next four sections of “Berck-Plage” move inland, where a grave is dug into the red earth characteristic of Devon. The speaker’s gaze there follows an indoor death-bed scene, funeral scenes of laying out the body and burying it in a churchyard, and a post-funeral scene where the dead are forgotten. Oceanic elements invade the inland scenes: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (5.1), as if the breakwater cannot prevent the interfluence of land and sea, death and life. I begin my reading of the spaces and places of the poem at the sea, and work my way inland to the beach environment and the structure and crossing of its porous borders, and then examine the implications for the space/place border in the infiltration of the sea upon the land in the burial scenes.

The littoral landscape of binary opposition between land and water connotes convergence, if not conflict, between stability/labidity and permanence/flux. Border-crossings occur through formal structure and typographical layout. Text becomes landscape: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (2.3-4). The structure of the elegy on the page echoes this transformation. As O’Brien

observes, “‘Berck-Plage’ is made up of disconnected vocabulary and its short, spaced-out verse structure assigns meaning to textual gaps and blank spaces. The structure of the poem, combined with fragmented descriptions which require thought and pause between words, intimate that Plath is negotiating with textual presence and absence” (101). I connect this “textual presence and absence” to the interfluence of sea and land, with the sea a space of absence—unmarked and uncharted as in Tuan’s formulation. The couplets draw opposing lines, while the combination of enjambment and caesurae suggests movement between and within them, echoing waves, tides and destructive floods:

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The “two lovers” reinforce the opposed doubles of this scene, sliced into unstable binaries of land/sea, life/death and sex/sickness. The sea devours the lovers behind the bunkers, and their limbs. The sexual element also gestures towards typical seaside behavior; cultural historian John K. Walton describes the “consensually liminal nature of the seaside as a ‘place on the margin,’ . . . to give a broader acceptability to, or at least tolerance of, variety of sexual partners and practices” (3). The mention of “eye” and “images” in the poem also emphasizes the presence of the observer; the human bodies are “objects organized around a focal point of converging sightlines” (Tuan 123). Casey suggests that viewing a landscape painting “lacks a practical intentionality” (xiv); as opposed to the action of travel that often results from reading a map: “paintings call mainly upon darting eye movements and slight shifts of stance” (xv). While the observer in “Berck-Plage” receives and translates impressions

rather than affects her environment, ocular images of eye and gaze are active; the devouring rather than passively receiving “swallowing” eye implicates the observer in acts of both sex and death.

“Berck-Plage” moves from space to place to space as it moves from the sea to the beach to inland Devon and back to the sea. The absence and emptiness assigned to space in Tuan’s formulation, and connected to the imagining of the sea as a site of death, is evoked by the very first line of “Berck-Plage”: “This is the sea, then, this great abeyance” (1.1). Gilbert quotes the etymology and usage of the word as follows: “A great abeyance? My dictionary gives the meaning of the (here) peculiar word ‘abeyance’ as ‘1. The condition of being temporarily set aside; suspension . . .’ It adds further, about the word’s etymology, that it is “Anglo-Norman, variant of Old French abeance, desire, from abaer, to gape at: . . . see Bay” (311). Gilbert concludes that the “abeyance of the sea” is a “grave” (311), emphasising the sea as ending, a line drawn between life and death, or even as an “abyss, a death” itself (311). I focus here on the “temporary” aspect of “abeyance,” challenging finality and implying tension between absence and return, fuelling the elegy’s investigation of the nature and expression of loss, and reflected in the eternal ebb and flow of tides and waves. The living cross the border towards the deathly sea, but if the “abeyance” is a state of temporary suspension, the dead also return to the living. This return occurs in traditional elegy through the conventions of springtime or sunrise signifying resurrection and rebirth, or as a Christian or classical after-place of heaven or Elysium, but in “Berck-Plage” the return of the dead is more sinister. In “North Haven” the dominant image is of a place from which the deceased has permanently departed, leaving it static and silent, but “Berck-Plage” involves the emergence of dead bodies in its immersive experience,

rather than serving as a navigational device offering the dead guidance towards their next spiritual state.

The “breakwater” bordering the seaward side thereby maintains connection with the realm of the dead as well as severing it. Although Folsom suggests the solidity and impassability of the breakwater as an “emotional barrier of stone” between the speaker and the “maimed and barnacled veterans” (526), the ambiguity of the structure is reinforced by its dual function. The breakwater is designed to protect the beach from the force of the waves, but also to prevent erosion. The “barnacles” evoke, as Folsom notes, the clinginess of the dead in Plath’s poem “All the Dead Dears” “How they grip us through thin and thick, / These barnacle dead!” (14-15), further suggesting passive immersion in death rather than control over the scene. The sea full of bodies in “Berck-Plage” corresponds startlingly with cultural historian John Mack’s description of the conceptualisation of the sea as both purifying and polluting in Ancient Greece; it served to dispose of “corrupted substances, things which could be got rid of definitively” which included “suicides, the victims of murder, disfigured children, unwanted passengers on a ship and enemies” (92). This method of disposal evokes the “swallowing” sea in “Berck-Plage” both in content and implication; as Mack says, “Things which float to the surface and refuse to disappear are generally regarded as omens of misfortune” (93). Part of the uncanny atmosphere of “Berck-Plage” comes, perhaps, from the sense that Plath transgresses against the age-old law that the corrupt must be hidden by placing the dead in a temporary suspension instead of a final resting place.

Furthering the idea of murder, in “Berck-Plage,” the dead return dismembered from the ocean, as fish become limbs and organs, transformed in the eyes of the observer/speaker:

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These perceptual shifts contribute to what geographer Yvonne Rydin calls the “threatening and disruptive” (152) otherness of beach-sites, evoking the uncanny that often accompanies the liminal. The observer’s perspective of the *Plage*, with its uneasy combination of holiday and hospital, is inflected by the uncanniness of the site. The beach is invaded by monsters recalling oceanic mythology, and the sea with its “crystallizing” effect becomes the transformative fluid that causes the sea-change of “Ariel’s Song” from *The Tempest*. The unpredictability of the sea reinforces the doubled and transformative vision of the observer: the sea is both abeyance and snake, the sun is a “poultice” (1.2) and a holiday-maker dons dark glasses to become a priest in a “black cassock” (1.13), thus obscuring his eyes, his vision and his gaze, and emphasising the imagery of concealment and optical distortion within the poem. These funereal hints recall the journey from health to disease and mortality. The hostile and interrogative gaze of the observer/speaker distorts the scene itself; ice-cream scoops sold “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1.4). The effect is ghostly; the haunting (or haunted) pale girls and disembodied hands arouse the speaker’s suspicion: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1.5). This paranoia is reinforced by the speaker’s limited gaze (in contrast to the clear-

sighted elegist-cartographer of “North Haven” and augmented by the insistence on restricted and damaged eyes: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (1.10). Similarly, limbs and organs are severed and damaged; as well as the “scorched hands” holding the ice-cream, there is a “dead foot” (2.2) in a black boot (recalling the black boots and shoes of “Daddy”). Because the landscape is divided, a binary of land and water as well as life and death, the body itself cannot remain whole. Sea, land and limb are thus conflated by the perspective of the observer. Bodies mark the topography of the shore, thereby creating a site where the nature of each can be questioned; the human being becomes merely a collection of body parts, driven by desire for sex (after all, the naming and objectification of body-parts, as in “breasts and hips a confectioner’s sugar” (2.7), could be the result of a lustful as well as a destructive gaze) and fear of death and disintegration. The unstable double vision of the observer and the infringement of the borders between land and sea inspire a deep sense of unease, as the poem evokes the ocean’s power to immerse land and body in death.

The disruption of borders continues in Part 3 as the poem moves inland. Flesh, nature and landscape are further blurred, with additional ocular references that connote heightened but helpless sensory perception:

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The man’s flesh and bone suffer a “land-change,” with nerves conflated with trees. The power of human skill and intellect is evoked through the surgeon and

his knowledge, but his “mirrory eye” can only inform of the state—and fate—of the patient, not the surgeon himself. Although the speaker is trapped by hotel-hospitals on one side and the breakwater on the other, these are porous and permeable borders. The hotel-hospitals provide a portal to the land, while the breakwater used to define the beach can be crossed:

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The beach is not only strewn with limbs but with artificial aids to movement, limb-replacements, both testifying of the powers of survival that metal has over flesh, and suggesting that their users may have left them behind as they approached the breakwater. The speaker has no need to pass beyond this ambiguous border between life and death; because she is not a “nurse,” or an escort of the dying, she has no need to maintain a professional smile.

The shift of scene halfway through Part 3 would seem to sever the connection with the ocean, as the speaker moves inland to an interior death-bed scene, where the subject of the elegy is finally introduced. However, even this place is imagined through markers of oceanic geography. The change in site is foreshadowed by the mentions of priest and hearse on the beach, and the mention of the nerve-tree, suggesting an inland seascape.



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There are subtle hints of the seaside here; stripes are often used in beach apparel and decoration on sun-loungers and umbrellas. The tears of the wife echo the references to salt in the littoral sections of the poem. If focus on the scene is narrowed to the place rather than the action, it is notable that the euphemism selected for dying is “vanishing;” this highlights both the solidity of the place as opposed to the frailty of human life, and suggests the eradication of meaning from the place as it becomes an ocean-like death-space. This erasure is also evoked by the speaker’s search for the jewels—they also vanish, perhaps to produce the effect that the man has literally disappeared from the scene, leaving behind only grief and consternation—and a physically empty space.<sup>16</sup> The vanishing act continues as the “washed sheets” (4.13) on which he lay “fly in the sun” (4.13) and “The pillow cases are sweetening.” (4.14), as traces of the dead man and the significance of his death are expunged; we see here happening on an individual scale what happens on a local scale at Holbeck Cemetery during the course of decades, and to sites of Native American loss in “A Procession at Candlemas” over a century. The absence of the old man is papered over with platitudes, further erasing him: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (4.15-16).

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<sup>16</sup> Folsom explains the jewels as follows: “The stones are yellow and valuable-looking because of the light reflected from an electric fire, [...]The cognitively dissonant catechresis, ‘And the tongue, sapphire of ash’ (3.18), added later, underscores the shockingly ironic nature of this transformation from jewel-valuable life to ash-reduced death—ashes to ashes” (527-528).

The mention of soap reinforces the sense of sponging away the dying to leave only the empty space of death. The speaker's reaction to the death is a frightened and disgusted realisation: "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons" (4.7-8). The oak contributes to hiding this horror, as well as suggesting the coffin.

Burial in the land, as opposed to the dead waiting in the ocean, is the central theme of Parts 5 through 7, perhaps in the hope that the dead can stay still in the stability of the earth. The land is figured as the aftermath of a battleground:

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The glitter here recalls the crystallising powers of the ocean and the metallic objects viewed on the shore: "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons" (3.1). The redness of the earth may be a reference to the type of soil in Devon. Although the action is now placed on earth rather than water, the ceremonies of mourning are infiltrated by oceanic metaphor and simile. The images of the sea, human organs and artificial objects that have been scattered throughout the poem are brought together into the landscape, blurring boundaries between beach, brain and body:

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Again we find a reference to concealment (harking back to the question of “what are they hiding?” in Part 1), which here indicates knowledge of what happens next—and *where* it happens. The shifting of perspective from beach to inland village enables a flexible distance between life and death; the sea of death is “far off,” or present within the mythical space beyond the hills, beyond the field of vision but simultaneously encroaching upon the scene. The mythical space around the framework of the everyday and familiar is evident in the lines “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.” (5.11-12)—the dead man’s distance evokes vast spaces and can only be imagined via the use of familiar objects.

The emptiness of the ocean invades the “thoughts of the wife”, and she attempts to map it with tangible, everyday objects and familiar people; the “blunt, practical” considerations of the wife further highlight the juxtaposition between the ultimate ephemerality, even futility, of these concerns and the “green sea.” The fragility of life is further emphasised by the contrasting of stone with candlelight:

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The open window is a threshold structure suggesting transition between states—the crossing of borders. The idea that death is a complete vanishing, a progress from place to the emptiness of space, a switch from presence to

absence, like the snuffing out of a candle-flame, is reiterated through expressions connoting nothingness in Part 5—“hollows” (twice), and “flying off into nothing” and “the empty benches of memory” (5.16).<sup>17</sup> “Stone” is also repeated during the funeral scenes of parts 4 and 5—“eye-stone” and “stone house,” and conflated with nothingness in the following:

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This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons (5.16-18)

Here the stones have progressed from body to building to memorial; as gravestones, markers of a life and a death, their monumental function is challenged by the “empty benches of memory,” in a similar dynamic to the recalling the choked-up Holbeck Cemetery in *V.* and the spaces around the photographs in *Nox*. And yet, someone has brought daffodils—symbols of spring—to the gravestones, suggesting continuity in tradition. The image of the “stopping place” is not only ambiguous, playing upon the idea of a “resting-place” often used in epitaphs, obituaries and eulogies, but it also suggests a crossing place of the border between life and death, the point where movement and thought stop. Meaning is erased from the side of the living, as flesh disintegrates and flowers fade, completing the transformation of place back into

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<sup>17</sup> Folsom’s research on the draft versions of “Berck-Plage” suggests that the “benches of memory” line had undergone alterations: “At this point, the scene shifts abruptly to the graveyard, and the speaker in the poem observes: “The empty branches of memory look over stones /

Marble facades with blue veins, and jelly-glassfuls of daffodils” (5.16-17).

He interprets this as follows: “No one is present but the stones, the spirits of the dead within them, their “flesh” reduced to blue-veined marble. The stones are flanked, not by reverently placed vases, but by cheap jelly glasses containing what the draft of the poem refers to as <yesterday’s> <malingering> daffodils. Memory is indeed fading, but as the fifth section of the poem concludes, the speaker affirms the value of the site as a way station on the road to eternity: “It is so beautiful up here: it is a stopping place” (5.18). As in her poem with that title, “Getting There” for Plath is an arduous journey with an unknown destination” (530).

space. In effect, the “stopping place” of death could be reversed to mean “place stopping”—the border between place and space has been reached. This abrupt ending is reflected when earth meets sky at the final phase of the burial, creating a horizon at the final lines of the elegy:

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If the earth is figured as blood, as in Part 6, plasma is what it needs to become liquid.<sup>18</sup> We are returned to the border between land and water. As with place and space, the border must exist for both entities to exist.

### **“North Haven:” “Afloat in Mystic Blue”**

“North Haven,” Bishop’s elegy for her long-time friend Robert Lowell, suggests the “desire for wholeness and a will to power, a dream of transcendence and an appeal to radiance” (2) that Cosgrove assigns to cartographers. Radiance is evident throughout the light-infused poem, and its summery descriptions of flower-filled meadows and bird-song, whereas a desire for wholeness, I argue, is visible in the attempt to contain and thereby manage grief and loss by mapping the archipelago and the coastland of Maine. In relation to the mainland, North Haven is situated within Penobscot Bay, which forms a triangle of sea behind it; on its Eastern side, facing the ocean, is the island of Vinalhaven, and beyond this is the Atlantic Ocean. In terms of space and place, then, rather than the linear land/seascape of oppositions in “Berck-Plage,” the littoral borders islands, which are in turn bordered by “blue frontiers of bay” (10). This means that while Plath faced outwards into the imaginary geography of the “great

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<sup>18</sup> OED: “Plasma”: *Physiol.* “More fully blood plasma: the clear, protein-rich liquid in which the cells of the blood are suspended. Also: the liquid component of lymph.” Gilbert interprets the plasma as an effort to staunch a wound (311).

abeyance” (in reality the English channel with Hastings on the opposite side), Bishop’s gaze is towards multiple borders and multiple sites of knowledge and enquiry. Denis Cosgrove writes that

Of equal significance to physical location within the evolution of Western global imaginings has been the boundary between known and unknown space. On a flat map the known can be extended to the very edges of representational space, leaving implicit the question what lies beyond the frame; on the globe the “ends of the earth” cannot be ignored. . . . Practically, on the global surface ends are also beginnings; psychologically, boundlessness implies the chaos that attends the dissolution of form. (*Apollo’s Eye* 13)

While Plath figures the ocean as an entity that could break its bounds at any moment, invading the inland hills of Devon, Bishop’s ocean here is ambiguously bounded, depending on whether the speaker’s gaze is towards the land or out into the Atlantic.

Instead of the ocean as a devouring monster, both land and sea are alternatively blank and full of meaning, fluctuating and static according to the will and perception of the elegist/cartographer. As Willard Spiegelman observes in “Landscapes of Knowledge” (2007), in which he does not discuss “North Haven,”

Bishop’s best poems show her to be an epistemological poet in the tradition of William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge. Going beyond the surfaces of the scenes which they lovingly depict, these poems pose essential questions about the relationship

between experience and knowledge, between what is empirically ascertainable and what must be deduced or inferred, and between what can be known and what not. (105)

Spiegelman describes a reflective process, implying a philosophical questioning absent from the overwhelming and immediate experiential feedback of “Berck-Plage;” as he goes on to write, “Bishop’s poetry passes from statement for elegant description to reenactments of the processes of discovering and learning” (105)—the “passing” is key to creating a detachment between image, analysis and articulation. As opposed to the dead returning from the sea, either of their own volition or as body-parts, in “North Haven” the insistence is on the deceased leaving the island and the shore behind. “North Haven” draws on a different littoral tradition that figures the sea as a connective gateway to an after-state instead of a repository for the dead. With its focus on traditional elegiac imagery such as flowers and birdsong, as well as the “mystic blue” (27) sea, the dominant moods of the poem are sadness and serenity, creating a more consolatory tone than the violent melancholy that inundates the “great abeyance” of “Berck-Plage” permits. Similarly, as Seamus Heaney notes in “The Redress of Poetry” (1995) of Bishop’s “famous gift for observation” (172), “Her detachment is chronic, and yet the combination of attentiveness and precision which she brings to bear upon things is so intense the detachment almost evaporates” (172-173). This combination of detachment and attention is evident in the strategies of selection and arrangement afforded by the cartographic gaze in her navigation of place, space and mythical space, and the labile borders between them.

“North Haven” comprises six stanzas of five lines each; the lines are of varying lengths, sketching a wavering line of bays and peninsulas along the

right side of the page. Bishop uses italics and parentheses to create a varied typographical topography, and capital letters to mark the names of flora and fauna, suggesting the legend of a map. She was aware of the effect of the poem's layout on the page, and the effect of gaps in shaping the whole, noting in a 1978 letter to American academic and poet Frank Bidart that "There should be a wider space after the first stanza—the others equal spaces" (*One Art: The Selected Letters* 624). There is indeed a gap between the first stanza, which maps the speaker's visual perceptions of the scene, and the rest of "North Haven," emphasizing the present disconnection of the deceased from a place of shared meaning and nostalgia. There is a further dimension to this gap; W. David Shaw notes that

Elegiac composition has a double aspect. When print domesticates the strange, making irregular states of mind more patterned and regular, it can subdue distress and moderate pain. But a cadenced voice may seem suddenly strange or unfamiliar when the blank space that encroaches on a truncated line helps a reader visualize the elegist's own fear of being engulfed. (226)

Shaw refers here to the rhythms of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar"—the watery imagery of being "engulfed," however, applies to "North Haven" as well. The blank space between the present position of the speaker and the mourning and memorial of the rest of the elegy serves a similar barrier to "engulfment" (or Ramazani's "immersion")—the pause to draw a deep breath, perhaps, or to arrange thoughts into the scene sketched in the following stanzas. While in "Berck-Plage" the print layout heightens the oppositions and tensions of the poem and its landscape, augmenting its uncanny vision and undermining the regularity of its couplets and stanzas, in "North Haven," as in "One Art," the



geographical imagination allows judicious placement of formal mourning and grief in a way that allows the elegist to “*Write It!*” without becoming overwhelmed.

Bishop’s *oeuvre* engages with questions of political, cultural and physical geography through her textual delineation of maps and appreciation of the map as an object—“More delicate than the historians’ are the map-makers’ colors” (27), she writes in “The Map.” The process of mapping, travel writing, and the detailed evocation of landscape (and seascape) in natural and urban environments recur throughout her collections, and give their names to *Questions of Travel* (1965) and *Geography III* (1976). Critics assign different motives to Bishop’s preoccupation with cartographies, oceanic environments and borders, but usually connect them to gender and sexuality, and, as in the case of Plath, biography. Poet and critic Jo Shapcott, for instance, reads Bishop’s drive to explore the world as the result of a complex sense of home and belonging due to an unsettled childhood, and suggests that Bishop’s textual bordering is informed by experience as a female author: “Borders and edges of territory and language, home and body, land and water have always offered some of the most attractive hide-outs for women writers who have long understood that the secret might simply be to let the other in or to sift through whatever flotsam washes up” (45). Jan Gordon asserts the influence of Bishop’s travels, and calls Bishop a “map-maker” who is “fixated by boundaries, where each participant loses domain” (304), and Margaret Dickie correlates map and body in Bishop’s oceanic work, suggesting the encoding of erotic attachment to women (3). The general critical consensus is that Bishop’s maps are labile (a term that connotes fluidity rather than the danger of Plath’s unstable shores in “Berck-Plage”). Lorrie Goldensohn notes of “North Haven” that “As much as

death, the poem's subject is change within an order of the non-changing" (275); we see this in the shifting islands, and in the birdsong, as opposed to the immutability of death. Sara Meyer emphasizes the fluid nature of Bishop's maps:

[T]he cartographic logic searches for meanings and identities not within members of a net but in their inter-relations. Such logic of spatial arrangement defies selfhood and autonomous self-regulating economies because it places the subject at a junction of diverse foci of meaning—allowing fluctuating, multiple interpretations, as boundary lines and acts of positioning are constantly changing. (238)

Bishop invests the oceanic scene with a transformative vision, as Plath does in "Berck-Plage," but in "North Haven" it serves to create order rather than chaos, to mark territory rather than undermine its very foundations, and thereby to draw a border between the emptiness of space and meaningful place.<sup>19</sup>

The meaningful place of "North Haven" comes to contain some stretches of the sea, marked with a memory of Lowell learning to sail, thereby making it navigated and charted. Meyer implies that Bishop's cartographies lack a "self"—"Another facet of Bishop's defiance of placement is her reluctance to disclose a self, to join the confessional tide engulfing the American poetry scene in her

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<sup>19</sup> The beach is not always ordered and pleasant in Bishop's poetry, which again shows the shaping force of the specific site; in "Florida" (1946), the titular state is undermined and destabilised by the sea as it "floats in brackish water, / held together by mangrove roots" (2-3). The beach is marked by the death of innocent creatures: "This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons" (17-20). "In the Waiting Room" (1976) depicts an invasive ocean via the medium of a National Geographic magazine outside a dentist's office. The speaker, a seven year old girl, comes to a realisation of her own individuality and connection to the rest of the world; this awareness is overwhelming: "The waiting room was bright / and too hot. It was sliding / beneath a big black wave, / another, and another" (90-93). As Charles Berger notes in "Bishop's Buried Elegies" (2012), this black wave can be traced back to the draft of "Aubade and Elegy" (53). This poem is distinctly melancholic: "For perhaps the tenth time the tenth time the tenth time today / and still early morning I go under the crashing wave of your death / I go under the black wave of ~~your~~ death" (4-7; spaces and strikethrough in original facsimile edition). From *Edgar Allan Poe and the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments* (2006).

time. The map, a two-dimensional artefact lacking a center, resembles Bishop's seemingly selfless poetry" (238). A self of a sort is evident in both the personal reminiscence and the cartography of "North Haven" if the metaphor of mapping is looked at more closely. If "North Haven" is read from a cartographical basis, the poem is not only designed to mark fluctuation, but also specifically drawn to border grief and even death. The elegy itself thus becomes both map and metaphor, both within the representation of the map on the page and as a map itself. Meyer's claim of "selflessness" and "lacking centre" negate the process of selection inherent to map-making—maps are representative rather than exhaustive. Maps must be subjective, and therefore a "self" is inherent to their construction; as John Brian asserts, "My position is to accept that rhetoric is part of the way all texts work and that all maps are rhetorical texts. . . . All maps strive to frame their message in the context of an audience. All maps state an argument about the world and they are propositional in nature" (163). Maps do have centres, and choosing it is usually a subjective political or ideological choice—in early Christian times, for example, Jerusalem was pictured at the centre of the world. The cartographer exercises power by choosing a perspective and selecting and positioning the content of the map, and navigates knowledge of the seen and unseen by drawing a picture of the world.<sup>20</sup>

The cartographer's all-seeing perspective is evident from the opening stanza, where she not only records what she sees in the bay, but identifies and magnifies selected features of the scene. Goldensohn suggests of "North Haven" that "we're on the ground experiencing . . . around us or above us; we're

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<sup>20</sup> Denis Wood suggests mapping as a way of knowing and seeing: "And this, essentially is what maps give us, reality, a reality that exceeds our vision, our reach, the span of our days, a reality we achieve no other way. We are always mapping the invisible or the unattainable or the erasable, the future or the past, the whatever-is-not-here-present-to-our-senses-now and, through the gift that the map gives us, transmuting it into everything it is not . . . into real" (4-5).

not up there at the top of the poem's canvas, getting our aerial look down" (271); I would add that the view is simultaneous and three-dimensional, suggested by the enjambment and semi-colons linking the clauses of the stanza, as we see vertically upwards to the tree-tops and sky, downwards at the flower-filled meadows, and horizontally towards "shifting" islands and by contrast the precisely marked schooner.

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The quest for a whole vision is echoed in the full sentences connected by enjambment; in "Berck-Plage" the damaged and broken scene was reflected in the fragmented lines and images of the poem. This scene hints at immortality with the evergreen spruce and springtime rejuvenation with its "new cones;" as Bonnie Costello notes, "Like so many pastoral elegies, ["North Haven"] takes solace in nature's power to renew itself" (*Questions of Mastery* 211).<sup>21</sup> This stanza not only evokes the generic pastoral, however, but a specific place and state within it. R. Clifton Spargo remarks that "Bishop writes as someone for whom the greatest loss is already in the past" (419), and this temporality is inscribed in the first stanza, which sketches the state after the turning point of the pastoral elegy, the calm after the storm and the refreshment of withered vegetation as hope for reunion or resurrection emerges—the "fresh woods and

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<sup>21</sup> Costello discusses the pastoral and Bishop further in the *Oxford Handbook of Elegy* (2010), 324-343.

pastures new" (193) that conclude "Lycidas," for instance.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, there are hints that the serene equilibrium of this opening scene is delicately held rather than entrenched; the "horse's tail" (also known as "mare's tail") is a wispy cirrus cloud that despite its innocuous appearance sometimes predicts wet and stormy weather. The typography of the italics reflects the fragility of the cloud, as if the scene of stasis is not as emphatically marked as the memory and loss of the rest of the poem. The "pale bay" (4) with its "milky skin" reinforces paleness, a connotation of death echoed in the word "still".<sup>23</sup> In elegy, "still" is often loaded with the double meanings of "continuing" and "motionless."<sup>24</sup> The "It is so still" (3) of "North Haven," positioned at the end of the line, embodies both the persistence of the landscape despite the disruption of the death and its stasis caused by the death, as we see further on in the poem.

Despite the stillness conveyed by the first stanza, the second stanza evokes the instability of the littoral site. Cosgrove states that "securing the immutability of the mobile has been a constant obsession of cartography. It is fundamental to the map's claim to be more than an imaginative picture" (*Geography and Vision* 168). We see a tension between fixity and restlessness in the destabilisation of the archipelago by the elegiac vision:

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<sup>22</sup> Theocritus's "The Death of Daphnis" (trans. C.S. Calverley) opens with a similar sense of pastoral peace: "Sweet are the whispers of yon pine that makes / Low music o'er the spring, and, Goatherd, sweet / Thy piping;" (1-3), before his reminiscence of the death of Daphnis is accompanied by the pathetic fallacy of nature's lament: "Now let white lilies drape the juniper, / And pines grow figs, and nature all go wrong: / For Daphnis dies. Let deer pursue the hounds, / And mountain-owls outsing the nightingale" (6-7).

<sup>23</sup> In "First Death in Nova Scotia," Bishop similarly uses a washing out of colour to connote death, repeating "white" in reference to both the body of the child, objects in the room containing the casket and the snowy country outside.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Shelley's "Adonais": "Come away! / Haste, while the vault of blue Italian day /

Is yet his fitting charnel-roof! while still / He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay;" (49-52).

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The drive of the poem is from flux to fixity. Although the points of the compass frame the scene, the islands they contain were fluctuating, and therefore so have the borders between life and death. After Lowell has “left North Haven, anchored in its rock, / afloat in mystic blue” (26-27), mobile elements become “anchored”—both islands and schooner are now static. Even if the observer/cartographer is omnivident within the sphere of the “blue frontiers,” she is not omnipotent because she cannot keep death at an indefinable and shifting distance, in the fuzzy mythical space rather than invading space with its powers of erasure. “A mile off” emphasises distance from the observer; the precise location of the schooner in the sea suggesting a correlation with the firm knowledge of Lowell’s death, and creating a place out of space. While this firm knowledge has immobilised the islands adrift within the “blue frontiers of bay” at the borders of the map, the ship strains at the edges of mythical space, hinted at in the repeated emphasis on leaving and absence beyond the borders of the map.

The flower-list in the third stanza recalls funeral rites, from propitiating a vegetation deity in pre-Christian times to the flowers still brought to gravesides, and serves as a further marking of borders. Zeiger claims that “the third stanza engages the elegiac tradition head-on, with its recapitulation of the Renaissance-neoclassical flower catalogue” (76), but as we have seen, Bishop’s negotiation of the spaces and moments of the pastoral tradition starts

at the beginning of the poem. As George Monteiro remarks, Bishop alludes to other poets as well as the generic tradition in “North Haven”—the islands are inscribed with intertextuality from Shakespeare to Marianne Moore.<sup>25</sup> The flowers reinforce this positioning within the tradition, as well as the clarity of the cartographer’s perceptions:

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“Painting the meadows” is an act of inscription—the land here is made into place by the assigning of meaning, as the flora of the islands act as cartographic markers. According to Sacks, “Few elegies or acts of mourning succeed without seeming to place the dead, and death itself, at some cleared distance from the living. Hence, in part, the sense of distance marked by the processions in elegies or by such related items as the catalogued offering of flowers” (19). These ceremonies of flowers and processions are challenged in the bleak, mechanical funeral scene in the fifth part of “Berck-Plage,” but on North Haven, the flowers are designed to invoke rather than subvert tradition

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<sup>25</sup> George Monteiro links Bishop’s catalogue of flowers here not only to the generic pastoral, but also to specific poems: “The matter would seem to end here, if not for something Bishop said about the Lowell poem after she had finished it. Writing to the poet Frank Bidart, a mutual friend, Bishop explained that “North Haven” incorporated words and images from other poets” (138). The passage Monteiro refers to from *One Art: The Selected Letters* (1994) is as follows: “‘Daisies pied’ and ‘to paint the meadows with delight are straight from the summer part of the song in Shakespeare—you know the other parts, ‘When icicles hang by the wall’?... The ‘incandescent stars’ I’m pretty sure are from Marianne’s ‘Marriage’—but that isn’t too important. (I think I felt the more literary the better!) ‘Mystic blue’ is I think a steal from Cal [Robert Lowell], isn’t it?—also more or less on purpose” (624-5). As well as an homage in the elegiac tradition of inheritance and intertextuality, Monteiro reads these allusions as a comment on marriage.

with their bright colours and nostalgic associations. The “eyebright” (13), in particular, is significantly related to powers of perception and thereby mapping, reinforcing the ocular motif of “North Haven” (begun in the opening stanza with the insistence on the speaker’s powers of sight). “Eyebright” not only suggests clear vision, but its Latin name is *Euphrasia officinalis*, commonly known as “eyebright,” and once used as a remedy for weak eyes (*OED*).

The fauna as well as the flora of the island are marked on the elegiac map. The lamentation of the “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (18). The ocular motif is continued here, but it is left unclear whether the cartographer herself is crying (although “eyebright” could refer to tear-filled eyes as well as clarity). The clear vision and detachment that enables the mapping of sorrow are maintained, however, as the expression of emotion is assigned to nature, echoing the pathetic fallacy of the elegiac convention. Nature marks absence by mourning it, but also delineates the space of loss: “This quotation has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons” (19-20; italics in original). Although the familiar flowers and birds return to the site of shared experience on North Haven, the spring cannot be the same because of the absence caused by death—which is why nature “almost” repeats herself. Because of this gap, the space left by the departed, the scene is revised.<sup>26</sup> Again we have the choice of italic font linked to death, although here it connotes movement rather than stillness; indeed, the tension between the returning of spring and its natural accoutrements and the insistence on Lowell’s permanent departure and concomitant stillness fuels the elegiac dynamic of the poem, as well as reinforcing the border between life and

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<sup>26</sup> Monteiro and others have commented that this “revision” also refers to Lowell’s habit of revising his poetry: “The great changer of his own poetry (“repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise”) is now frozen in his tracks” (138).



death—in the scenes of life and colour, on the islands, things move on in their natural cycles, while the sea is static, and in the first stanza leeched of colour. In the elegiac tradition, repetition “creates a sense of continuity, of an unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the extreme discontinuity of death”, so that “time itself is thereby structured to appear as a familiar, filled-in medium rather than as an open-ended source of possible catastrophe” (22). There is a spatial as well as a temporal dimension to repetition; patterns are engraved upon space as well as used to mark the passage of time. Sacks goes on to assert that repetition “functions to control the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion” (Sacks 23). Costello claims that “North Haven” “[refuses] the conventional consolations of elegy: the renewal of nature and the permanence of art” (*Questions of Mastery* 211) and correspondingly that “the poem affirms the human capacity to remember, and to change through and with memory. It also makes clear that the act of memorializing experience in art is not a form of mastery over loss” (*Questions of Mastery* 210). While memory is important in “North Haven,” and anchored to the island scene, the cartographic perspective enables the mastery and thereby management of grief as it brings the order of the map out of the chaos of grief. As opposed to “Berck-Plage,” where the dead leave the sea and the sea overwhelms the land, and simultaneously the speaker’s sensory perceptions, in “North Haven” stillness/movement and death/life are put in appropriate places and spaces.

The purpose of repetition is comparable to that of mapping. A map is a pattern, a way of fixing the fluid while allowing for potential instability, as whirlpools and currents are marked on maritime maps. Maps connect disjunctive parts into a whole; as well as bordering space and place, they border and thus help to define, contain and exclude presence, absence and silence. As

Harley writes, and as I discussed further in “Mapping Conversations with the Absent,” “that which is absent from maps is as much a proper field for enquiry as that which is present. . . . Silence can reveal as much as it conceals and, from acting as independent and intentional statements, silences on maps may sometimes become the determinate part of the cartographic message” (86)<sup>27</sup>. The “blue frontiers” delineate a space for absence, as well as gesturing towards the mythical space of death, while the song of the sparrows is emphasized by the silence of death they aim to counter—and the other way around. The expression of grief here is marked on the topography of North Haven, but is mediated—even mastered—through its cartography. Two crossings across the border of land and sea are charted, one from youth to adulthood, and the other, equally permanent, from life to death. The map of “North Haven” consoles; because it charts a leave-taking while drawing a map that factors in both memory and absence, and because transience and mortality form essential territories of this cartography, the map defines and enable their acceptance.

The “familiar, filled-in medium” of repetition is reinforced in the next stanza as the speaker reaffirms nostalgia for an idyllic past, marking her memory of Lowell’s recollections upon the island.

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<sup>27</sup> We see this shaping power of silence as shadows in Bishop’s “The Map” (1946): “Land lies in water; it is shadowed green. / Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges / showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges / where weeds hang to the simple blue from green” (1-4).

Here the shore is shown in its aspect of a domesticated leisure resort, a playground rather than a wild expanse peopled only with birds; the only direct reminiscence of the friend who died is moored firmly to the island, and, as Zeiger points out, the only explicit mention of “loss” occurs here (77). The actual memory of the speaker (or subject), however hazy, reflects the labile nature of the shore-borders. Terming the summer “classic” paradoxically makes it seem less real, an invoking of collective cultural nostalgia, something immortalised in fiction and on screen instead of individual memory. The subject is also in a hazy, liminal state at the beginning of the final stanza:

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Two crossings across the border of land and sea are described here – one from youth to adulthood, and the other, equally permanent, from life to death. The words are now finally fixed, as is the state of the subject. The borders on the map are finally similarly inscribed; only the birds are able to change—perhaps their song of lamentation may change to one of renewal.

There are advantages to approaching the elegiac from the perspective of the map drawn through the godlike perspective. Firstly, as I have mentioned before, a process of selection is involved in drawing a map; they are representative rather than exhaustive. This enables both evasive strategies and commemorative strategies, allowing the shifting of focus onto the map. It is

therefore possible to focus on the purifying aspect of the sea, for example, rather than its destructive potential; it is possible to focus on celebrating an individual's life rather than grief for their loss. Another advantage is also present in the nature of the map itself—its potential as a mediatory object. According to Mack, “with the production of accurate maps, the mariner's relationship to the sea changed irrevocably” (69). This was because “navigation by sensory means alone, or by the senses informed by simple instrumentation, was to become less essential to successful way-finding” (70). If this is applied to the elegy-map, it would seem to suggest that through mapping, the true, or the instinctive and experiential knowledge and awareness of navigating through the process of grief has become to some extent unnecessary; the map presents a short-hand version of this and because of its selectiveness, grief could potentially be edited out altogether. This has consolatory implications, but it also means that the map enables a process of detachment. The elegy-map can also provide a consolatory function because it contains grief, in the sense of defining, limiting and bordering it; if mortality is drawn into the map, if transience and fluidity (as in “North Haven”) are an integral part of it, then it enables the acceptance of these and therefore could act to ease the pain of loss as well as prepare for it.

Scholars rarely connect Bishop's explorations and cartographies, or indeed her littoral geographies, to death or grief, and her work is rarely examined by critics of elegy. Ramazani alludes to Bishop's “One Art” but does not discuss it. Zeiger mentions “North Haven” in the context of women writing elegies for men. Although her focus is on the poem as a “revaluation of elegy” [sic] in its “dialogue not just with mainstream elegy but also with its leading contemporary practitioner” (75), Zeiger notes the “familiar landscape, almost empty of people (the schooner hints at human presence), but full of animation

and memory” (75). She observes that “the poem avoids elegiac explicitness about loss and death, affording only clues to, rather than statements of grief” (77); this elusiveness regarding grief echoes Dickie’s comment on Bishop’s “encoding” of erotic attachment to women. The avoidance of explicit mentions of death also recalls the concealments of “Berck-Plage”—if mythical space is a coordinate for death and the unknown, it is present in “North Haven” as well, although the speaker’s attitude is one of acceptance rather than paranoia. Geography and the reading of mythical space, however, provides further clues to Bishop’s responses to death, as she consistently maps grief onto place. In the much-anthologised but little-studied villanelle “One Art” (1976), accomplishment at “the art of losing” (1) is attained by moving from losing small items to places:

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As Gordon writes of Bishop’s short stories “In the Village” and “In Prison,” “Lines of narration proceed only to be broken off with large patches of white space—the spaces of nature struggling with the spaces of absence. Such a conflict is almost always at the heart of Elizabeth Bishop’s craft” (295).<sup>28</sup> “One Art” exhibits the same pattern, in which the space of absence and the presence of text-as-place shape each other. In the final stanza, after the “patches of white space” dividing the stanzas of the villanelle from each other, the ultimate lost object is finally revealed:

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<sup>28</sup> While Gordon’s “Cartographic Imagination” naturally discusses cartography in Bishop’s work, my approach differs in that it focuses on littoral elegiac writing, and analyses cartographic elements from a geographical rather than metaphorical perspective.

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Cartography is not merely a technique for articulating borders, topologies and cultural landmarks in Bishop's work, but it is also the "art of losing." "North Haven" maps the future and the past through its nostalgia for summers gone and the realisation of present loss; absence and presence are mapped as Bishop draws the border of the "blue frontiers of bay" (10) and notes that Lowell has permanently "left North Haven, anchored in its rock, / afloat in mystic blue" (26-27). Even though his leave-taking is marked, where he is going is left hazy, and this is why transcendence is not possible; there is no certainty of reunion or a better place.

### **Bordering the Abyss**

The varying littoral geographies in twentieth-century elegy continue a tradition begun in the earliest myths and literatures: the sea as a site of unpredictable dangers, of devouring absence, of the birth of life on earth, and of mythical monsters and protective deities, and the border between life and death. The juxtaposition of "Berck-Plage" and "North Haven" reflects these contradictory narratives. "Berck-Plage" imagines the sea as a repository for the dead, as a labile, encroaching, devouring entity, but in "North Haven" the ocean is a connective medium between known and uncharted territory—death is a journey rather than a "stopping-place" ("Berck-Plage" 5.18). Indeed, while the barrier between life and death in "Berck-Plage" is a solid structure undermined by the ocean, overwhelming the speaker with an influx of deathly imagery, "North

Haven” charts the permanent departure of the deceased, allowing a space that can be mapped with sorrow. “Berck-Plage” is a textbook modern elegy, with the insistence on the human point-of-view—the broken-as-designed body, the ambiguous and faulty vision, and the bitter and fearful mind. The littoral site of “Berck-Plage” is a site of “immersion” in loss, with its uncanny landscape and the constant reminder of death, disease and danger. “Berck-Plage” is immersed in loss, but “North Haven” accepts it. This distinction between the elegies is determined by the all-seeing god-like perspective and the art of cartography in Bishop’s work, which determines a level of detachment towards death and grief—a choice between the lens of a microscope and the wrong end of a telescope. Indeed, a kaleidoscopic view would best describe the perspective of “North Haven,” with its colourful islands and potentially fluid boundaries.

The human and god-like perspectives are linked to imagery related to eyes and vision within the poems. Not only is the world visible to the observer/cartographer in “North Haven,” but she can control perception, if not event, through cartography, drawing an island of flowers and birdsong and a calm sea and sky, to resonate with the mood of mournful but resigned reminiscence. The speaker/observer in “Berck-Plage,” by contrast, suspects concealments, and is attacked by doubled images and shifting scenes that she cannot master. Instead of “eyebright,” the ocular imagery in “Berck-Plage” connotes damaged and limited vision, in “The lines of the eye, scalded by these bald surfaces” (1.10), for instance. This distinction is reflected in the transparency of the language; while Plath’s later work, including “Berck-Plage,” conceals as it reveals, the lucidity of Bishop’s work throughout her career conveys clear-sightedness, an attempt to illuminate.

Many twentieth-century elegists combine elements of immersion and transcendence in some form; they are rarely embodied as clearly and distinctively as in the elegies discussed here. The differences in their expression and mediation of grief, “Berck-Plage,” and “North Haven,” and their negotiations of liminality, dualities, instability and fallibility reflect the geographical particularities of their sites. The painting of a landscape that reflects fear and disease, with borders between life and death that cannot hold, and the marking of death and absence by using a map that shows death in the distance, are both attempts to define and navigate the terrain of loss.



## 6. Geography and the Elegiac Imagination

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Seamus Heaney “The Tollund Man in Springtime” (1-9, 2005)

In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood—  
 Where most the gipsies by the turf-edged way  
 Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush you see  
 With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of grey,  
 Above the forest-ground called Thessaly—  
 The blackbird, picking food,  
 Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all;  
 So often has he known thee past him stray,  
 Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,  
 And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall.

Matthew Arnold “The Scholar-Gipsy” (111-120, 1885)

Seamus Heaney’s “The Tollund Man in Springtime” and Matthew Arnold’s “The Scholar-Gipsy” share both an environment inflected with the pastoral and a mobile, haunting, figure from the past. The Scholar-Gipsy haunts the countryside around Oxford, and the Tollund Man switches between the contemporary “virtual city” of modern technology and the moss and springs of rural surroundings. Both passages have overtones of autumn—despite the “springtime” of the Tollund Man—the “dead bracken” and “wither’d spray” contrast with the eternal sameness of the beings who encounter them. The status of the spectral presences in these poems is ambiguous; the Tollund Man is “neither god nor ghost” and the Scholar-Gipsy emerges from a legend written hundreds of years before Arnold’s time. And yet they are given shape through

the liminal spaces they inhabit; the Tollund Man is both underground and walking the streets, while the Scholar Gipsy is both within Glanvil's book and wandering among the Cumnor Hills. I have chosen these extracts as epigraphs for my conclusion because they seem to me to summarise the flexibility, mobility and layered spaces that characterise the genre of the elegy. "Virtual city" suggests both a cyberspace and questions the reality of a cityscape, while the layering of Thessaly—the Arcadia of the pastoral convention—onto the Cumnor Hills creates intersecting geographic imaginaries of the rural and the pastoral, the real and the ideal. The mourner, the dead, and the imagined geographies they inhabit and are placed in are not fixed; as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, multiple, varied, and overlapping sites of mourning and loss that nevertheless share a common heritage permeate the tradition—and the similarities of "The Tollund Man in Springtime" and "The Scholar-Gipsy" illustrate this narrative of continuity.

These figures and poems also show the interplay of absence and presence that marks elegy. The state of the Tollund Man and the Scholar-Gipsy as simultaneously hidden and in plain sight, both everywhere and nowhere, and between geography and imagination, echoes the concomitant traces and spaces of elegy. I have discussed the shaping force of absence and silence in all of the chapters here, whether to do with layout on the page or imagined geography; in "Tollund Man in Springtime" and "The Scholar-Gipsy" Heaney and Arnold follow the Wordsworthian dictum of making the absent present. On the infinite variety of presences and their interaction with experience, Henri Lefebvre remarks:

Space thus conceptualised is defined as the play of absences and presences, represented by the alternation of light and shade,

the luminous and the nocturnal. “Objects” in space simulate the appearance and disappearance of presences in the most profound way. Time is thus punctured by presences. They give it rhythm, but it also contains things that are not what they seem, representations that simulate/dissimulate.

(“Triads and Dyads” 55-56)

The Tollund Man and the Scholar-Gipsy are positioned as absent and present; their presence marks the passage of time through the cycle of the seasons and the passing of the centuries, and their uncanny spectral nature, as well as the liminality of their geographies, both simulate and undermine the pastoral representations they are assigned. As shadowy, slippery figures moving through imagined geographies of “light and shade,” the Tollund Man and the Scholar-Gipsy can be considered as metaphors for elegy and its conventions itself. Elegy creates sites that are stages, pauses for reflection and consideration and arranging things and searching for truth—and then it is written or read and left behind. Elegy is a genre of traces; as Nigel Thrift argues, traces are constructive: “Places are ‘stages of intensity’, traces of movement, speed and circulation” (222-3). Both reading and writing elegy is an act of connection with the past, but also an insight into the spaces within and the places without (in both senses) grief; it does not matter if it is for a brief or a long moment.

At the beginning of this thesis, I remarked that I want to “introduce geocriticism to poetry,” specifically elegy. By drawing connections between geographic theory and the imaginative inflections of elegiac geographies, I have demonstrated the importance of geocritical study to emotional, poetic narratives

as well as prose. This thesis has presented a variety of geographies, both man-made and natural, that are manipulated and shaped by the elegiac imagination into sites where death is encountered and mapped. Throughout this work, it has become increasingly apparent that the diversity of elegiac geographies here—sites of burial and retrieval, mobility, architecture, and shoreline are marked with navigations of loss and absence, but also the tension between memorialising and erasure and the tension between the grief of loss and the form of elegy. W. David Shaw summarises this last instance of tension as follows:

In controlling grief, the elegist also transgresses norms by trying *not* to make the reader feel that art is totally coherent and controlled. The comfortable framework of art confines the reader to a knowable universe. But death is an unmanageable, mind-expanding event. A wholly controlled elegy makes at most an impact on a mourner and a reader. But an elegiac tremor is introduced whenever Tennyson chooses to break down boundaries and create a sense that his elegy, like his life, is simultaneously continuous and broken. (224; italics in original)

We see marks of attempts to assert control despite the elegiac “tremor” in the confrontation between the skinhead and the poet in *V.*, in the questioning of the elegiac purpose in “Station Island,” in the balancing of flitting mindscapes that circle the globe and the linear route of the “Procession at Candlemas,” in the quest and restlessness of *Nox*, the shadowed memories and interrogation of fate and chance in *Elegies* and *Birthday Letters* and in the crossing of borders in “North Haven” and “Berck-Plage.” These elegiac markings likewise balance the fixed and the shifting; landscapes and people are fragmented, layered and fluid, controlled by the mourning process of the elegiac imagination that charts

them, but they can also be made bordered and static. In *V.* a cemetery becomes a battleground, Heaney's pilgrim route is re-mapped into a series of encounters with secular ghosts, Clampitt's procession becomes a re-inscribing of America's history, Carson mirrors narratives from millennia apart, Dunn's municipal registrar's office is transformed into a site of fate and inevitable wrong turns, Hughes's architecture becomes tomb-like, Plath's ocean changes the whole into the dismembered and land into ocean, and Bishop places memory and loss into the borders of a bay. The site-specific focus of these engagements with death and mourning, and their accompanying anxieties over memorial, an after-state, and the elegiac tradition itself, mean that individual geographical narratives are highlighted—these elegists all inflect their cartographic strategies with the personal nature of their mourning, whether it is for friend, family member, acquaintance, anonymous body in a bog or mythical figure summoned by church bells. Beyond the scope of this thesis, elegiac narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries multiply and diversify even further, particularly in the digitised and virtualised twenty-first century; mourning has moved from the realm of church, graveyard, poetry book and newspaper column to social media networks and websites dedicated to remembering a loved one.<sup>1</sup> Rather than consolation in an abstracted afterlife, comfort provided by elegy is often that of empathy; some people find comfort in the fact that others have experienced and articulated the messy, confusing and often silencing emotions of grief. And yet, the curious thing about elegy is that the old figures persist.

I have emphasised continuity throughout this thesis, particularly related to geography. The geography of daily life, at an essential level, remains the

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Gilbert has written extensively about virtual sites of mourning; see *At Death's Door* 224-294.

same—burial grounds, roads, dwellings, and landscape. Within these parameters, however, elegy takes on a variety of narratives and inflections, ranging from the deeply melancholic to the comforting—and, as I have demonstrated by my focus on precursor and context, these inflections have also persisted throughout the centuries of the lament. Elegy is a protean genre. It changes shape and form over the centuries, and it spreads itself over imagined geographies grounded in nature and its destruction, but the essential function of the elegy remains the same; it is a way of orienting the bereaved in a changed world. The gap between Tennyson’s “outline” and his “large grief” must be filled, however inadequately—as Ann Keniston summarises in her examination of trauma and belatedness in American post-9/11 elegies by poets such as Robert Pinsky and Louise Glück:

As they consider their own cultural purpose, these poems draw attention to a much older problem: poems may originate in, respond to, and incorporate “real” sensations, emotions, and ideas, but as linguistic constructions, they are always artificial and figurative. I will argue in the remainder of this essay that several poems depict recent events in ways that draw attention to this problem of representing the “real.” But these poems do so indirectly; they consider the relation between the literal and the figurative through chronological instability, distance, indirection, and estrangement. (661)

The poems I have discussed here face the “problem of representing the real” through the geographic imagination—spatial “instability.” The geography of daily life, at a fundamental level, remains the same—burial grounds, roads, dwellings, and landscape. As I have demonstrated, elegy uses a fair amount of variety in

expression and in the navigation of the traditional tropes; elegy speaks in the face of silence, moves after stillness, creates holes out of the solid and inscribes borders in infinite time and space.

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