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Who Died: Redefining the Elegy Through Affect and Trauma

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Brittney La Noire

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Abstract

This project introduces the claim that death literature, specifically elegies and epitaphs, do not rely on set structure or content, but rather are poetic effects of trauma and affect. Both have been defined and redefined by critical scholars, but there is still a division about their use. The beginning of the project will pull together Paul De Man, Cathy Caruth, Theresa Brennan, and Diana Fuss to apply the theoretical principle of trauma and affect transhistorically through Theocritus, John Milton, and Percy Shelley. The final portion will be an original creative collection of elegies combined with epitaphs as ending couplets about fictional characters who have died. For example, there are elegies about Edgar Allan Poe's Annabel Lee, Ned Stark from *Game of Thrones*, and even video game characters such as Link from "The Legend of Zelda" series. All elegies will have epitaphs as their couplet, because the two are not necessarily separate. Overall, this project is meant to demonstrate how poetic writings, explicitly the elegy and epitaph should be defined in terms of emotionality.

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INTRODUCTION

Elegies and epitaphs belong to the genre known as “death literature.” Death literature consists of different literary styles which address the topic of death. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines the elegy as “[a]n elaborately formal lyric poem lamenting the death of a friend or public figure or reflecting seriously on a solemn subject” (“elegy”), while the epitaph is “[a] form of words in prose or verse suited for inscription on a tomb” (“epitaph”). Although the *Oxford* provides what might appear to be standardized definitions of *elegy* and *epitaph*, previous critical scholarship on the two has proven inconsistent in this regard. On the one hand, some critics, including the poet-scholar Robert Hass, understand these forms of death literature in terms of content; that is, writing generated by and around the experience of loss. On the other, scholars, such as Michael D. Hurley and Michael O’Neill, define the elegy and epitaph by their formal structures: meter, lineation, and stanzaic organization (100). What results from these divergent conceptualizations is a lack of understanding of the affective dimensions of elegy and epitaph and, as a consequence, their vital roles in the deep processes of grief.

To account for this quandary, I engage critical frameworks in trauma theory and affect theory to restore and interrogate the emotionality undergirding the composition of elegies and epitaphs. That is to say, I argue that the two poetic modes are better apprehended in terms of affect rather than content or form. To develop an understanding of trauma in relation to elegy and epitaph, I turn to Paul de Man’s *Autobiography as Defacement* and Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience*. I then argue that the traumatic event, of which both de Man and Caruth write, gives rise to a range of emotional experiences that I capture through Theresa Brennan’s Diana Fuss’ work on affect. Specifically, I bring these thinkers together to offer a more nuanced conceptualization of elegy and epitaph that refocuses critical attention on poetry as an effect of

emotion. I do this in two ways. The first is a critical analysis of Theocritus' *Idylls*, (ca. 300 BCE) John Milton's "Lycidas," (1637) and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Adonais" (1821) to articulate a transhistorical phenomenon of poetic affect. While the elegy and epitaph have taken different forms over time, from the classical to the medieval, from the Renaissance to the Modern, they share a functionality implicated with the grieving process. My second method is to apply theory to practice by composing a series of elegies and epitaphs inspired by fictionalized deaths in popular media. Overall, I validate the connections we have to popular culture icons and establish a space where grief of such characters can be verbalized. These connections hold value in our understanding of relationships to one another and our level of empathy. My inspiration comes from different genres within television, film, and gaming in which both beloved and despised characters die. The ensuing emotions give rise to a new function of human relationships and how different connections affect our emotional state. Through my critical analysis of Theocritus, Milton, and Shelly, and in my original compositions, I challenge prevailing templates to suggest that we don't know as much about the elegy as we thought.

Both forms of elegies and epitaphs rely on the end of the life cycle and what emotions and language come from it. Elegies are emotionally charged written responses towards death. Epitaphs are one's way of immortalizing a person through quotes or even words to live by. Both forms require a death to have occurred and need serious and impactful emotions to be legitimately created. They cannot be fabricated out of nothing. A significant difference between the two is that elegies can only be created after the subject has passed, while the epitaph can be created before or after, and sometimes, the person who died created their own epitaph. Leading into the question, does the inevitability of death create equal emotions to write this poetry, even if the person hadn't died yet? By looking into three famous works within elegy, connections are

found that create a mutual understanding and a base foundation for what a true elegy is. There is a lack of concrete understanding within the literary community as to what the elegy is. Is it a form, subject, genre? Unpacking similarities between officially recognized elegies can point to the direction that the elegy is headed in modern times. Once that base foundation is established, boundaries will be pushed.

Both *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* and *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* define elegy and epitaph differently. One compares four major elegies to one another and takes on a more “classical” approach. Meaning, it describes what the elegy is typically composed of; elegiacs, as well as lists the different themes that follow the history of the style; death, love, and war. Oxford, however, uses a more traditional one-sentence definition, but does not fully capture all the elegy has to offer. The same style is used in the defining of “epitaph.” Penguin uses historical context, as well as famous examples to explain what the epitaph is; an inscription on a tomb which could take multiple forms and be useful to either the living or the dead. Oxford gives a more concisely worded paragraph or less on the term. While the epitaph’s vague description ultimately works for individual purposes, the lack of consistent definition of both creates a divide within the literary community. All that can truly be said and agreed upon is the presence of legitimate emotion after the death of another being.

What exactly is an English elegy? Does it have a form? What does it look, sound, or read like? During the oral times of the elegy, both were not considered separate, but rather part of one another. I intend to keep with this tradition as the epitaph continues its presence throughout the three major works. In Robert Hass’s *A Little Book on Form*, he notes that “the English elegy, like the ode, is formally various, mimicking spontaneity, but elegy was originally associated with the elegiac couplet, one line of hexameter and one of pentameter, and the term passed into Latin

meaning any poem using the elegiac distich.” (296). Similar to other forms of poetry, the style has shifted. Poetry used to have to rhyme, have metered lines and a whole set structure.

Nowadays, there are different ways to write poetry, especially after World War I which chipped away at the fantasy world created by poetry and replaced with the reality of war in a more conventional style. No longer are writers forced to follow specific rhyme schemes, metered structures, or certain themes. Poetry is now freedom of expression. For example, people have written one-lined poems, poems with no rhyme scheme, and poems in the shape of objects. The elegy has evolved over time as well. There is no longer a set of rules that one must follow in order to construct an elegy, so why is there still discrepancy in its definition?

Hass goes back in time and thinks back to the Greek terminology *elegos*, or lament. He describes the history of the pastoral elegy created by Theocritus in the third century BCE. He finds that Theocritus used the ritual laments for Adonis, a God who was part of a divine ritual accident, to invent the pastoral elegy. This type of elegy was specific to an author who was a shepherd mourning the death of another shepherd. For the English elegy, connections have been drawn back to ancient Greece, when music had accompanied elegies. They were part of the connection between loss and consolation. The wind instruments they used to play along with the words of an elegy were found to be associated with mourning and the god the of the dead, Osiris. This opens the door to the subject matter of elegies. Do the deceased have to have physically existed, or could there be a potentiality of fiction? These customs had since then been passed down and used as tributes and to reflect mourning after a loved one has passed. There lies the purpose of the elegy. It was created as part of a mourning ritual, that has since been morphed into a writer coming to terms and understanding of a death.

Not only does Hass give a small introduction to the poetic form of elegies, but he also provides a “how to” chapter on reading them. He takes multiple popular English works and breaks them down into sections to dissect the use of the form given by that particular poet. With Percy Shelley’s “Adonais,” Hass finds that Shelley fused together two different worlds to create a memorable elegy, “Twice as long as “Lycidas,” it shares a subject- the untimely death of a young poet- and some of the same issues- what poetry is in the face of death, how to overcome grief, what to feel in the face of the trivialization of poetry by the culture... and how to come to terms with one’s own death in relation to all of the above. ... it’s worth looking at how he frames these issues in this elegy, where the forms of very ancient funerary ritual are put to use in a struggle with a sense of the uselessness of poetry” (310). During the early 1800’s, the use of poetry was being called into serious question. What does poetry do for people? Shelley’s creation of “Adonais” is a perfect representation of the type of emotional distress people endure and how poetry helps relieve those emotions and helps make sense in a world that feels chaotic. When we mourn the loss of loved ones, sometimes the grief takes over our lives. Writing elegies has helped people come to terms with the break in the fantasy we live in. We are obsessed with the idea of “forever,” that when forever comes to an end, it is a disruption to our lives. Underneath, humans know and understand that death is a natural part of life, but that doesn’t stop the pain from when the time comes for your family or friends, or when imagination runs wild and creates a space where a loved one is no longer present. Poetry doesn’t help us answer the questions previously mentioned, but it does help in maintaining our sanity during those incredibly stressful times.

The elegy cannot simply be a poem where the writer/speaker is conveying a “woe is me” tone about death but is an emotionally charged response to the life that is now gone. An elegy is

not to be written in a way that gains sympathy for the speaker/writer, but rather is intended to gain a response for the death. Although, this isn't always the case, there needs to be a consistent purpose for elegies, and because of the heightened emotions a speaker/writer is facing when writing such material, the focus should be on the life lost. Abbie Findlay Potts' *The Elegiac Mode* is a critical study of just what the elegy is in respects to other forms of death literature. More specifically, she argues how the term "elegy" should not be used generically to replace, "death literature." This is the same as labeling *The Lord of the Rings* as a romantic film, simply because Aragorn has a love interest. What is more interesting is that, in the modern world, the definition of elegy is not consistent, making Pott's argument one of many ways to look at this type of poetry. There is not a concrete definition of the style, which calls for debate about its function and purpose. This thesis is how the elegy and epitaph are to be read and written in a world where fiction has a strong hold over emotions that could only come from genuine loss.

Elegies help with the grieving process by having the author walk through those stages with the content. Michael D. Hurley and Michael O'Neill write in their book titled, *Poetic Form: An Introduction*, that "Conventions available to the English elegist include: a pastoral context; the myth of vegetation deity...; repetition and refrain; reiterated questions; the outbreak of vengeful anger and cursing; the procession of mourners; and the traditional images of resurrection" (101). Among that list includes multiple stages of the grieving process, except acceptance. Once acceptance has been made, the initial emotion that follows loss is no longer there to help create the poetry. While one may still be saddened by someone's passing, the melancholia that stems from the lack of understanding in the present moment is gone and cannot come back unless another subject had died. Elegies are how some writers move from grief to acceptance.

The content of poetry is the last and final step to the success of the elegy. Elegies are biased. They are created out of memories and individualized interpretations of one's life. Therefore, the content of an elegy used to focus on the fantastical, mythological, and dream-like world, however, that isn't necessarily the case anymore. The elegy will not always represent the world, but a better version, because in this better version, the person who had passed is still alive. In elegies, the subjects typically are symbolized by Gods and goddess, animals, or even plants and other aspects of the natural world. Their attributes are compared to other beings through metaphors and similes to show the reader what kind of person the writer thought the dead was before they passed. It is persuasive poetry, meant to convince the reader that the subject was the type of person described in the poem, even other perspectives say otherwise.

There is a beginning to the picture of what an elegy is. First, there must be legitimate emotion stemming from loss in order to set the mood and tone to parallel the content, this loss could be fictional or eventual. The elegy does not have a set form, it can be long, short, metered, free, and still be considered a valid elegy. Then finally, we have the base foundation as to the content of the elegy. Most elegies are recollections and descriptions of the subject in a way that feels genuine to the writer, but overall might not be so. This form of poetry is quite flexible, but when we hear the word, we all have the same idea as to what it is. We think of death, and with that follows depression and heartbreak, enough to pour out one's vulnerable side in words and label it as tribute.

AFFECT AND TRAUMA THEORY

People rely on communication to connect with one another, and when communication is not possible, what are we left with? Death is, believed to be, an impenetrable barrier where that failure creates a misconnection during high times of emotion. The living and the dead suffer from silence, leaving one unable to come to an understanding of the trauma that separated them. They are left alone where they have difficulty establishing an understanding with another person, relating to one another, and coming to terms with someone who has experienced the exact same situation. The living ends up speaking in name of the dead for their own gain and stability, especially within death literature. Without the dead to put in their own two cents, the living has the opportunity to manipulate language and emotions to distort history to comfort themselves, although, they are unknowingly doing so. This allows for complex emotions to become manipulated within an individual to feel a desired emotion. In this sense, language is dangerous and should be used for a more objective truth if it is going to be used as a dedication or remembrance.

The living and the dead are condemned to muteness with one another. Language is what humans rely on to comprehend what happens in life, and when the other person, or people, who experienced the same separation are unable to communicate with one another, language ceases to help. Therefore, people use their language to glorify the dead, to help themselves feel better about the life they lost and make sense of their grieving. This is where the epitaphs and elegies are born. Grievers use these mediums to, in a sense, talk through their pain. They imagine the person who has passed, what they did every morning, how they relaxed after work, how they made the living laugh, and the writer compiles a new world for this person. The living person uses their language ability and their memories to describe the dead, regardless of how the dead,

or other living people, would describe them. Although the elegist is using facts based on memory, their memory is being distorted by their emotions.

Language manipulates reality. When people write elegies and epitaphs, they are using a subjective lens that they alone were exposed to, not necessarily a well-rounded view of the deceased. We take the words of elegies as absolute truth and don't question the intentions of epitaphs created by loved ones. Our individual histories are distorted by our inherent subjectiveness. Therefore, the language we use to write death literature, in turn, morphs history into our ideal past. We begin to ignore the awful truths and baggage that follow everyone around and highlight what makes us sentimental. Our emotions stir from our trauma regarding the death of a loved one and abuses our language to help grieve.

Paul De Man states in his "Autobiography as Defacement," "Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of morality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores," (de Man 930). Death is a barrier that limits language. There is no back and forth between the living and the dead that is recognizable as verbal/bodily language. When we try to bring someone back to life through death literature, we are recreating their life and their death at the same time. Through reimagining the dead, their physical self that existed in the past is killed twice, as the language being used by the living mutes who the deceased was. The lens the living is remembering through is but one of multiple that have experienced the dead's persona, meaning their interpretation will not be entirely accurate. This, essentially, is mimicking the death of the person all over again, because their whole self is not being portrayed through the language of the living. The dead do not have a say in the writing and is solely reliant on the writer's ability to be objective, but they cannot be so due to the trauma of being left.

Once someone dies, that trauma, figurative or literal scars that appear after extremely stressful and/or disturbing experiences and situations, sticks to the ones left behind, altering their view of the deceased. If the dead were to come back to life, the act of mourning was already in effect, making it nearly impossible for life to continue on the same course as before the person had died. The living and their relationship to the person had lost momentum, which could never be gained back, just as a player with a video game. When the character dies, the player has to restart somehow, in another area, back at the beginning, etc. which creates a complete disconnect from the mentality of the player had before the character died. The player, now affected by the trauma of their character dying, would then start to feel a mixture of emotions; frustration, anger, sadness, which impedes their ability to play the same as if their character had not died the previous moment. This will cause the player to make mistakes, making it more likely that the character will die again while trying to avoid the cause of death from the first time. Having someone die in life affects our understanding and mentality of the area around us and our own memories. It is not the act of dying and the loss itself, but the trauma in which dying and loss create that generate the elegy and epitaph mode.

These types of trauma explicitly stem from our memories of the dead. We remember all of the positive times we shared with them, and those memories are what create the deepened sadness and depressed state that generate death literature. Our memories are powerful tools that manipulate our emotions towards the dead because we have a hard time thinking about the awful parts of relationships between us, our memories are distorted. After the initial moment, the memories we have are fragmented and altered recounts similar to that of our understanding of people. We believe what we want to believe. When we are only reliving the good times, the language that is produced from them are false in a sense. Our minds are passively denying the

negative sides to the dead, recreating them in our own minds, which then transfer into our language and written works. This is how death literature is formed under our own traumas.

Trauma plays an important role in the emotional state of the death literature writer. Cathy Caruth in her book, *Unclaimed Experience*, writes that we are never truly conscious during traumatic events; it is our memories that allow us to experience our trauma, “The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (Caruth 187). Our memories hold the power of the trauma within ourselves. Without the memories of the events that trigger the trauma, it would simply cease to exist. Trauma cannot be determined unless there are “overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events” which can be remembered, (Caruth 181). However, when our emotions are high jacking our memories, our writings about our traumas become skewed.

Although the events did happen, De Man notes that our written work of the past created a false memory. If we do not experience the trauma until after the fact, the events after could alter our perception of said event. Similar to a young child who falls. If the parent says, “You’re okay,” the child is more inclined to realize the fall didn’t hurt them, and they could get back up and continue playing. But, if the parent becomes frantic and begins to persistently ask “Are you okay? Are you okay?” the child senses that something is wrong. After a moment of figuring out what is happening, the child takes the parent’s franticness as a clue that they are hurt and begin to cry, even if they aren’t hurt. When death occurs, people constantly give their condolences, lengthening the trauma. By expanding those emotions, people are being forced to live in that mentality, because it is constantly surrounding them.

When people are surrounded by others who are assuming one's emotions, or are pressing with theirs, it can cause an assimilation, or transmission, of those emotions. Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect* is a theory about how emotions, or affects, can be passed from one individual to another. Affects differ from the notion of "feelings" in that affects have physical properties. While feelings are powerful, affects take on different roles within the body and mind that essentially create a new lens the person is seeing the world through. The difference Brennan defines is; "What I feel with and what I feel are distinct" (Brennan 5). For example, an affect is feeling *out* of a particular mindset, such as anger. Anger is then a root which drives the person. While feelings are more passive, such as the generic, "I feel sad," that do not necessarily drive any action or emotions, but just simply is. With such strong emotions like affects, their chemical and physical compounds can alter through other people without any sort of direct action. Our emotions are susceptible to being passed on and received by other people.

The most common example of such transmission is seen throughout different fandoms of popular television shows, games, novels, and films. People become connected with their favorite characters and will also have genuine hatred for despised ones. When death happens to these types of characters, the writers and creators of such worlds purposefully manipulate character development, forcing the audience to react in specific ways. The most beloved characters will have audiences actively grieving despite the loss not physically happening to them. The strong emotions coming from the actors/language is what helps in the transmission of these affects. The same phenomenon occurs with hated characters such as Geoffrey from *Game of Thrones*, the majority of the audience experienced uplifting and excited emotions when he died.

This does not mean that our emotions are invalid, but simply that they can be manipulated by outside forces. The trauma doesn't have to happen to a person directly but can

cause enough shock in another person to affect others around them after the fact. When a character dies, the trauma is transmitted from the other characters to the viewer, even if the viewer never had an intimate or personal relationship with the character who died. Emotions are complex, but evidently powerful to understanding human consciousness.

When it comes to the modern use of the elegiac form, and the epitaph fading into the background, Diana Fuss challenges what she believes to be the current fad. She quotes in her book, *Dying Modern*, “the modern elegist tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen the wounds of loss,” which she argues we are never past consolation (Fuss 4). Her argument that the modern elegy hinders rather than helps the healing process is a different approach to our traumas. Although we are reliving our traumas, it could be healing to face them head on rather than run away from them. The writer is imagining a space where the deceased still roam the world, creating a sense of security within their own minds. Through their writings, the writer will come to terms and acceptance of the dead, as the elegy requires such acknowledgement. Remembering the dead and clinging to a life are two separate concepts.

She writes that the mere fact there is no consolation *is* consolation. She has defined the new consolation as being melancholia, or a severe sadness or state of mind after constant depression and trauma induced fears. This state of emotional being is one result of a traumatic experience and is an affect rather than a feeling. Melancholia is a state of mind in which people experience the world around them. Within this state, affects such as sadness and anger form.

When death occurs, melancholia is one of the first affects to set in, stemming from memories which could never be re-lived. This is how the trauma affects the writers of such literature. The elegy does not come from a feeling of “sadness” but, in fact, comes from a

depressed state of mind, which is eased, and fed, by memories. The memories recreate the trauma of loss and separation, but also provide a safe space to reminisce about the life once lived. Therefore, the memories they begin to recall come from the emotional state they are in. If the person is suffering from the loss, their memories will be positive ones, forcing them to miss the relationship they had with the dead. If the person is joyful of the separation, then the memories will be more negative, reinforcing their opinions. Either way, their memories are skewed from the overall personality of the deceased. Their memories affect their emotions which, in turn, reflect how the dead will be portrayed in their elegy or epitaph. Therefore, elegies do not necessarily have to glorify the dead if the relationship did not warrant so.

If writers can help their newly found and overwhelming emotions by writing poetics such as elegies, (and epitaphs) why is it considered unethical? It is because of the amount of respect necessary for the dead. When respect for the dead comes into question, Fuss asks the biggest question in writing; who is the elegy (and epitaph) for?

In order for elegies to meet their purpose, they have to, on some level, disrespect the dead. Death literature writers have an ethical duty to tell the truth, but what is the truth? With our emotions being controlled by outside individuals, those emotions creating the memories in our brains, and those memories coming to life on page, the truth ends up being muddled within. The modern death literary scholar will write what they believe is *their* truth, regardless of contradicting past experiences. Respecting the dead is a curse placed on our culture inhibiting us from telling the truth. We must never speak ill of the dead, even if it is the truth. Therefore, elegies have become “fantastical fiction” (3). This doesn’t have to be reality. Once writers are able to separate themselves from this notion that telling the truth is disrespectful, only then can

death literature become more recognizable. As of now, the modern elegy is forcing itself to be subjective, when it doesn't have to be. This is where Fuss differs.

When asking the question, "who is the elegy for?" my answer is this; why does it need to be *for* anyone? My argument is that elegies can be written for the author as a coping mechanism, for the subject as a final dedication, or even for the community as a last remembrance. With such a twister of complex emotions being manipulated and thrown about within one's consciousness while also being mixed with our demonization of how we talk about the dead, there cannot be one way of handling it. Elegies cannot and should not be predicted.

Death literature is a form that isn't often recognized in popular culture, although we are obsessed with death. The unethical dilemma that arises from such writings are the way they are being written. With prosopopoeia in full swing, the dead come back to life, but not in their original forms. Instead, the subject is being sculpted and recreated as to what the writer idealizes them as. Within their grief, they cannot bring themselves to truly say how someone affected their life, or how they truly acted. It is ingrained into our minds that we must never voice negativity about the dead, especially if we loved them. The idea here is to not create poetry out of spite or negative emotions, but to truthfully capture the essence of the life lost. The living is doing no justice by recreating the dead, because, we are then saying that our mental creations are more favorable than the complete life that was lost. Which seems more disrespectful?

WHAT WAS BEFORE

Death literature has come in multiple shapes and sizes since the father of the Greek pastoral elegy, Theocritus. A close reading through a transhistorical lens of three prevalent works in the field, reveals just how little we truly know the elegiac form. It begins with Theocritus and the birth of the pastoral mode that greatly influenced what the elegy would later become.

Although this thesis discusses not only elegies, but also epitaphs, the two are not necessarily different embodiments of death literature. In the beginning, the two were often connected, making the elegy and the epitaph almost one in the same, but also radically different.

Chronologically, this section will be looking at Theocritus' (mid-third century BC) *Idylls*, then transition into John Milton's "Lycidas," and finally ending with Percy Shelley's "Adonais," showing just how the elegy and epitaph have evolved over time and should be allowed to continuously do so with newer situations and traumas affecting people in the modern age.

To dig into what an elegy is in practice, and what it "should" look like, the pastoral mode first needs to be addressed. It is within the pastoral mode that Milton first begins to create his famous elegy, "Lycidas," which in turn inspired Shelley. The pastoral is the entire framework for which Theocritus is not only known, but what *Idylls* is entirely written. This style typically has four important characteristics: music, the image of the shepherd, a sense of blaming, and a fantasy world, that are adopted within death literature, especially for Milton and Shelley.

However, these are not the only characteristics that need to be addressed within the form. The emotions that come from loss have often times been overlooked but are in fact the beating heart of what the elegy is. These are the four characteristics that this thesis will closely look at in respects to each text, and conclude that, even though it began at the pastoral, that does not mean

that is how it should continue in the future. There are other elements, such as the emotions, that also define written works as elegies.

Music was an important part of the elegy before its written form. When a person had passed, an oral elegy would be presented that would often be accompanied by music played on a wind instrument. In Theocritus' "Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis," Thyrsis mourns the loss of Daphnis with a song from the Muses, "*Begin, my Muses, begin the herdsmen's song,*" (64). A majority of the poem is Thyrsis' song which follows the "standard" guidelines of an elegy, making it safe to say that Thyrsis' song is an elegy. This particular song starts the bridge between the written and the oral traditions of elegies, by having it take the role of a song, but in a written work. With a musical presence, Theocritus was paying respects to the classical medium of the elegy, while transitioning into the future of the work.

"Lycidas" does not contain a musical number, similar to that of "Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis," but does, however, contain the element of music as a dedication or tribute to the passing of Lycidas, "Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew/ Himself to sing and build the lofty rhyme" (10-11). The speaker beckons the characters within the poem to sing for Lycidas, just as he had done for the world. Then, throughout the rest of the poem, there are instances of a flute, as well as nod to the song Thyrsis sang for Daphnis, which Damoetas, a fellow shepherd, would long to hear. The use of music does not take a vocal shape, where singing is part of the poem, but the music is referenced to, making it just enough to satisfy the pastoral mode. Already, there is a shift in the evolution of the elegy, and it continues to shift through Shelley.

Percy Shelley's "Adonais" is an elegiac poem on the death of the poet, John Keats. The references to music fade more within this poem and makes minute appearances throughout, "Oh, weep for Adonais! The quick Dreams, / The passion-winged Ministers of thought, / Who were

his flocks, whom near the living streams/ Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught/ The love which was his music..." (IX 1-5). In this section of the poem, the music is referred to as a passion of the dead's, not as an action being made in honor of that person. The music, at this point, is being mentioned irregularly and does not hold as much of a weight as it did with Theocritus. While music is still present, the pastoral style has already faded. This branches the elegy away from the pastoral and giving it over to the next popular and credited style.

Secondly, the characterization of the shepherd is, historically, a pastoral attribute. This imagery is an interesting one in which that the shepherd could indeed be seen as either the living or the deceased and could influence the interpretation of the relationship between the two. After Milton, the shepherd was seen as the deceased, making the living part of the flock, but Theocritus created a world where the living was the shepherd, and the dead was not part of the flock, but a cowherd, creating a community where which the living and the dead were on the same level. By eliminating a potential hierarchy, the elegy is a more reliable account for the life of the deceased, unlike elegies which create the imaginary dichotomy where the dead is somehow raised to higher level, which follows the behavioral pattern in the modern day. When someone dies, it is appropriate, as well as expected, to only talk positively about their lives, and simply not mention the negative. When this happens, the person is generated in a higher position than where they were before their death, because their negative influences are never recognized again. While the role of the shepherd follows Milton, the role and its meaning are evidently changed.

Milton had a different use of the shepherd imagery for Lycidas. The speaker characterizes himself as a shepherd and does so with Lycidas. Creating a balanced relationship between the living and the dead. Although, Milton uses the role as a symbol for the life of the dead, while

Theocritus uses it as a literal role. Milton takes the imagery of the Shepherd a step further and discusses the future without the shepherd, “The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed, / But swoll’n with wind and the rank mist they draw, / Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread; besides what the grim wolf with privy paw/ Daily devours apace, and nothing said,” (125-129). This raises the status of Lycidas in a way that life begins to decay without him, highlighting his importance. His role as a shepherd is vital because lives depend on him and fall prey when he is gone. Milton effectively re-creates Lycidas using a more Christian-based view of the shepherd. Similar to Jesus Christ, the shepherd is an important figure that helps give, maintain, and live life. A person cannot reach much higher than the son of God, turning Lycidas into re-creation where only the speaker’s interpretation is imagined.

The image of the shepherd fades drastically when time reaches Shelley’s “Adonais.” Not only is the character referenced as “the herdsmen,” this character isn’t that of Adonais. The dead is not seen as the shepherd, but, the poem revolves around how nature is affected by the death, “Grief made the young Spring wild, and she threw down/ Her kindling buds, as if she Autumn were, / Or they dead leaves; since her delight is flown, / For whom should she had wak’d the sullen year?” (XVI 1-4). Just as the flock dies with the shepherd, nature begins to fail after the death of Adonais. Although the actual shepherd is not present in the same way as Milton and Theocritus, the same principle is being applied. This further disconnects the elegy from the pastoral, showing its evolutionary traits as it comes into the modern age.

After the death of a loved one, people will find aspects to blame for this occurrence. This blaming implies that there was an outside force responsible for a natural stage in the circle of life. When the living suffers through loss, the mind has an easier time pinning the responsibility on a root cause rather than accepting the loss as it is. This aspect is clearly present in all three

works, Theocritus, Milton, and Shelley. For Theocritus, Nymphs are the source of blame, “Where were you Nymphs, when Daphnis wasted away, Where were you? In the lovely dales of Peneus and Pindus? You were surely not by Anapus broad stream, nor the peak of Etna, nor frequenting the sacred waters of Acis” (66-69). Deep inside human rationale, it would only make sense to the living if someone or something else was responsible for the death of a loved one. This is easier to manage than admitting that a dead loved one may have wanted to die without any sort of persuasive influence or was naturally at that stage in their lifespan. Of course, with a blaming component, comes an acknowledgement that someone has died. Even though there are recreating aspects, such as representing the dead in a second life or imagining a life in heaven, the initial awareness of the passing has to be stated. Theocritus does this in the following way, “No more will Daphnis the cowherd Haunt your thickets, woods and groves” (116-117). Both are highly important parts of death literature, someone must die in order to it be remotely considered as a contribution to the subject. Normally, blaming the death of someone is seen as a negative, who would want to be responsible for the death of another life? However, death, if for the good of the community, kingdom, or world, could be spun in a positive light making the “blame” turn in to credit.

Blaming is far more prevalent within “Lycidas,” and more similar to Theocritus than the last two themes. The Nymphs come back in Milton’s poem as the responsible party for the death of Lycidas, “Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep/ Clos’d o’er the head of your lov’d Lycidas? / For neither were ye playing on the steep/ Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie/ Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high, / Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream,” (50-55). Just as Thyrsis sang, the speaker points out where the Nymphs were not, assuming that if they had been in any of those places, the death could have been stopped. This

gives more sympathy to the speaker because it indicates that there was an attempt to find the Nymphs, thereby making the speaker less guilty. Even if the speaker were not the cause of Lycidas' death, there is still an element of guilt that hangs on the living, commonly referred to as "survivor's guilt." When one dies, the living will suffer from Although misplaced, the guilt makes it necessary for a blaming aspect to be present in death, regardless whether the elegy is in the pastoral fashion.

Adonais jumps right to the point of blaming within the second stanza, "Where were thou, mighty Mother when he lay, / When thy Son lay, pierc'd by the shaft which flies/ In darkness? where was lorn Urania/ when Adonais died? With veiled eyes, / 'Mid listening Echoes, in her paradise" (II 1-5). The speaker has a more pessimistic tone than the previous poems. They are actively blaming other forces for the death of Adonais, while the last two were passively blaming. In the passive sense, the last two poems indicate that the presence of the Nymphs would have prevented the death, while the absence of the Mother figure and Urania were the legitimate cause. This brings about a whole new emotional playing field within the elegy. After the initial acknowledgement of the death, the speaker becomes aggressive, playing into the more modern stages of grieving, which includes anger. Again, the transformation of the elegy into the modern day is seen within the structures. Although the three poems contain similar elements, the style of the genre has changes drastically, redefining the elegy.

A creation of a fantasy world is significant in elegies. This fantasy world could be almost any fictional society or natural world in which the deceased once lived or is now "living." Such example are, but are not limited to; talking animals, Greek mythology characters, and/or the image of heaven. Within Theocritus, the song Thyrsis sings lamenting for Daphnis is centered in the Greek mythological world where the Gods and Goddesses had a role to play in Daphnis' life.

The culture surrounding not only Theocritus, but Thyrsis, generated the world where these figures were actively involved in human mortal life. This draws away any responsibility and helps with the blaming of anyone/anything and is hard to refute. It also creates a comfort zone, knowing that it was completely out of the living's hands to stop what is a natural part of life. It becomes the best of both worlds where it is not only not the living's fault, but there was also nothing they could do about it, making it easier to sleep at night, because their loved one is "alive" somewhere.

Milton uses Greek mythology within his poem, not too far off from that of Theocritus, which creates a connection and progression within the elegiac mode. The Muses and Nymphs play similar roles as they did in "Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis," but also highlights some characters that fall into Greek mythology, such as a suspiciously close friend, Damoetas. However, along with the use of Greek myths, Milton adds in multiple images of nature, possibly playing into a combination of heaven and the realm of the Gods and Goddesses. Before Shelley, the bridge is there that connects a sacred space to that of the natural world. The natural world mourns the passing of Lycidas, "And daffadillies fill their cups with tears, / To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies" as he reincarnates into another, "So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high/ Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves;/ Where, other groves and other streams along, / With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves, / And hears the unexpressive nuptial song" (150-151/172-176). As the elegy progresses, the Greek fades away, giving more light to the natural world as the fantasy realm.

Shelley's use of the natural world repels the Greek myth but keeps the same personas. The speaker quite often mentions and personifies Death and other natural parts of the world, although the traditional names are taken away, aside from one mention of Apollo. The same

mechanics are working with this theme as it did with the image of the shepherd. Recreation has become the bigger picture than that of the natural/God imagery. The point of each was to show that the dead are indeed alive somewhere, just not in reality. In Adonais, the speaker acknowledges this idea right out, and says, “He lives, he wakes... He is made one with Nature; there is heard/ His voice in all the music, from the moan/ Of thunder, to the song of night’s sweet bird;/ He is a presence to be felt and known/ In darkness and in light, from herb and stone” (XLI 1/ XLII 1-5). The dead are not always dead, but are rather alive in another sense, one which humanity cannot see. Just because you can’t see it, doesn’t mean it isn’t there.

After analyzing the traditional aspects of the elegy, the most underrated feature of the form must be addressed, emotionality. Without emotions, poetry would cease to exist. So, why are they not given the credit from literary scholars who attempt to define such forms as elegies? For elegies to be written, loss needs to occur, and with loss follows the impact of deeply rooted negative affects. Such states of being should not go unnoticed, as they are what fuel the creations discussed. Theocritus, Milton, and Shelley demonstrate the power of loss has on our emotions through their elegies. Emotions must be considered as a significant asset to the form.

Within *Idylls*, Theocritus uses specific language to convey the attitudes towards the death of Daphnis from Thyrsis’ point of view. During his lament, Thyrsis sings of how “Even the lion in the woods lamented your passing” (72). The natural world mourns for the loss of life, mimicking the grief of the living soul. By having the emotions and the speaker separated, there is a sense of denial hidden within the work, further reflecting the different grieving stages. The loss happened to the natural world rather than to the speaker, disconnecting themselves from the suffering altogether. With countless imageries of the world surrounding Thyrsis suffering from the loss of Daphnis, how could such an element go unrecognized? Even if the presence of

emotion comes across as inevitable, the type of sorrow being described is essential to the elegiac form. Theocritus' use of the natural world in mourning provides context to the melancholic expressions that often follow death, and more specifically, that emotions surrounding death are not necessarily negative.

When it comes to Milton's "Lycidas," the emotion lies within the tone of the work. In the first stanza, Milton writes, "Bitter constraints and sad occasion dear/ Compels me to disturb your season due;/ For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, / Young Lycidas, hath not left his peer" (6-9). The way in which the speaker pronounces the death of Lycidas gives a sense of dread and melancholy. This severe depression brought on by the death is conveyed in the language used by the speaker to formulate the world around him after suffering loss. Although the poem does not directly state the emotionality of the speaker, the way in which the imagery of a world without Lycidas is conveyed tells all. The description of the decaying season replicates the act of dying on the natural level, mixing acceptance with grief. However, it is the language that is the most important quality to analyze. The reader's only understanding of Lycidas comes from Milton's language, skewing any opinions generated of the life lost. With such diction geared towards a negative reflection of the loss of Lycidas, the reader has no choice but to interpret that his life lost is surrounded by sadness. This is eerily similar to what is seen in Theocritus, as the act of loss through death is deemed to be depressing.

The emotionality within Shelley's "Adonais" again reflects the same attitude as Milton and Theocritus, however, the language does not allude to specific feelings, but rather explicitly states them, "I weep for Adonais - he is dead! / Oh, weep for Adonais through our tears" (I 1-2). This language is far more direct than that of Milton and Theocritus, showing the evolution of how death affects people differently. Although the same type of dread in being articulated, the

way in which the speaker acknowledges their emotional state is radically different, ranging from Theocritus' separation between speaker and sorrow, to Shelley's declaration of grief.

Shelley's use of emotional language causes the reader to experience a more critical transmission of affect demonstrated by Brennan. The more aggressive and persuasive the language, the easier a time the reader has to assimilating to the same affects, which determines the success of the poem. Over the course of time, the depressive state of the speaker shines through the language being used in poems in different ways. With such commonalities within emotions coming from all three poets, how is it that this is not considered as part of the form? Literary scholars assume that emotion would be part of the process involved in the creation of works, but do not consider it to be a formal part of the structure. Without the emotions that death brings, elegies could not exist.

All four conditions create the environment that has morphed death literature over time. What stays consistently the same is the use of the epitaph. If the last two lines are separated from Thyrsis' song, "Lycidas," and "Adonais," an epitaph for tis made clear. The closing lines represent the final words the speaker has for the dead and encompasses their interpretation of that life. Thyrsis' finishes his song with, "Daphnis came to the river, and the waters closed above the man/ Whom the Muses loved, and whom the Nymphs did not reject" (139-141). This is ultimately how Thyrsis perceived Daphnis, as a lover of the Muses and a friend of the Nymphs. Thus, recreating the spirit of Daphnis by using a fantasy element to raise his status in the physical world. For Milton, the last two lines are; "At last he rose, and twitch'd his mantle blue: To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new" (192-193). This is a different type of re-creation that Milton wrote. In this sense, Lycidas has transcended the barrier between the living and the dead, and is now "alive," in a new setting. He is no longer part of the speaker's world, but is

instead, alive in another realm where the world is beautiful. He has already died, and could not die again, making the new world he is “living” in a fantasy in which he will always be there, and will be happy in this environment. The epitaph gives hope to readers, while wishing a pleasant future for the departed soul. Last, but surely not least, Shelley’s “Adonais,” finishes the poem with; “The soul of Adonais, like a star, / Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are” (LV 8-9). Shelley plays close to what Milton was portraying in “Lycidas.” Adonais, or John Keats, is no longer part of the physical world, but his soul is still present. Shelley puts him in a heaven-like realm up above the stars and re-creates the soul to be as bright as the stars in the night sky. This is, again, placing the dead on a higher pedestal, both figuratively and literally, and giving them praise. This is not to mean that John Keats, the subject of the poem, does not deserve this praise, but unless negative characteristics are ever shown, the only direction he can go is up, creating an idealized version of who the living truly was. Each epitaph has done just this. The act of re-creating is used to benefit the image of the dead and retain hope into the readers that they may never be seen by us again, but they are most certainly not gone.

The elegiac form is neither consistent nor concrete; however, there are aspects that remain similar or connected. These elements are not the definition of elegies, but in fact are a map that show where they have been and where they are going. The major components for the elegiac form are the emotions that stem from death and separation. Through these complex emotions, memories create the language used to establish a medium where their interpretations of these traumas can come to fruition. Though most elegies come from a more negative mindset, they can also come from positive affects that appear after the death of a person who had damaging qualities. The next section is my demonstration of how the elegy is written today. In my poetics I attempt to captivate the emotionality that comes from fictional deaths within

popular genres of television shows, film, and gaming. All subjects belong to a fandom I care deeply about, such as “The Legend of Zelda” series, “Star Wars,” and *Game of Thrones*. I have decided to use ending couplets as connected epitaphs to capture the essence of each life lost. The following poems are examples of just how the elegy and epitaph are changing in the modern day as trauma affects our connections with fictional characters and are meant to make us reconsider how we cope with separation and muteness.

DEFYING HISTORY

Link, Hero of Time

Like a silent princess, he lives in the grass, waiting.
Waiting for the rays of cascading sunlight
As the fairies bless his safety in the battles to come.
He tiptoes across the mountain ranges and rides his amber steed.
In vast lands with no rock nor leaf left untouched by little seeds
Who dance and sing when hide and seek was won.
His armor shields from every blast, every stab,
As he points his sword to the sky above, praising his goddesses.
He looks about the endless world from the grass,
Inspecting all creatures, good and evil, sitting, waiting, being,
While the wolves run, braiding the trees to conceal themselves.
He kneels to the soil, picking healing plants that turn
Towards the broken castle grounds where purple clouds mist
The cursed spirits of soldiers once loyal for a century.
Too long they had waited, too long they had suffered
The abuse towards his light, flicker, flicker, gone,
Helping the paralysis, darkness, chaos.
100 years they wished for the gleam of his sword,
Which tangles in the lost trees, far away.
His protective gaze now through the ancients
Trapped in mechanical bodies of former allies
Reminiscing of the times before the walls fell,
Where the royals once stood, beautiful and tall.
And through their gaze they see where she still lies
Hoping, waiting, for his return that will not come,
Shackled to 100 years of memories, rotting.
But no anger can come, peace found in loss.

The hero of time now dances with fairies and wolves,
Dressed in nature's green, far from the blood-soaked moon.

House Stark

The wolf fights with white fanged teeth,
Keeps his sharpened stance.
The pack follows sunlight
Flickering off the snowy path.

He leads his pack past abandoned
Homes where we would be king
If not for Golden Boy's savage slaying.
Ripping apart his family ties.

Allies in the animal world cried
Through bleeding hearted screams.
They witnessed his blood seep
Into the kingdom's cracks and collapsed.

His final howl, the day honor died.
His young hope for his return,
Until they too were silenced
By the lion cub's cruelty.

Now, his pups step in paw
Pockets of snow, fatherhood fulfilled.
They outgrow his shadow
Fading into grey snow.

The hunter will be hunted, that is law,
Betrayal is survival.

Donnie Darko

There is no space that he calls home.
His life a curse upon the natural world,
Where chaos rains airplane propellers,
And tubes of unclaimed memories trace what should have been.
To live means to die, living on expired time.
The grim reaper mocks his nightmares,
Counting down to World's end.
He makes no sense of Donnie's footsteps
Creeping along the town creating off put feelings.
What does it mean to not belong?
His death, a reminder that we have no choice.
Now, his crushed limbs sleep soundly
As the anguished cries of his family
Fix the world around you and me.
We live on time that is not ours.

Why are we dressed in suits of flesh,
When the anti-Christ preaches in fine silk.

The Elegy of Annabel Lee

Somewhere, in a land far, far away,
Lies the dear Annabel Lee.
Her body rotting and fading
In her tomb by the side of the sea.
The world moving on without her,
But one man, peculiar was he.

Watched her from outside the window,
Obsessed with Annabel Lee.
He wrote to her, day in and day out,
No one as fixated as he.
He thought she was his child love,
Drawn to her plot by the sea.

She was so carefree and full of life,
Before her place by the sea,
She was the perfect household wife,
The purest, Annabel Lee.
Alas, she was taken from us to soon,
By no one other than he.

This solitary tomb of hers, safe by the sea,
Was the only escape ever had, for the dear Annabel Lee.

Han Solo

He explored the dark corners of the sky.
Flew faster than justice could catch.
First shooter in every battle,
The rebel amongst rebels.

So he thought for years.
Until fatherhood cut him down
And suffocated light from his eyes.
The unexpected, sudden, thrust.

Loyalty had sat by his side,
Through every mission.
He howled with grief
When Han fell from the platform.

His roar broke into your heart,
Squeezed your lungs,
Until you coughed up moans
And tears filled your palms.

Betrayed by the dark side,
His faith stayed firm and true.
Hoping for the redemption
Of his murderous son.

Known across galaxies for stealing the hearts of princesses,
And making the Kessel Run.

The Champion's Ballad

Champions of the sacred light,
Spirits of forgotten history,
Channel energy deep within
To guard the awakened hero.

Mipha

Her ruby skin shimmered in Zora's Domain.
Every flip of her tail embodied the
Ancient lore of skillful swimmers
Weaving through dark, chaotic waters.

The touch of her fingertips
Cured wounds down to bone
While her soft, melodic voice
Reassured your safety.

When she opened her palms
To fill you with healing light,
Her gaze would hush your panicked
Mind, and ease your tired sight.

The day she died inside of Ruta,
Her ancient beast of burden,
Haunts your thoughts with floods
From the murderous water demon.

You see her reflection in rippled waters
Her shy smile breaks your heart in two
Underneath the silver stitched armor
That protects when she's gone.

For she stands atop the mountain
And breathes life within your chest.

Champions of the sacred light,
Spirits of forgotten history,
Channel energy deep within
To guard the awakened hero.

Daruk

His fists, the size of boulders,
Cracked skulls of fiendish lizards
And broke the bones of senseless pigs
To protect along the lava-side.

His greyed hair flowed with singed tips
From the sunshine embers
That whisked across the mountain
Where his village bathed in heat.

He stood in front of every blast
Shielded you with hardened barriers
While his thunderous chuckle
Buckled the ground beneath your feet.

He was buried beneath volcanic comets,
Hanging on the ridged spine of his beast.
Friends and family bellow below
From the loss of their leader.

You felt your strength dwindle
When his back broke, and smile cracked.
He pumped his fist one final time,
In the name of courage and wisdom.

From the fire pits of Death Mountain,
He forever guards you.

Champions of the sacred light,
Spirits of forgotten history,
Channel energy deep within
To guard the awakened hero.

Revali

His wings spread across the valleys
Below his self-centered stare.
Blue and purple feathers ruffled
With confidence fed his ego.

His sarcastic nature shadowed
The success of others.
No one could fly higher
And raise the bar of victory.

The gust from each flap
Swirls around you, lifts you,
Throwing your body into the sky
Where your true aim marks.

When the wind turned against him,

Divine wings did not shelter him,
And he struggled in every push
Of his war-torn wings.

He would laugh and approve
Of the tugging of your heart
After seeing him fall from the sky,
Screams lost beneath the winds.

Postured, and looking down
He judges heroism.

Champions of the sacred light,
Spirits of forgotten history,
Channel energy deep within
To guard the awakened hero.

Urbosa

Her hips swayed with lightning strikes,
Paralyzed masked warriors
hidden beneath the dusty
And never-ending sand dunes.

Skills unmatched by any creature,
She fought with trained force.
Leader of the toughest women,
Most intelligent fighter.

Every time you push your limits,
She stands behind you,
Generating electric thrashing
Alongside the gleam of your sword.

On the day darkness snuffed her,
She clawed until her spirit fainted.
Promises to an old friend
Left unfinished for you to bear.

The women wail under the moonlight
Deep in the frozen desert,
As you collapse within the woods,
Hugging in agonizing defeat.

She strikes from her peak,
Loyal only to her princess.

Champions of the sacred light,
Spirits of forgotten history,
Channel energy deep within
To guard the awakened hero.

Immortal

Bravery was scarce in his strange little family
Who lived deep in the emerald hills.
Selfish creatures drove him into the forest
And through the thunderous mountains.
He solved the riddles of the caves,
And escaped the jaws of greed,
To find himself in the immortal arms of beauty
That lived high above glistening waterfalls and
Were secretly lost between the wise, old, trees.
He bid farewell with time catching up on
Overdue wrinkles and mobility constraints.
Aboard a golden boat, he floated far beyond reach,
Where immortality is whispered in the ears of elders.
His new family, thankful of his sacrifice,
Forced their tears to melt into their warmed hearts
Full of compassion their little thief.

There and back he went again,
On the most unexpected journey.

Golden Boy

The lion cub prowls for his next victim.
His mother does the hunting, as he kills
For the pleasant thrill of drawn blood.
He bites the necks of wild dogs,
Severing their heads from the pack.
Snapping the limbs of busy critters,
Tearing into their empty flesh.
With crimson blood smeared across his fangs,
He smiles at the strength he did not earn.

The day he drinks from the poison pool,
The kingdom shouts with joy.
His prickled fur on edge
As he convulses in the dirt, alone.
His tyrannic claws no longer digging
Into the broken-backed lives
Bowing down to the true fear that lies
Within his mother's hungry eyes.

The golden boy is greyed and buried
Without a loyal, mournsome gaze.

The Rosy Guild

Every clown paints a smile on faces
With colorful suits clinging to arms and legs,
Inescapable, tight, and unflattering.

There were two clowns chained beside
their saddened Prince with love and faith.
He smothered laughter under royal curtains,
Looking for answers in once friendly, empty skulls,
While masked from the inconvenient truths.

They pulled on their loyalty to save the Prince,
Help him escape the darkness trapped inside,
But the rope slipped through their smooth fingertips
As they waited for help from any source,
Only to push the Prince further down.

The clowns grasped on to their faded friend
As he chased the forgotten fatherly spirit.
His collar slipped from their gloves
When they journeyed to lost futures
Of beheaded laughter and betrayal.

Too often were the clowns forgotten
When they cut away the smiles.

All is Quiet Here

Where the books scream their printed words
Snuffed under hushed tones, gasped
Into ears of the doe-eyed young.
Where thin sheets speak volumes
For the knowledge of arts and science.

Where two minutes a day is all there is.

All is quiet here where she stares at notes.
Where she climbs bookcases, caressing each spine,
Knowing, loving, all there is about their wisdom.
But she is lost, stunned and silenced by flames
Where history is engulfed and shredded.

Where she lies, in the belly of the beast,
And children stare in horror as her limbs
Are torn from sockets, chewed, and swallowed.
Silence stuns the crowd, her shrieks imprinted
Into my mind as my bones rattle under my skin.

All is quiet in this place of mourning,
Where our muffled cries are ignored.

All is quiet here,
Where she is a volunteer.

Galactic Commander

A princess with no kingdom,
 Found a home within the stars,
And love amongst the rebel scum.

She flew around trees and across deserts
 Where bravery shot beams
And shouted louder than electrified droids.

Her battle cry created holes in darkness,
 With a liberating light, shining
And disturbed the blackened eyes of paternity.

She hid away under translucent ships,
 Cascaded pride, grace, and strength
In systems overwhelmed by power and greed.

Sucked out into the strangled void,
 Her eyelids frosted and frozen shut,
As her fist tightened around her last hope.

Where was her elder brother?
 Disgraced beyond the prickled sea,
Failure buried beneath his tired heart.

Where was her loving son?
 Murderous snake, deceitful eyes
Aching for grandfather's powerful grip.

Alone, she wept, reached for simple futures,
 While blood dispersed like comets,
A fleeting moment passed through breaths.

She drifts within the swirls of cosmos
 Leading freedom fighters to victory.

Master

Vague words, the teacher shares
Simple lessons stamped into the soul.
Where interpretation is free from shackles
Of rigorous self-hatred and disappointment.
The teacher shares his wisdom with thought
And drills the questions into your mind.
Where fighting yourself means victory,
And it is a small one.

The master shows his skill to demonstrate the way.
Between his wrinkled hands he holds the light
As it nestles and absorbs beneath his dry skin.
Judge him by his size, and he will pierce you.
The master fights beyond the stars, forever mindful,
Of the damage soon to follow human choices.
Where there is peace, there is violence,
And seclusion is key.

Trying does not exist in the eyes of the master,
There is only do, or do not.

Speak Friendship

He arrives when he means to
With frightening shenanigans
Following close behind
In a rugged potato sack
Overflowing with magic
That glistens and mystifies
The eyes of the young and small.

He carries his polished staff
Between his strong and wrinkled hands
And plummets to the Earth,
Illuminating unexpected courage.
His sacrifice speaks friendship
To open secret doors
That once held strength.

The wails of his followers
Echo through the cavern,
Bouncing off the crooked edges
That line his eternal resting place.
The fire demon lassos their hearts
As they collapse into the harsh snow
With spikes thrust through their hearts.

His grey plunged beneath the pits of Hell
To bring white light in the land of violence.

Hunger

What does it mean to starve?

He licks his gnarled fangs and circles his prey,
Pouncing around flying arrows
Snapping his teeth, deprived the taste of you.

Could you run? Would you fight?
A sword to his stomach
Slices you in half, bleeding into your spirit.

It pierces your soul when his paws collapse,
His body stiff, without holding on,
His eyes close, his chest slows, and music stops.

You choose life,
By permitting his death.

Locked Hearts

The holder of the key that locked each heart into place,
Hiding it away from the thieves of the night
Who cannot search under the watchful eyes of light
And bypass the lock to steal it away so it could rot and crumble.

Imagination carried him through his search of a friend
One who has lost to her unconscious and buried heart.
Fought over by the light and dark, once old friends,
When dark turned its back and stole the sacred key from light.

The holder of the key glided around worlds in search
Until his final breath expelled from his small lips
While the key was dragged away to service dark's ill-fated power
Chained into possession by jealousy and spite, it cried for its holder.

Reunion far from reach.

He was alone in the trinity, separated from home,
Hero to innocence and Gods.

Dark Side

Faithful father, with your deepened voice.
Throws lives down to flatten rebellion.
But take off the crown and breathe,
Reality chokes you like the force
You will on those beneath
Your gravity-defying cape.

Does death justify your actions?
Did love push your hatred?

When masters abandoned your skill
And the future was destroyed by
Your angry and vengeful eyes,
Your centered world buckled
And suffocated, like that of your daughter's,
And morphed, like that of your son's.

Your legacy died alongside the birth of your saviors,
In that galaxy far, far away.

CONCLUSION

The modern elegy needs to adapt with the modern times. Poetry has evolved from the strict forms of sonnets to the free form styles of today. Elegies should be allowed to be a part of the free form, not just structurally, but textually as well. The pastoral elegy had many rules to follow in order for it to be considered legitimate, but how can we legitimize the way in which people grieve or perceive other human beings. All we have is our own experiences, that is the lens in which we see and interact with those around us. Through understanding the underlying theories that connect to the reasons why elegies are written, a new addition to the modernization of elegies and epitaphs in the poetic form is being made.

First, it is important to understand just who the elegies and epitaphs are written for. Are they written for the deceased as a dedication or farewell, or are they written as some sort of benefit to the writer? Paul De Man makes it clear that writings such as the epitaph, and in this case elegies, are a recreation. The writer is using what they know about the person to create a poetic form of the dead. However, their interpretation of the person is no longer the same as it was before the person died. The trauma from the death of said person has changed the perception of the writer, whether they are conscious of it, or not. They have an understanding that this person will no longer walk the Earth in this exact physical form. With that understanding, it alters their memories to focus solely on the positive. Those positive memories are what create the upset and depressed affects that comes with loss. It is not always a reaction to the person being dead and won't make any progress in their individual life, but it is a reaction to no longer having a connection to that person. When someone dies, a connection is lost, and because of the trauma of having that loss, if the connection were somehow reinstated the relationship would no longer be the same. There would be not only the physical loss, but a loss in momentum. The

relationship between the two people were at a certain point on a timeline, and when it is suddenly interrupted and cut off with no way of clear communication and understanding from both parties, it creates a disturbance that stays with the living and is lost in the dead. As previously stated, there is a muteness in the dead, where the trauma of the loss is received by both parties, but there is a barrier preventing either side from really confronting those emotions. The elegy is an attempt at communication that is morphed by our unconscious focusing on the nostalgia of the deceased.

So, who benefits from a poem about a person from one perspective? Both parties are, in fact, helped by this. The dead figure has, what could be interpreted as, a glowing recommendation from the living, and the living gains sympathy as well as comfort, believing in the idea that they knew and were influenced by such a great person. Ultimately, however, the elegy, in the form that is currently accepted, is written for the author. It is a comfort tool used to come to terms with and understand the trauma of loss. While it is a nice thought to be glorifying the dead, since they cannot defend their own honor, a disservice is being made when the truth is not being voiced. That is the difference that determines who these types of death literature are for.

The true modern elegy and/or epitaph speaks the truth as far as the individual experience allows. Therefore, the content does not have to portray despair and the writer does not necessarily have to convey mourning. It is established in modern culture that death is perceived to be a loss that triggers mourning or depressed attitudes because of what that loss represents. However, if the person who has died did not contribute to the progress or humanity or even within their own culture in their own way, and is all-around hated, an elegy could be created that demonstrates what this loss of life represents. This proves that the elegy and epitaph have before been written for the author, but the modern forms can be written for the dead as final

proclamations that needed to be said. There is a morbid feeling about praising the death of a person, and while a loss still occurs, and emotions still rise from this loss, the emotions do not have to be negative. If a truly horrible person dies who has created a mass amount of despair, violence, or negative energy that influences the world, it can be agreed that, while no life is not precious, the loss of this life does not have to be interpreted as a tragic loss. Death literature and its definition does say a loss needs to occur, but the modernization of the form can include other complicated emotions that stem from that loss, even if they turn out to be more closely related to happiness.

The emotions surrounding death range depending on the relationship established between the living and the deceased. Mostly, people suffer from a melancholic experience that come from their re-lived trauma through their positive memories. When one does not have positive memories, the trauma of being left behind morphs into a more positive reaction towards, what can no longer be classified as loss, but, a separation. Some people experience relief, sadness, denial, and even happiness. There are multiple psychological reasons for these different reactions, so why should death literature be limited to only the negative sides of loss? Sometimes loss creates a positive impact, and those emotions are valid, which means that any poems that stem from those emotions can and should be found legitimate.

Second, it is important to acknowledge where these emotions can come from when in regard to fictional deaths. Not only can death literature be written about our human relationships, but it can also be written about those beloved fictional characters within popular culture. Understanding Teresa Brennan's theory of affect and how affects can be moved between people, it is easier to acknowledge that emotions of loss that come from fictional deaths are valid.

Although a physical person has not died, there is a grieving process that can follow the death of one's favorite character in a television series, movie, as well as their character in a video game.

Television and movie writers know how to create an emotional response from their work. They purposefully create a well-rounded character that is specifically written to be loved or hated and will write in scenes and/or experiences for those characters in order to solicit a certain response. The emotions of viewers are manipulated by the writers. This begs the question, how is this possible? How are people creating such strong connections to fictional characters they've never met or had a relationship with? It all comes down to exactly what Brennan was talking about. The viewer will get to know the characters through the lens of the show/movie and form an opinion of them through its context. So, when the favorite character of the show eventually dies, the emotions and grief coming from the characters as well as what the loss means in regard to the world within the screen, those same emotions are transmitted from this fictional setting and into our world. Although a life was not truly lost, there is a loss within the viewer. The same affect of loss is being lived.

Elegies and epitaphs are representations of emotions stemming from loss but does not specifically state that the loss has to be physical. Once a television show and or movie establishes a concrete character, viewers create this connection that feels like they are part of our lives. When the character dies, genuine loss is felt by the viewer because they are experiencing the same separation. They are coming to terms with this loss of a future for this character as well as what this fictional life represented and the future of the show without this character. What their death represents is important to what emotions are going to be felt.

The same principle can be applied to video game characters. Like before, there is a loss in momentum in a relationship when one person dies, and another is left living. The whole point of

a video game is to finish the game and die as little as possible. Most video games will offer multiple lives and will even reincarnate the character at a certain point after the dreaded “Game Over” takes over the middle of the screen. After this point, emotions rise within the player that replicate the emotions of loss. Even though the player will have another chance of redemption, there is a loss of momentum in their play. The player will grieve in their own respects for the life lost, even though they are aware they will get another chance. A loss still occurs either way, and the emotions that come from that loss, mostly anger, can be written into death literature. Video game designers consciously create situations that put a player’s character in danger in order to stimulate certain emotions when the player loses. They want the player to be angry or frustrated, so they will put in more effort and feel like they have accomplished something when they ultimately win. With this win, they had to have suffered some sort of loss along the way, and this loss should be recognized in respects to death literature.

Whether the person or subject that has been lost is fictional or physical, the emotions are still the same. There is a sense of loss that is created from their deaths, and the affects of the loss are transmitted from their world into the viewer’s or player’s minds. It must be understood that although the affects of loss are being manipulated by character developers, they are most certainly tangible in the minds of the experiencer. This is how Brennan’s theory is related to the makings of death literature. It ties together the coming of terms with character mourning in relation to how people mourn over physical beings.

Next, there is the trauma theory that indicates that people are unconscious during traumatic events. Cathy Caruth’s explanation of such a theory directly fuses together De Man’s recreation idea and misinformed poetics with Brennan’s influence of affect. When a loss is felt, the trauma is connected to the memories and interpretation of the loss. As stated before, it is not

necessarily the loss of a life that is traumatic, but instead how that loss affects the living. The living will reside in memories during the mourning period and will interpret the loss in a way that reflects their future. When death occurs, the person will not think about how the body is lying in the ground, or how the physical ashes of a person are swirling around in the air or on the mantle of the fireplace, instead, the living will think about them in a more abstract way. The physicality no longer exists, but instead, the abstract being takes over. This directly correlates to what De Man was talking about in regard to recreation and prosopopoeia. They create elegies and epitaphs to bring them back to life to cope with the trauma stemmed from their memories of the lost life. If there were no memories of the life lost, would there be any trauma? The answer is no, because the memories are proof that a life created an impact, and that a relationship was established in some form, whether that relationship be in the physical or fictional realm. Without that relationship, there would be no interpretation of loss. Without writers manipulating viewers emotions, death of characters would be meaningless. But, since there are established connections between the fictional and physical world, the trauma is allowed to occur.

Now, how exactly does this translate to the modern death literature? Diana Fuss specifically calls works such as elegies “fictional fantasies,” implying that a fantastical structure is still needed. This is not true. Death literature does not need to uphold this idea that the dead should be glorified if they did nothing to deserve it. The language within such writings can be truthful to personal experiences. If a death does not call for a fantastical world where colors and mythical creatures come to life to portray the life lost and the emotions of the loss, then the writer’s interpretation should not be written off as not death literature. A death occurred, and the writer is creating poetry from how they were affected by it. It is not their choosing to be happy, sad, or angry at the loss, so why should their poetics be limited to such emotions? The simple

answer is that they shouldn't be. With updates in other poetic fields, death literature is far behind in acknowledging different human experiences. With new technologies influencing emotions, and new relationships being built from other's creativity, the range in which death literature can be created needs to be expanded to accommodate the recently receivable emotions from fictional characters and how positive outlooks can stem from death. People will not always interpret loss the same way and modern death literature should reflect that.

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