

The Daughter's Consolation:
Melancholia and Subjectivity in Canadian Women's Paternal Elegies

By

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B.A., University of Winnipeg, 1998
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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

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University of Victoria

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Abstract

This study investigates the redefinition of female filial piety and the negotiations of female subjectivity in paternal elegies written by Canadian women. It sets Freud's theory of the work of mourning against the potential for a "work of melancholia" in order to read the elegies as inquiries into the rhetoric of mourning as it is complicated by father-daughter kinship. Examining poetic texts by P.K. Page, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Atwood, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Anne Carson, and Erin Mouré, this study considers these "daughterly elegies" as literary artifacts that adopt politicized subjectivities that grow from the poets' investigation into the function and limitations of elegiac convention.

Debating the elegiac trope of consolation as potentially oppressive, this study contrasts the social expectations of mourning against the libidinal politics of paternal authority, including the daughter-mourner's desire to delineate, and perhaps dismantle, the fidelity demanded by the father's death. This analysis proceeds from the idea that these paternal elegies revise the premises of the familial compact by examining the work of female poets who practice a determined melancholia as a literary act of infidelity to the Father as social and cultural law.

While each poet pursues her own discovery of subjectivity and consolation, it is possible to conclude that the paternal elegies explored in this study are united by their location of elegy as the poetic site of energetic challenge to patriarchal authority. These poets inquire into the elegiac mode's ability to speak women's experience of loss and

possible consolation, by searching for ways to elegize the father without resorting to encomium, to memorialize the father without sacrificing daughterly subjectivity, and to re-think a daughter's position within the rhetoric of paternal mourning.

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Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to many people who provided assistance during the composition of this dissertation. I am grateful to my examining committee for their expertise; my supervisor, Smaro Kamboureli, whose keen editor's eye and insight into the writing process were invaluable; Misao Dean and Jamie Dopp, whose teaching inspired and whose support was unfailing; Ingrid Holmberg of Greek and Roman Studies, for being so willing to read poetry; and Lynette Hunter of the University of California, whose "outsider" perspective and breadth of knowledge was much appreciated.

Other professors contributed their attention to the completion of this study. Iain Higgins took up supervisory duties in times of professorial scarcity. Eric Miller and Dianne Chisholm recommended Carson's *Plainwater* and Tostevin's *Cartouches*, respectively. I was offered excellent advice with good humour by Professors Lisa Surridge, Janelle Jenstead, and Stephen Ross at the University of Victoria; Brenda Austin-Smith and Dennis Cooley at the University of Manitoba; and Mavis Reimer, Keith Louise Fulton, Neil Besner, and Deborah Schnitzer at the University of Winnipeg.

Thanks are also due to those who listened to my ideas in less formal venues: over meals, after classes, during conferences. I particularly wish to thank my fellow doctoral candidates – Frances Sprout, Chris Fox, Suzan Last, and Karina Vernon – whose good company and practical advice always had a buoyant effect. My students in English 115 and 125 asked questions that kept me thinking about love, death, and literature.

Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their eclectic reading tastes, and John Roscoe for his unflappable nature.

Introduction
The Daughter's Consolation: Mourning and Subjectivity

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from the seat of Jove doth spring.
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.

John Milton, "Lycidas"

Restless and challenging, [the elegiac imagination] makes and
unmakes ethical codes, ritual, and liturgy. It rearranges even as it
disturbs the patterns of civil government and ecclesiastical hierarchy.
Although its themes are the puzzles of life and the riddle of death, it
settles down neither in the tavern nor in the churchyard.

Abbie Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode*

Beginning a study of Canadian women's paternal elegies by quoting Milton's 1638 poem "Lycidas" may appear odd, but Milton's elegy in memory of his friend and fellow Cambridge scholar Edward King, who drowned at sea at the age of twenty-four, is considered by poets and elegy theorists as the exemplar of the elegy, the poetic touchstone to which all subsequent elegists and all who discuss elegy as a genre must answer. But in the above quotation, one of the major precepts of "Lycidas," the homosociality of one young man grieving the death of another young man, joins with an elegiac convention, the invocation of the muses, to trigger the question that begins this study. What happens to the elegy when it is no longer a homosocial exploration of the loss of one man as mourned by another man? What happens to the elegy as a genre when women, instead of accompanying the poet-swain's song of grief, "loudly sweep the string" of their own grief and, in doing so, question the rhetoric of mourning? I quote Milton's invocation to the Muses, those "Sisters of the sacred well" with irony, in the hope that Milton's classical reference may be borne out as unintentionally prophetic

about the urgency of women's elegies in the latter half of the twentieth century. The Muses, I suggest, have been replaced by, or transmogrified into, women who "loudly sweep the string" to assert the legitimization of their love and question the rhetoric of mourning in the late twentieth century.

Abbie Findlay Potts, in her 1964 study *The Elegiac Mode*, asserts that the elegy is less sorrowful than "skeptical," and more concerned with "revelation" than with affective closure (2). Playfully naming the muse of elegy, Potts claims that "Elegeia" imbues the elegist with an unflagging energy for the activities of "sorrowing, challenging, questioning" (11), and it is within Potts's energetic view of *anagnorisis* as the defining term of elegy that I would like to situate the poems of this study. Potts takes her definition from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and I take it as my working definition of the elegiac mode. *Anagnorisis* involves an elegy's defining revelation or discovery "through the display of feelings aroused by memory, by reason or inference, fictitiously by false reference or intended deceit or – best of all – out of the nature of previous events or antecedent discoveries" (Potts 37). For the purposes of this study, the "nature of previous events or antecedent discoveries" will be assumed to be the tensions and social expectations of father-daughter kinship, and the need to redefine female filial piety in the twentieth century elegy will be the "ethical code" that is changed through the poets' discoveries.

In this study, I concentrate on the ways in which the urgency of the twentieth-century elegy combines with contemporary feminist theory in Canadian women's paternal elegies. Certainly American elegy theorists have begun to regard the parental elegy as a subgenre, and both Melissa Zeiger and Jahan Ramazani have produced studies

that work towards an American elegiac theory that claims a definite stake for female elegists. Ramazani, in *Poetry of Mourning*, claims that “the personal act of mourning the father is politically charged, and the politics of resistance begins at home” (264), noting that female poets who have written “the American family elegy” from mid-century onwards have “been more than willing to use the genre to exorcize, slough, divorce, defame, even annihilate the dead” (263). Warning that the contemporary elegy may contain more “fractured speech” than outright lyricism and more “memorable puzzlings” than consolation, Ramazani situates the elegy not only as a genre that defies the “acid suspicions” of a cynical citizenry but, also, as a poetic distillation of those same acid suspicions in poetic form (x). In the twentieth century, the elegy is most often discussed as a literary artifact that charts Freud’s “work of mourning,” a theory that is attractive for its promise of completed mourning, but remains problematic for the same reason. There is a frequently reductive tendency for the late twentieth-century elegy to enact a slavish obedience to the letter of completed mourning, but remain distant from any revelatory experience, a tendency to ignore the *anagnorisis* that is axiomatic to the elegiac mode. Elegies that fall into this genre trap become *merely* conventional, rather than thoughtfully conventional. As a literary display of mourning that “has persisted,” as Sandra Gilbert phrases it in *Inventions of Farewell*, “through massive cultural and theological turmoil” (25), the elegy maintains its energy by engagement with the twin devices of inquiry and discovery.

The Canadian elegists of this study, while as motivated as American elegists are to tread the unexplored ground of father-daughter kinship, are less given to angry iterations of loss and more to inquiring into the mythical implications and political

possibilities that emerge when a female poet explores the death of her father, whether he is her biological progenitor or a poetic representation of patriarchal power. Though Ramazani concludes that contemporary American female elegists write parental elegies in order to “rethink the daughter’s position within the family romance” (294), the paternal elegies by Canadian women in this study go beyond rethinking the daughter’s position. They place the “family romance” of psychoanalytic theory under the microscope of elegy and, in doing so, suggest the possibility of a more efficacious theory of female mourning on the borders of paternal power.

The slippery nature of poetic subjectivity has been at the forefront of Canadian feminist theory since Quebecoise feminists began self-consciously inscribing the subject into (or onto) the text in the 1970s. I suggest that evidence of such debates about feminist subjectivity in Canadian poetry can be found as early as mid-century, when politically-minded poets like Miriam Waddington and Dorothy Livesay began to situate the female body as primary speaking subject that, in Merleau-Ponty’s sense, is always already in the world. P.K. Page and Jay Macpherson, as female modernists who are more circumspect but perhaps more sly, evade the pitfall of Husserlian “intentionality” by inscribing more self-conscious female subjects to debate the rhetoric of mourning practice. For this purposes of this study, I consider the paternal elegy to be a literary referent in which a daughter’s search for a mourning practice that does not sacrifice her subjectivity references the need for a functional feminist criticism of the rhetoric of mourning.

This study grew out of my fascination with the adaptations of elegiac convention in the twentieth century, and my frustration with the paucity of discourse concerning father-daughter kinship in major movements of critical theory. While I appreciated the

immediate political urgency for feminist theory to explore the maternal dynamic, I wondered what women were losing by not examining the relationships between fathers and daughters with a critical and literary eye. But, without a doubt, a maternal absence has haunted this project, for every question a daughter asks of the father has its echo or its counterpart in a question for her mother. I can only speculate on the degree to which an elegy for one parent carries a second silent beloved in the person of the other parent, whether s/he is deceased or not. Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug A Stone* asks a question that has hovered behind this study from its inception: "what is parent material? how long do we need it?" (141). Marlatt's narrator follows her maternal lineage back to England to rediscover her "mother's trace, these family pathways to negotiate, these still-standing walls of home" (141). *How Hug A Stone* is a maternal elegy, though Marlatt's use of the phrase of "parent material" is significantly inclusive of both parents: why not "mother material," as might be more appropriate for Marlatt's text? The term "parent material" refers to the geologic material that forms the chemical and mineral composition of soil. Marlatt's conflation of her own "parent material" with the "red clay soil of Devon" is not unusual as an autochthonous metaphor. However, her reference to the shared etymological roots of "parent" and "*parcae*, the Fates, who allot what you get" (141), is forbidding, particularly when considered with fateful presence of her mother's sister "spinning and cutting [...] in the family room" (141). It is no accident that Marlatt emphasizes the "distaff" by the spindle; this is, after all, her mother's family, and it is her "mother's trace" for which she is searching. But the father, who does not appear as a character in *How Hug A Stone*, slips into Marlatt's text as the unmentioned (and perhaps unmentionable) figure glossed by the term "parent material." In a feminist text, the

absence of a father figure is not especially unusual, but the trace of the father as “parent material” seems veiled and even surreptitious. While Marlatt’s text ventures forward to explore the mother material, I had to wonder: what would a feminist poet have to say about her father, and how she would say it?

Another Canadian feminist work, Di Brandt’s critical study *Wild Mother Dancing*, takes its title from the final prose poem of Marlatt’s *How Hug A Stone*. Picking up the trace of the maternal in Marlatt’s “wild mother dancing upon the waves” (187), Brandt asks a poignant and insistent question – “where are the mothers in Canadian literature?” – and points to ways that cultural elision can masquerade as family dynamics that are subsequently lauded as literary tradition. Though Brandt notes the ubiquity of fathers in literature, I note how infrequently literary daughters speak about their fathers with criticism or explore the tensions of father-daughter kinship. Jane Gallop’s take on Freudian seduction theory, that a daughter needs to step carefully to keep a father’s attention without “scar[ing] him away,” seems to hold the key to at least part of this silence. Daughters were forbidden to speak of their fathers because a father feared not only his daughter’s criticism, but also the possibility of the daughter’s love as an emotional, intellectual, or social seduction, if not a sexual one. This condition of daughterhood ventures near to what Derrida calls “the unbearable paradox of fidelity” (“By Force” 159), though the conditions of daughterhood do not necessarily invest in Derrida’s incomplete and impossible mourning, but, rather, debate the balance to be maintained between fidelity and distance, that balance that is socially demanded from a daughter as her father’s gendered Other.

I began to uncover poetic texts by Canadian women that regarded the dead paternal body in an elegiac fashion: fondly, with frustration, and with a sense of political urgency – a mixture of grief and determination that has been imperfectly described as “ambivalent” by Jahan Ramazani and Melissa Zeiger. For my purposes, the term “ambivalence” is dissatisfying in its neatness. The struggle for acknowledgement, for subjectivity, for inheritance, and for consolation depicted in these poems is messy and often unresolved. These are poetic inquiries that are more energetic than lugubrious, despite their foundations in the rhetoric and conventions of mourning practice.

If the energy of the poetic inquiry is intriguing, then the fact that all these poets are Canadian is even more so. In terms of existing elegy theory, these poems were not completely readable through the British conventions of elegy, nor totally explicable through the developing American theories of elegy as defiant rage or depressive confession. While both the British tradition of consolation and the American innovation of “acid suspicion” (Ramazani *x*) can be discovered in the Canadian elegiac mode written by women, the pursuit of a subjectivity distinguishes them from British and American works. This is not to say that subjectivity is not at issue in all kinds of elegies, but the ways in which these Canadian women poets situated themselves politically within the elegy becomes a defining factor in the debate about the elegy’s “skeptical vision” and its journey towards “revelation,” in Potts’ terms (2).

Little critical work has been produced to date about the place of elegy in Canadian literature. The criticism that has been produced tends to focus more upon fiction than poetry, and more upon an accepted critical position of Freud’s “work of mourning” than upon any discussion of its deficiencies. Karen E. Smythe’s study on the elegiac mode,

Figuring Grief: Gallant, Munro and the Poetics of Elegy, works with the short stories of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro. Christian Riegel's *Writing Grief: Margaret Laurence and the Work of Mourning* takes a Freudian perspective on Laurence's novels. However, the surge in elegiac work in the latter half of the twentieth century in Canada demands attention to poetry as the fundamental and traditional form that the elegy has taken throughout its history. While it is undeniably felicitous for this study that Margaret Atwood has claimed the elegy to be "a natural Canadian form" ("Dire Things" 29), the implication that the elegy is as natural as feelings of loss is a false equation. The elegy is highly constructed as a genre, and so is distinctly "un"-natural, as is any genre or form that must obey rigid literary conventions, but Atwood cannot be blamed for pointing out the cultural space that the elegy has begun to occupy in Canadian literature.

A complete list of Canadian elegists would show poets of every age and style, and the elegiac objects mourned in these poems are certainly as diverse as their authors. A number of poets have written elegies in memory of the women killed by Marc Lépine at L'École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989.¹ Dionne Brand includes two elegies for Grenadian revolutionaries, "Phyllis" and "Jackie," in her 1990 collection *No Language is Neutral*. Diane Schoemperlen's *Names of the Dead* (2003) is a book-length elegy composed around a necrology, a list of names of those who died in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001. George Bowering's prose-poem elegies in *The Moustache* are dedicated to the memory of his friendship with painter Greg Curnoe. Bronwen Wallace's "Toward Morning" in *Signs of the Former Tenant* and "Anniversary" in *The Stubborn Particulars of Grace* are elegies in memory of her friend Patricia Logan. Wallace herself was elegized by many Canadian poets after

her death, as was Gwendolyn MacEwen, for Canadian poets have taken up the notion of literary homage in composing elegies in memory of their mentors or fellow poets, poems Sandra M. Gilbert calls “laments for the makers” (16).²

But these inscriptions of grief generally appear as single poems, and, with exceptions like Bowering’s *The Moustache*, book-length explorations of loss have been, in the late twentieth century, most frequently focused upon familial loss. Ramazani names the “American family elegy” as a major twentieth-century trend, and without a doubt, the family elegy has begun to exert a similar prominence in Canadian poetry. But it is important at this point to distinguish between elegies and poems of attribution, and between elegies and generational poems, the kinds of poems that explore or recount a family history, rather than poems that pursue elegiac *anagnorisis*, the revelation about death and loss. An elegy asserts itself as a poem that both mourns a death and challenges the rhetoric of mourning. An elegy engages with *anagnorisis*, the revelation or discovery that is achieved through memory or sorrow, but moves beyond the sorrow or mere memory to adopt a questioning attitude towards death. For instance, Fred Wah’s paternal elegies of *Waiting For Saskatchewan* are distinct in their quest for a revelation about relationality and absence:

Father, when you died you left me
with my own death. Until then I thought
nothing of it. Now I see it’s clear cut
both genetic “bag” as well as choice. I know now
I’d better find that double edge between you
and your father so that the synchronous axe
keeps splitting whatever this is the weight of
I’m left holding. (6)

Wah's discovery of his "own death" through the memory of his father's passing performs the classic elegiac *anagnorisis*: the shocking awareness of one's own mortality through the experience of loss, particularly the loss of a parent. In comparison, most of Wah's prose-poems in *Diamond Grill* are not elegiac in that they do not challenge the rhetoric of death, but, rather, situate the father in memory and in time without performing the elegiac *anagnorisis*, the revelation that grows from inquiry into mourning. (Wah's penultimate prose poem in *Diamond Grill*, "Tears in the never-ending aftershock reverberate at" [175] is perhaps the exception. The way the poem parallels closing down the café with the closing down of the father's body suggests an elegiac *anagnorisis*.) To take another example, Gregory Scofield's *I Knew Two Metis Women* is a book of generational poems, but I read two of Scofield's poems as more specifically elegiac; "She's Lived," and "Mom, As I Watch Her Leaving" challenge the rhetoric of mourning, writing the mother's death as tragic or ecstatic.

Additionally, a poem that addresses loss without mourning a "lost beloved" is not an elegy. For instance, in Miriam Waddington's *The Visitants*, "Managing Death" addresses the problem of loss, but the poem does so without the pinion of a death to mourn. However, "The Visitants" and "The Secret-Keeper" are elegiac in that both poems address the deaths of individuals as they grapple with the expectations and limitations of consolation. An elegy need not necessarily focus entirely upon a human lost beloved, but when the elegiac object is a place or way of life, the lost object traditionally takes on the poetic aspect of a beloved body. For instance, in *Civil Elegies*, Dennis Lee situates Quebecois artist Hector de Saint-Denis-Garneau as the lost beloved, calling him "our one patrician maker, mangled spirit" (47), but Lee makes Saint-Denis-

Garneau a metonym for Canadian democracy and artistic freedom as the text works towards an *anagnorisis* that is both political and personal.

A preliminary list of book-length or otherwise significant Canadian family elegies produced in the latter half of the twentieth century would include, in addition to Wah and Scofield, Elizabeth Smart's "Rose Died," in memory of her daughter, George Bowering's "Elegy 4" for his father in *Kerrisdale Elegies* (1984), and Dennis Cooley's two book-length elegies for his father (1983's *Fielding*) and his mother (2001's *Irene*). Michael Redhill's *Asphodel* (1997) contains two lengthy elegiac sequences, the twelve-part "Alzheimer Elegy" for the poet's grandfather, and "Going Under," a lengthier section that ends the collection, in which the lost beloved persona is not identified. Add to these Saskatchewan poet Paul Wilson's paternal elegies in *Dreaming My Father's Body* (1994), Patrick Lane's cluster of maternal elegies in *The Bare Plum of the Winter Rain* (2000), and Betsy Warland's book-length examination of her mother's memory in *Bloodroot: Tracing the Retelling of Motherloss* (2000), and it becomes apparent that there is certainly a growing trend towards the production of Canadian "family elegies" in the final twenty years of the last century.

Some interesting and challenging texts that I chose not to examine because of the generic or theoretical limitations of this study deserve to be noted. Kristjana Gunnars' *Zero Hour* (1991) is a book-length examination of a man's death and his daughter's mourning that contains a debate about the daughter's "inheritance" of his intellectual attributes but, while the book shows Gunnars' roots as a poet, it is undeniably a prose text. Nicole Brossard's *These Our Mothers* focuses upon the maternal influence, but criticizes the father's gaze upon his daughter as an estranging and authoritative influence

that recreates the narrator as a “patriarchal daughter” whose difference is writ large in his eyes. Brossard’s daughter-narrator finds herself “looking at him while thinking of what [she] could write on his tombstone” (36). Brossard’s text is undeniably compelling, and her criticism of the father’s gaze is rigorous, but she spends too little attention on the father to merit inclusion in this study.

Other poets produced paternal elegies that were merely not lengthy enough to examine in a sustained critical arc, and so I note them here as evidence of the growing concern with father-daughter kinship in the elegiac mode in Canada. Among female poets who have written shorter paternal elegies, consider Dorothy Livesay’s “Lament” from her 1956 *Selected Poems*, Gwendolyn MacEwen’s “For Alick MacEwen: d. 1960” from her first collection, *The Rising Fire* (1963), Di Brandt’s “The Dead Father” and “Fathers Never Leave You” in *Agnes in the Sky* (1990), Anne Szumigalski’s “Voice” from her collection of the same name (1995), Mona Fertig’s “Father, Father,” and “I Feel Like Sisyphus” from *Sex, Death and Travel* (1998), Betsy Struthers’ “Father” sequence in *Driven* (2000), Patricia Young’s “Foxes Also, Lying in Wait” and “Blue Salt and Silence” in *Ruin and Beauty* (2000), Christine Wiesenthal’s “Vaterland” series from *Instruments of Surrender* (2001), and Maureen Hynes’s “Estate,” “The High Salt Content of His Tears,” and “In Paradisium” in *Harm’s Way* (2002).

My focus on paternal elegies meant choosing texts from several book-length or significant poetic sequences written by Canadian women about the death of the father, and I have chosen my texts with an eye to how deeply they problematize the elegy in their pursuit of subjectivity. I am interested in those poetic works that reach far into the tradition of the elegy, and emerge with the dramatic political reconfigurations of the

genre. There is plenty to be explored about the feminist perspective on Jewish mourning rituals in Libby Scheier's *Kaddish for My Father* (1999). Rachel Zolf's *Masque* (2004) suggests a younger generation of Jewish women struggling for legitimation within a culture that values knowledge and father-son filiation. Other paternal elegiac texts pursue revelation through the medium of memory, notably Jan Zwicky's *The New Room* (1989), Mary di Michele's *Mimosa and Other Poems* (1981), Roo Borson's *Water Memory* (1996), and Lorna Crozier's *Inventing the Hawk* (1992) and *What the Living Won't Let Go* (1999). The *anagnorisis* of these texts focuses more upon entering loss rather than questioning the meaning of mourning in father-daughter kinship, and these are generally less politicized and less critical than the ideas I wished to pursue.

My pursuit will engage the paternal elegiac works of P.K. Page, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Atwood, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Anne Carson, and Erin Mouré – works engaged with the discovery of a daughter's mourning as political, both within and outside of the family dynamic. Their engagements with, and resistance to, elegiac conventions function as part of the poets' willingness to debate the definition of female filial piety. Why are these women writing about their dead fathers at this juncture of literary and feminist history, and how does their work illuminate the study of the twentieth-century elegy in general, and the contemporary feminist project in particular? The resistance that complicates a woman poet's paternal elegy is inevitably a political resistance, fuelled by the desire to challenge convention in the name of female subjectivity. These paternal elegists demand as much from their generic concerns as from their approach to the subject, and ask as much from the daughter as subject as from the father as elegiac object. They distinguish themselves from the field of female paternal elegists in Canada by the

demand of their pursuit of an elegiac *anagnorisis* that questions gender, the family dynamic, the function of language as a power structure, and the rhetoric of mourning, all in the cultural pressure-cooker of father-daughter kinship. The poems are, within their different styles and histories, concerned with the reappropriation of language, the reconfiguration of the rhetoric of mourning, and an insistence on legitimation for the female subject.

The tension inherent in a woman poet sincerely mourning the father while questioning the scope of patriarchal power, and doing so while questioning the effectiveness and conventions of the elegiac mode, points to a central paradox of this study. No elegy study is immune to paradox; in fact, *anagnorisis* itself is paradoxical. How can mortal beings question death? If we are the inheritors of centuries of social approbation and ritual surrounding mourning, how can such practices be criticized from within the culture? The elegy is the container for such paradoxical questions, and its conventions support the tensions between mourning and consolation, between public and private grief, between specific, individual death and its mythic iteration in poetry. Among the persistent generic paradoxes that W. David Shaw explores in his *Elegy and Paradox: Testing the Conventions*, the elegy's resistance to simplicity or easy solutions is fundamental to its efficacy. He asserts that, in the twentieth-century elegy, it is not unusual for "the uneasy peace of a paradox" to "break down into an open war of opposites: an insurrection of the self, a civil strife" (5). The elegist will quarrel with herself in the elegy, as well as with the dead or dying father, though the insurrections enacted within these paternal elegies are often against neither the father nor the daughter, but against the power structures that estrange them from each other.

So the elegy becomes the exploration of what Ramazani calls “the vexed experience of grief in the modern world” (x), with the vexed quality emerging, in these elegies, from the search for a way to elegize without encomium, to memorialize without sacrificing subjectivity, and to think critically about daughterhood within the social order of mourning. Ramazani suggests that the vexatious quality of the twentieth-century elegy springs from its position as a modernist work of art that has been consciously stripped of centuries of mourning ritual, and now must remake grief in the cold light of a technological age. But in these paternal elegies, ritual has not been fully repudiated. The search for a satisfactory mourning practice for the father appears in these poems as a demand for female subjectivity that refuses the ritual self-sacrifice of the daughter as an expiation of her father’s death. To the list of elegiac paradoxes, I wish to add another. The daughter’s interrogation of paternal power and attempts to redefine female filial piety necessarily occur within the bounds of a literary system that remains certain that a daughter’s mourning should be read through tropes of self-sacrifice.

How does a woman poet write her father’s death? How does traditional elegiac homosociality alter when the dynamics of father-daughter kinship guide the elegy rather than the dynamics of male filiation or fraternization? Both Melissa Zeiger and Jahan Ramazani have glossed the importance of anger as a filter for the traditional elegiac encomium in women’s elegies, but it is the presence of a “third term” that complicates the political implications of a female poet’s elegy for her father. Gillian Rose maintains that a woman’s mourning is a “just act” that can enliven the political life of the community. Judith Butler suggests that being trapped between love and anger yields melancholia, and this melancholia is the first vital step towards subjectivity. Julia

Kristeva asserts the value of melancholia with her concept of the abject as “the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost” (*Powers* 15). Jacques Derrida famously claims that there is no third term to mediate between the impossibility and necessity of mourning, and that an “unbearable paradox of fidelity” to the dead gives force to mourning. Each of the poetic sequences in this study pursues a way to illuminate or interrogate this third term of mourning, as a path to consolation that does not sacrifice the daughter but, rather, grants her subjectivity outside the bounds of paternal authority, and so reframes the elegy as a literary and political project.

The role of consolation is key to any discussion of this “third term,” and, indeed, any discussion of the elegy. Certainly the traditional elegy, from Milton’s “Lycidas” onwards, begins by establishing the magnitude of the mourner’s loss, and then, by systematically working through a series of elegiac conventions, arrives at spiritual and, until the twentieth century, Christian consolation. Milton mourns the loss of Edward King by granting his “lost beloved” a classical identity, by invoking the Muses to assist him in mourning, by recalling the Orphic journey to the underworld, by condemning cruel Nature only to witness and be comforted by her pastoral renewal, by writing an apotheosis for the lost beloved, and by receiving the benediction from Lycidas himself as his soul is drawn to a Christian heaven even as his bones are scattered beneath the sea, watched over by St. Michael the Archangel, patron saint of mariners. The mourner, cast here by Milton as a rustic swain, departs for “fresh Woods and pastures new,” consoled and even the better for his grief. Against this tradition, I expected to find, as Zeiger and Ramazani have discussed, that a tough-minded feminist elegy written close to the end of the twentieth century would eschew consolation as outmoded or at least outdated, but

these elegies give the lie to being truly “beyond consolation.” Consolation, though difficult, is attainable in these elegies; indeed, these poems reinforce consolation as the elegy’s *raison d’être*. Even the refusal of consolation that the poet frequently uses to assert her right to mourn is so conventional that it creates the conditions for consolation itself – an elegiac tautology, that, in the best cases, may be read as an elegiac teleology.

Melissa Zeiger’s examination of the elegy beyond the limits of consolation is persuasive, particularly her contention that consolation relies upon a tradition of reclaiming masculine privilege after mourning (11-12). Establishing the elegy as “the crucial and constitutive place of the living person’s ongoing affectionate relations with the dead” (63), Zeiger proposes that women’s twentieth-century elegies go beyond the limits of tradition by examining the political reframing of bodies that are not male, nor white, nor young; her study contains chapters of women’s breast cancer elegies and elegies for people with AIDS. Zeiger’s intimation that female elegists move “beyond consolation” dispenses a double-dose of twentieth-century poetic pragmatics: that consolation is impossible to achieve in the terms laid out by traditional male elegists, and that it is an ill-conceived avoidance of grief that feminist writers should neither expect nor desire. While Zeiger’s emphasis on affective continuity in the women’s elegies is important, I want to consider how the elegies themselves define “affectionate relations with the dead,” when female elegists resist the convention of encomium, and instead view the symbolic and cultural Father with a critical eye. Each of these poets creates a daughterly persona that actively debates the conditions of consolation as they are complicated in a paternal elegy. Unlike Ramazani’s “ambivalent” American family elegies (22), these Canadian female elegists consider the possibilities for elegizing the

father as a problematic amalgam of love and authority, while searching for the “third term” that guides politicized and efficacious mourning.

The study of the female-written elegy, to date, has done little to unravel the theoretical snarls and political consequences of grief in a family setting. Peter Sacks effectively ghettoizes the female elegy in his reading of Amy Clampitt’s “Procession at Candlemas,” by suggesting that women, once again, must mourn first and ask questions later, that the mourning must be “processional,” ordered, and properly stylized as well as unfailingly sincere. Celeste Schenck’s assertion that female poets choose to elegize their families rather than other poets is not only inaccurate, but it is also uncomfortably essentialist. Ramazani’s study of the subsection of the American family elegy as written by Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich, and Sylvia Plath is more expansive in its proposition of a profound ambivalence at the core of the female elegy, but does not progress beyond a confirmation of anger as an earned right in mourning. How can a daughter’s ambivalence about her father’s death be explored as something more than a literary demonstration of Freudian seduction theory? These elegies represent something more rigorous than an iteration of feminist anger or post-modern ambivalence towards the father as individual and the Father as social authority. Though Ramazani’s identification of anger and ambivalence in the female written elegy is important, he does not consider the impact of resisting libidinal family politics in the larger world. Through various strategies for emphasizing the political implications of consolation and subjectivity, complicated by gender and inheritance, the female poets in this study write elegies that include, but are not limited to, expressions of affect. I like Shaw’s contention that elegies are inherently risky propositions for the reader and the writer, and believe that the discovery and

exploration of a post-paternal subjectivity in these elegies can be exhilarating, “inseparable from the satisfaction of being open to adventure and risk, including the fear of dissolution that any enlargement of consciousness might bring in its wake” (6).

The dynamic of father-daughter kinship and its accompanying cultural tensions are central concerns in a woman’s paternal elegy, and the cultural limitations of father-daughter kinship must be contrasted with its literary significance. As Barbara A. Babcock notes in *The Reversible World*, “What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central, and if we ignore or minimize inversion and other forms of cultural negation, we often fail to understand the dynamics of symbolic processes generally” (32). Linda E. Boose, in “The Father’s House and the Daughter in It,” responds with incredulity to the historical silence surrounding father-daughter kinship in literary works:

[W]hile the territory of daughter and father is a discourse that stands virtually unmapped, it is hardly a space that could be called unmarked. The relatively dark discursive terrain that this family relationship occupies has been written all over by tacit injunctions that have forbidden its charting. (1)

Boose’s wry astonishment reflects the extent of the cultural negation of daughterly mourning. When she points out the centrality of the father-daughter relationship to foundational texts of Western literature, from the Greek tragedies of *Antigone* and *Electra*, to Cordelia and Ophelia in Shakespearean tragedy, Boose emphasizes – without acknowledgement – texts that explicitly position the daughters as mourners for the doomed father figures. The image of a daughter grieving for her father in Western literature is symbolically central to the point of obviousness, but little has been written from a critical or theoretical perspective of the daughter’s experience of her father’s death. Arguing in 1989 that the daughter’s lack of inheritance and her “exchange value” as a marital commodity makes her a liminal figure in “the family space” (33), Boose

asserts that “[d]aughterhood is, in fact, inseparable from absence in the psychoanalytic definition of social development,” a condition which places the daughter in the position of a “temporary sojourner within her family, destined to seek legitimation and name outside its boundaries” (21). My intention is to focus upon the tensions and expectations of legitimation that shape a daughter’s mourning duty as filtered through the paternal elegy as a literary artifact. What literary shape does a daughter’s elegy describe in the latter half of the twentieth century? Ramazani suggests that, “[s]corning recovery and transcendence, modern elegists neither abandon the dead nor heal the living” (4). What then do these modern elegies *do*? If a woman’s paternal elegy is compromised by late twentieth-century feminist politics, how might these “compromises” revitalize the elegy as a literary and political project?

The limits of psychoanalytical criticism in discussing the dynamics of father-daughter kinship become increasingly evident when examining how a daughter’s duty to her dying father within the limits of the elegy might be influenced by feminist theory. The most immediate result is a textual self-consciousness, as the daughter figure notes her position in the libidinal politics of the family. Nancy K. Miller, recording her reaction to her father’s illness in *Bequest and Betrayal*, mockingly calls herself “Ms. Oedipus,” a daughter who longed to “at last have [her] father to [her]self” until she realizes to her chagrin that her desire will be flouted; in illness, her father is not “the good father of [her] childhood: Daddy” (20). Miller writes that caring for her father felt like “a mockery of the maternal,” in profound conflict with her ideas of daughterly duty: “I was sick of Being a Good Daughter (though I of course reveled in it as well) [...] his constant complaining, the endless tasks of running another household, the white panic at being

responsible for another life. Being like a son" (27). Miller's capital letters on "Being a Good Daughter" emphasize her awareness of cultural and social performance, just as Margaret Atwood's designation of her first-person narrator as "the flower girl" (*Morning* 93) ironically equates her father's death with a wedding ceremony. Miller points out her own gender crisis that arises as she cares for her dying father, the "feminine" nature of the day-to-day care, and the "masculine" responsibility for another life. Miller's conflation of "son" and "responsibility for another life" suggests that such an inheritance may induce panic, but such responsibility may also encourage consolation, part of "being like a son."

But if a daughter strives to become closer to her father by occasionally acting the part of a good son, where is the mother in all of this gender negotiation? The daughter's social and cultural connection with the mother is one social expectation that is flouted within these paternal elegies, and the mother's absence from these paternal elegies deserves some attention before I continue. While it was not my original intention to isolate the father and the daughter in the elegiac mode, in text after text, I found daughter figures who eschew representing the mother within their paternal elegies. Some of this dynamic could be dictated by a generic convention that pits the lonely mourner against the memory of the lost beloved, her sorrow unrelieved by the presence of others. In these texts, mourning is not a shared duty; while these daughters may culturally inherit mourning practice from a tradition of female mourning, they address their grief without their mother's approbation. The absence of mothers from these elegies exacerbates the tensions of father-daughter kinship. The daughter's focus narrows to include only her father; her mother can neither mediate nor distract from the tensions produced by father-

daughter kinship. Or can she? Jane Gallop maintains that, in the father's eyes, a daughter can never be truly separated from her mother, that despite a daughter's "plea for separateness, its impossibility manifests itself" (114).

But even this "impossibility" must admit the Freudian "seductive" atmosphere that accompanies many of these poems: a seduction that may be more intellectual than sexual, but it remains a seduction all the same. Gallop herself suggests that the father's law offers "a veiled seduction" to the daughter in lieu of a forbidden sexual seduction (70), and these female-written elegies engage that paternal law in the most rigorous terms. This leaves the project of the daughter's paternal elegy in a precarious position. If any engagement the daughter has with the father is assumed to be seductive, then the presence of the mother is palliative, physical evidence that a daughter must be actively protected from the father's (seductive) law. This is the "vicious circle" of seduction of and by the daughter, according to Gallop. When the daughter's otherness proves unsuccessful as a sign of worth in her father's eyes, the daughter discovers the only way to "avoid scaring the father away, is to please him, and to please him one must submit to his law which proscribes any sexual relation" (71). Of course, even this kind of a "submission" is sexually encoded as a kind of seduction. Gallop's interesting suggestion that the daughter's attention frightens the father, and that she must carefully modulate her actions to "avoid scaring him," is even more intriguing, and is perhaps the key to the mother's absence from these poems. The mother is not represented in these poems *not* because she is, as Di Brandt puts it in her study of the maternal narrative in Canadian literature, "unspeakable, unrepresentable, unconscious, associated with death, double-handed" or difficult to locate in the "master narrative of Western history" (6), but because

these female elegists ask impertinent questions about the “family romance” as they apply to the stark but complex triangle of father-daughter-death. While I believe Gallop’s warning that any feminist politics needs to interrogate the “complex power relations that structure our world” while “avoid[ing] the pitfall of familial thinking” (xv), I also think that changing the terms of familial thinking may be the solution to examining this particular set of power relations. These paternal elegies represent a showdown of sorts: father and daughter caught in a demanding literary agenda, wherein she has the lexical authority to scare him, interrogate him, praise him, exonerate him, abandon or re-make him, all without the mediation of his wife and her mother.

My choice to concentrate upon fathers in this study should not be regarded as a reinforcement of patriarchal privilege. I do not think that paternal elegies categorically represent superior samples of the elegy as a genre, nor have I any wish to laud fathers as more socially significant or more worthy elegiac objects than mothers, siblings, spouses, friends, or children. But I contend that female-written paternal elegies are consistently foregrounded by a cultural discomfort with their female authorship as well as with their chosen elegiac object. While P.K. Page, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Atwood, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Anne Carson, and Erin Mouré share fundamental concerns about fathers as elegiac objects, their work represents a range of poetic styles and political outlooks; it would be reductive to treat these texts as though they agreed upon a single unified perspective. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the difficulty of discerning the Lacanian symbolic Father from the father, and doubly remiss were I to treat them as equivalent or parallel concepts. Page, Atwood, Carson, and Tostevin begin by focusing on the father as family member, writing a particular death within the historical and

cultural matrix of paternal authority. Macpherson and Mouré tangle with the traditions of elegy as cultural oppression, positioning the dead paternal body as an authority that demands daughterly obedience even as it denies her consolation. But having categorized the texts in such a way, I must also say that one of the most problematic and interesting aspects of these texts may be discovered in the poets' struggle with the disquieting, but inescapable, conflation of "father" with "Father." Along with the daughter's cultural duty to serve the father and the elegist's charge to memorialize him, the woman's determination to interrogate the symbolic Father complicates the search for consolation and subjectivity in these elegies. I turn now to an examination of models of mourning and melancholia, in the hope that regarding the breadth and limitations of these theories may suggest ways to think about female poets' interrogations of the paternal elegy.

Models of Mourning: Elegy and Authority

Any discussion of mourning practice in the twentieth century must contend with Freud's differentiation of mourning from melancholia in his 1917 article "Mourning and Melancholia." The article, cited frequently by psychoanalysts and scholars, differentiates between normative mourning and pathologized melancholia by noting that, while both states share similar "distinguishing mental features" such as "a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity," only melancholia is accompanied by "a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (143). Freud further differentiates mourning from melancholia by noting that the melancholic "knows whom

he has lost but not *what* it is he has lost in them” (145). However, before maintaining that melancholia is distinguished by the self-reproaches of the melancholic, as well as by the melancholic’s difficulty in identifying the magnitude of his/her loss, Freud admits that “[e]ven in descriptive psychiatry the definition of melancholia is uncertain” (142). His uncertainty keeps him from speculating about the “work” that may be performed by melancholia, and Freud grows more confident in pathologizing melancholia as the article progresses. The “work of mourning” requires a “testing of reality” of the loss, in order that the mourner may withdraw all libido attachments from the lost object (144). The mourner must, in an oddly practical manner, recoup all emotional loss by reappropriating his or her affections. Freud’s work of mourning is considered “complete” when the mourner’s ego is “free and uninhibited” from the attachment to the lost person (145).

Melancholia performs a similar type of “inner labour,” a work complicated by the melancholic’s puzzlement about the importance of the lost object. This puzzlement results in a lack of social shame, a propensity for the melancholic’s “insistent talking about himself” to the point that he will derive “pleasure in the consequent exposure” (147). Freud theorizes that the melancholic’s self-reproaches are sublimated transferences of the sins of the lost beloved that have been taken onto the melancholic self, with the result that the melancholics “give a great deal of trouble, perpetually taking offence and behaving as if they have been treated with great injustice” (149). Though both mourning and melancholia may be “complicated by the conflict of ambivalence” (158), Freud points out that “[i]n melancholia, countless single conflicts in which love and hate wrestle together are fought for the object” (159). Ultimately, Freud concludes that the “work of melancholia” either renders the lost object valueless and abandons it, or attains “the

satisfaction of acknowledging [the melancholic] as the better of the two, as superior to the object” (160).

Freud’s concept of the inner labour of grief is not the only method to approach “work” performed by the elegy, but his distinctions between mourning and melancholia have become accepted despite their inaccuracies. In a post-Freudian world, “post” means “ideologically implicit” rather than “finished with” or “beyond.” However, Freud’s identification of the melancholic’s investment in ambivalence and a perceived “injustice” are reflected in some of the concerns about the figurations of daughterly mourning in this study. While Freud genders the melancholic as male throughout “Mourning and Melancholia,” it is difficult to forget his tendency to assume sexual dysfunction as the source of all female affect and illness. Complicated by Freud’s seduction theory and its manifestation as hysteria in young women, a woman’s grief for her father becomes a snarl of cultural obligation. Too little or no display of grief makes the daughter socially monstrous, but too large a display of grief appears to reveal a pathologized sublimated sexual desire for the father. The only other route left for the daughter is one of psychoanalytical perversity: a desire to become the good son in order to inherit the father’s power and male privilege.

As extreme as seduction theory seems, it remains a force in contemporary beliefs about father-daughter kinship. When I told people that this project examined the literary dynamics of father-daughter kinship, many assumed that the study would concentrate upon explicitly incestuous relationships between fathers and daughters. While such a dynamic is an undeniable and disturbing formative presence in Western culture, to situate an overtly psychological or physically incestuous relationship as the “default position”

for father-daughter kinship only reinforces Freudian seduction theory and implies, reductively, that a daughter's literary pursuit of the paternal elegy is nothing more than hysteria. That is one reason why this study is important as an examination of both elegiac practice and feminist thought about paternal power at the end of the twentieth century. Shaw maintains that the elegy "stages swift progressions in shock and intimacy" (172), and sometimes what is most shocking about elegies is how the elegists are trapped in a web of cultural and literary sanctions against intimate expressions of affect and similarly intimate explorations of political urgency. How, then, to talk about the work of melancholia?

While the work of mourning has been explored extensively by elegy theorists and critical theorists – consider Jacques Derrida's *The Work of Mourning* – comparatively little has been written about the work of melancholia, perhaps because melancholia has been pathologized by Freud, but reified as the path to philosophical profundity from the Renaissance to the present day. As Juliana Schiesari observes in *The Gendering of Melancholia*, Freud's admission that melancholia proceeds outside the bounds of normative behaviour implies that melancholia may be construed as "a culturally prestigious condition over and beyond its own shortcomings" (38). Schiesari's study concerns the traditional split between male melancholics who are culturally exalted as intellectuals and artists, "disagreeable but justified rebel[s]" against social restrictions on affect, and female mourners whose expressions of grief or ontological questions are granted no particular cultural power (50). She hypothesizes that current psychological terminology pathologizes female melancholia as clinical depression rather than an aesthetic or philosophical position, and further, that such a diagnosis precludes women

from being culturally situated, as men can be, as sage cultural “legitimator[s]” who challenge the status quo “by virtue of [their] overdeveloped conscience” (53).

Probing the cultural blind spot in which the possibility for an expansive practice in female elegy might dwell, Schiesari asks: “why is it when a melancholic woman speaks, her loosened tongue is not granted the same extraordinary virtue and wisdom as a man’s?” (55). Consolation, in these elegies, is predicated partially upon the daughter’s choice to situate herself as a melancholic mourner. This position requires the poet to situate her elegist’s persona in an imagined position between pathologized melancholia and traditional consolation, in order to legitimate her own poetic subjectivity. Schiesari’s question seemed a timely one to apply to twentieth-century texts, and since Schiesari restricts her study to Renaissance texts, I adopt her question in order to contend that virtue and wisdom can be granted to the female elegist who speaks through productive melancholia. Schiesari affirms the need to define melancholia as potentially creative rather than pathological: “to become melancholic one would need some access to cultural production, that is, what Irigaray calls ‘access to a signifying economy’” (65) in order to “create out of the feeling of loss some valid way to articulate that loss, that painful dejection, meanfully” (66). The elegy is, among other things, such a method of cultural production.

But such cultural production is not always the place of innovation; the elegy has a long history of maintaining the cultural status quo. Certainly, the Freudian work of mourning has been interpreted in elegiac works as a system that favours male mourning over female melancholia. In *The English Elegy*, Peter Sacks suggests that the elegy parallels the Oedipal triangle that mimics mourning practice. Sacks’s deeply Freudian

reading of the dynamics of loss, longing, and substitution proposes the lost object as the absent Mother, the mourning subject as the longing Child, and the passage of time as the authoritative Father who is responsible for separating the mother and child and so introducing the child to loss. In situating the lost object as a “maternal” source of love and acceptance, Sacks rejects any possibility of ambivalence, and, indeed, he homogenizes the complexities of grief. Certainly the mourner’s longing after the lost object describes a great deal of the emotional arc of an elegy, but for such longing to go unchallenged by more equivocal feelings seems reductive. And what of the homosocial tradition of the elegy? While Shelley’s “Adonais” mourning the death of John Keats or Milton’s “Lycidas” memorializing Edward King make much of the elegists’ admiration for their dead friends, to situate Keats or King as symbols of maternal love and acceptance seems a misreading. Sacks’s triangle is also objectionable, as well as ahistorical, in its designation of the Father figure as inexorably and naturally authoritative as time itself

Despite the obvious limitations of this Oedipal triangle of mourning, Sacks has been successful in crystallizing a great deal of popularized psychoanalytical thought and critical assumptions that surround studies of the elegy. Sacks’s characterization of the lost beloved figure as inevitably maternal assumes a Western cultural perception of a feminine body as irrevocably “defeated” by time. Configuring time as a masculinized, authoritative master plays into the cultural codification of survival as “men’s work” steeped in a tradition of heroics. Working with heterosexist foundational myths, Sacks reiterates Freud’s ideas of completing “healthy” mourning through the process of substituting an artifact for the lost object, and finding consolation in the substitution.

Citing the Greek myths of Pan and Syrinx, and Apollo and Daphne, Sacks contends that as each male lover is abandoned by his female beloved, he consoles himself with a substitutive device composed of his lost beloved's transformed body: reed pipes for Pan and a laurel wreath for Apollo. This theory has a certain symbolic elegance, but its implications are not innocent. While it may be "consoling" for a male lover to play upon or wear a piece of his transformed lover's body, what does this symbolism say about the cost of such consolation? A woman's body, even when transformed into a reed or a laurel tree, remains a consumable object that a man can bend to his own desires, and call it love. Sacks elides the fact that, in both of these legends, the female figures are not consensual partners of the men. Both Syrinx and Daphne flee from their erstwhile lovers and beg the goddess to transform them into emblems of nature in order to elude the lust of their pursuers. Seen in this light, Sacks's theory of substitution as consolation is at best a bad joke; at worst, it is an elegiac theory based on an ethic of violent rapture. Is the refusal to *complete mourning based upon a lack of faith in the substitutive sign, or upon a rejection of the violence of substitution?*

Sacks's characterization of the father as the force of time is not very distant from Lacan's concept of the father as "the effect of a pure signifier" that "religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father" (Lacan 199). If the Father is situated as the overriding symbolic function of the mourning triangle, then the Father becomes the force that dictates the terms of the elegy, if not mourning itself. But Lacan skates between declaring the Father the supreme victor and profound loss, asserting "the appearance of the signifier of the Father" is linked in Freudian psychoanalysis to "the creation of the law" and ultimately "with death" (199). The results of this formulation position the father

as an object that is always already elegiac; as the father as signifier is speedily linked as both lawmaker and lost body, the father as human being is foreclosed upon with a kind of bodiless mastery. Patricia Yeager, in her article “The Father’s Breasts,” calls this notion of bodilessness, *asomia*, noting that such *asomia* acts as a societal complement to a belief in feminine *somatophobia*, a “fear of the body’s fleshiness and mutability” (9).

While Freud positions the father as the primary object of his daughter’s sexual attachment, Lacan does not emphasize any kind of daughterly role in his assertion that the living father must eventually become “the dead Father,” a figure who transcends the flesh to exist in perpetuity in his offspring’s psyche as a powerful authoritative memory. However, if a son’s reception of the dead father’s authority is part of the tensions of inheritance, how then does a daughter receive this word-of-the-dead-Father, particularly as she does not participate in the son’s symbolic murder of the Father, which “binds himself for life to the Law” (Lacan 199)? In *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, Judith Butler claims that Antigone’s sacrificial suicide “emblemate[s] a certain heterosexual fatality that remains to be read” (72). Certainly, a sense of fatality provides tension in each of these elegiac sequences; the poetic personas of the mourning daughters, particularly those of Macpherson, Atwood, and Mouré, are haunted by conventions of mourning as much as they are haunted by their losses. The desperation of daughterly self-sacrifice is never far from the surface in these poems, and each mourning persona survives only by accomplishing what Butler has termed a “melancholic turn” both away from and back to the object of loss (*Psychic* 171). Applying Butler’s melancholic turn as a tool to negotiate consolation, I will suggest that, in these poems, consolation is partially framed by a daughter’s search for subjectivity.

Psychoanalysis represents the standing model by which the father-daughter kinship has been discussed in Western culture, and both literature and psychoanalysis have drawn heavily upon the figure of Antigone as the exemplary familial mourner. George Steiner's book-length study, *Antigones*, is a testament to the popularity of the myth of Antigone as "a work of art nearer to perfection than any other produced by the human spirit," a belief strong in Western philosophy and literary criticism throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century (1). Steiner notes that Hegel, Kirkegaard, and Hölderin all produced major treatises that discussed Antigone as the most noble of heroines, and operatic and theatrical productions of the myth were performed frequently, to both popular and critical acclaim. Steiner asserts that Freud turned the twentieth century's attention to Oedipus as the foundational myth of human experience, though certainly the critical attentions of Lacan in "The Splendor of Antigone" in his *Seminar VII*, Irigaray in "The Eternal Irony of the Community" in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, and Butler in *Antigone's Claim* suggest that the early twenty-first century may have more interest in Antigone as a heroine who emblemizes "the convergence of social prohibition and melancholia," as Butler claims (80). Butler reads the Antigone myth as evidence of a centuries-old "crisis of kinship" that raises questions about a woman's physical and psychic vulnerability in performing mourning duties that have been inextricably linked to ideas of female sacrifice (*Antigone's* 24). If a sacrifice of the female self is considered proper literary mourning, then melancholia can be interpreted as a deliberate refusal of consolation and sacrifice, a rejection of a mourning practice that is too dangerous to complete. Butler also asserts that Antigone's burial of Polynices "at once reflects and institutes the equivocation of brother and father,"

that through the jointly cursed deaths, Oedipus and Polynices are “already interchangeable for her” and that her act can only “reinstitute and reelaborate that interchangeability” (61). Thus, for Butler, Antigone is a “daughterly” mourner; her determination to mourn Polynices draws energy from Antigone’s inability to mourn for Oedipus, due to his mysterious disappearance in *Oedipus at Colonus* that denies her both body and grave.

The ambivalent energies of the elegy are most clearly revealed by the genre’s investment in paradox, most specifically the double paradox that defines elegy as a practice of memory that presages forgetting, and as a practice of forgetting that requires remembrance. Shaw reminds readers that the elegy can be defined by the paradoxes of mourning enacted within the genre: “the best way to forget the dead by giving them a quiet grave is first to remember them. Only a past that has been genuinely recollected can also be forgotten” (216). If the elegy is the mechanism by which mourners “recollect” – in both senses of the word, i.e., to remember and to gather once again – then the elegy acts as an artifact in Elaine Scarry’s terminology: an object that has the power to “make and unmake the world” (22). The elegiac artifact recalls mourning as a practice in which the dead are genuinely recollected and sincerely forgotten. Shaw argues that elegy has a tendency to make myth from the force of its assertion: “By the end of the elegy, the vagueness of a mere memory has been replaced by the defining details of an authentic recollection” (215). But “authentic recollection” favours a fictive or mythic mode rather than a demotic confession; for Shaw, and for the poets that I include in this study, elegiac memory is filtered through a fictive modality. These poems may begin with an autobiographical impulse, but they quickly move beyond the merely personal to consider

the dynamics of mourning and daughterhood in the twentieth century. If “mere memory” can lead the mourner through Freud’s “healthy” mourning, then perhaps the workings of Shaw’s ironic designation of “authentic recollection” could lead the elegist through a productive melancholia to a reformed subjectivity.

Impossible mourning: Derrida and interiorization

The elegiac mode has in the past relied upon the mourner’s declaration of inconsolability to begin the poem, and to sustain the mourning arc of the poetic narrative. The movement towards consolation traditionally signals a poetic resolution that is written as an emotional resolution, situating the elegy as the literary artifact of “work of mourning.” Grief fuels the poem until the mourner discovers a reason, sometimes beyond the reaches of quotidian logic, to be consoled or at least to admit the possibility of consolation. Freud insists that any refusal of consolation will result in melancholia. The “work of mourning” requires what Freud calls a “compromise” between grieving the loss of the beloved and acknowledging the reality of her/his absence (145). If elegies are literary manifestations of the work of mourning, then consolation and Freud’s “compromise” appear analogous. If the elegy can be read by Sacks, Ramazani, and Shaw as the literary artifact of a Freudian work of mourning, then consolation is a literary construct designed to mimic the return of the literary mourner’s ego to an “uninhibited” state by a process of detachment and a “compromise” of substitution.

In contemporary critical theory, no one has debated issues of consolation and mourning as exhaustively as Jacques Derrida has. In his essay “Mnemosyne” (1986) in memory of Paul de Man, Derrida proposes that all writing about mourning reproduces the

central paradox of mourning because the elegiac “I” chafes against a “tendency to accept incomprehension,” and so refutes the completion of mourning according to the Freudian model (*Mémoires* 31). Derrida declares mourning to be equally “impossible” and “necessary,” and the mourner to be inevitably trapped between the two in a way that both creates and consumes sorrowful incomprehension (31). Mourning, in this model, both demands and denies a conscious observation of the interiorized image of the dead, and so privileges a permanently unresolved but affectionate mourning, with the mourner caught forever between the release of mourning and the maintenance work of memory. Such a pattern seems to describe Freudian melancholia, even though Derrida insists that the movement between “impossible” and “necessary” mourning puts into order “the whole rhetoric of mourning, and describes the essence of memory” (34). While Derrida’s resistance to a simple resolution of mourning seems encouragingly unlike Freud’s “free and uninhibited” ego, his use of the imagery of pregnancy to describe the interiorized image of the dead person is distinctly problematic. Focusing upon the interiorized dead as a kind of fetus of memory – “we grieve for him and bear him in us, like an *unborn child*, like a future” – Derrida describes a refusal of memory as “an *aborted* interiorization” that functions as “a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us” (35: my italics). Derrida is quick to note that these formulations, too, are part of the paradox of mourning. The fetus of mourning (living? dead? “unborn”?) functions as a representative of both future and past, and the refusal of this fetal burden casts the mourner as a rejecting or annihilating mother. Derrida’s choice to gloss mourning as a pregnancy is certainly paradoxical, given his discourse on male filiation in mourning, though his choice of abortion as a metaphor

to describe a refusal to mourn cannot help but place interiorization under the stress of an imagined but no less problematic religious and civil conception of Law.

So, between the choices of bearing the beloved dead forward into the future and rejecting the beloved dead (however “tenderly”), Derrida emphasizes that the mourner cannot choose, and so is left with only the “trace of the other” that perpetuates mourning (31). But in “By Force of Mourning,” included in 2001’s *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida advances his rhetoric of mourning to change the metaphor of the interiorized image from a fragile doomed fetus to a commanding father figure with the power of his own gaze. Writing about the dead forces the elegist to enact an “unbearable paradox of fidelity” to an interiorized image of the dead that maintains agency through the mourner’s grief:

When we say “in us,” when we speak so easily and so painfully of inside and outside, we are naming space, we are speaking of a visibility of the body, a geometry of gazes, an orientation of perspectives. *We are speaking of images.* What is only *in us* seems to be reducible to images, which might be memories or monuments, but which are reducible in any case to a memory that consists of visible scenes that are no longer anything but *images*. (*Work* 159)

This “naming space” returns to the metaphor of pregnancy, that which is “in us” and outside us at once. However, by staying focused upon “memories or monuments,” Derrida sidesteps the corporeal problem to “speak of images” instead of space. He chooses to discuss visibility instead of tactile sensation of interiority, and, in effect, to reiterate the Lacanian conception of the dead Father rather than to return to his own fetal mourning trope. According to Derrida, the inevitable reduction of the lost beloved figure to a series of images cannot help but result in a posthumous infidelity to the deceased. Such infidelity not only flouts the elegist’s obligation to serve the dead faithfully, but the elegist should be warned that this interiorized image “sees more than it is seen. The

image looks at us" (*Work* 160). Derrida invokes this interiorized gaze of the dead as a reminder of the responsibility of speaking of the dead; but from a female paternal elegist's perspective, this metaphoric gaze is a problematic replay of the male gaze, now interiorized and imbued with the authority of the dead Father.

Far from inheriting the power of the dead father's gaze to emerge as the subject of her own narrative, the daughter-elegist remains the object of the (fatherly) male gaze, now "interiorized" within her. Is this the gaze of Lacan's authoritative dead Father, watching to assure that her regard is properly filial? Derrida's fidelity to an image of the dead becomes highly complex for female elegists, for, if they are caught in a male gaze from beyond the grave, can their elegies assert any kind of female subjectivity or are they inevitably subordinate to a haunting male authority? Such formulations constitute an unbearable paradox for female elegists, not because, as Derrida suggests, the paradox of fidelity is potentially infinite, but rather because of the patriarchal imperative that such an interiorization serves. Derrida cites fidelity to the dead as the most important responsibility in writing about mourning, but Shaw's ironic assertion about "authentic recollection" that usurps "mere memory" should not be forgotten. At what point does fidelity become fidelity to a memory that no longer serves the lost beloved and, in addition, sacrifices the subjectivity of mourner? If the truth about mourning is caught between necessity and impossibility, how can this cycle of irresolvable mourning – a mourning that comes suspiciously close to Freudian melancholia – be broken? The answer may lie in the introduction of a third term to the dynamics of mourning.

The just act: inaugurated mourning

Gillian Rose proposes that the Derridean cycle of irresolvable mourning is not only an inaccurate description of the mourning dynamic, but that Derrida's insoluble binary represents an unethical model of "postmodern" mourning, or, as Rose terms it, a "despairing rationalism without reason" (7). Rose deflates Derrida's ironic aphorism "I mourn, therefore I am" as a statement that is indicative of a "static condition between desire for presence and acceptance of absence," something Derrida would not deny (11). She declares that Derrida's paradox of impossible yet necessary mourning offers little beyond a bid for tragic drama, reiterating the dynamic of the *Trauerspiel*. Working with Walter Benjamin's *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Rose emphasizes that the *Trauerspiel* represents "interminable mourning play and lament" rather than productive work, and so reproduces a dynamic that concentrates upon the "pathos of concept in the place of its logos" (64). Rose loses no opportunity to gloss the German *Trauerspiel* as literally "mourning play" and contrasts this play to her interpretation of Freud's "work of mourning." She is adamant that mourning "requires a work, a working through" which itself requires a "combination of self-knowledge and action which will not blanch before its complicities in power" (121). For Rose, the danger of the *Trauerspiel* dynamic lies in its unethical presentation of "death without determination" that presupposes "life without reason" (137). Rose calls this "aberrated" mourning, an irresolute stasis that was labeled melancholia in another era (as Schiesari points out), accompanied by a guarded attitude of intellectual despair (7). Rose asserts that mourning is necessary, and she advises an intellectual courage that she finds lacking in postmodern thought and, indeed, she implies that the concept of impossible mourning only inspires people to shirk the duties of the

mourner. The unresolved standoff between reason and love may be compelling as drama, but Rose argues that it is a dangerous substitute for actual mourning practice.

Rose cautions that Derrida's image of the mourner as pregnant with the spirit of the dead is not innocent; when "the remains of the dead are incorporated into the soul of the one who cannot mourn," the result is "a death-in-life, revenant evil" (70). Any attempt, metaphorical or theoretical, to incorporate a dead soul in a living body invokes a "baroque melancholia immersed in the world of soulless and unredeemed bodies, which affords a vision that is far more disturbing than the salvific distillation of 'spirit' or 'spectre'" (69-70). Rejecting Derrida's concept of a "spectral someone other" (1994, 7), Rose offers "inaugurated" mourning (70), a model that places the "just act" of mourning at the core of the mourning project. She suggests that the mourner's task is not to transgress the civic law that restricts mourning practices, but rather to perform a "just act" of mourning that will *become* the law that readmits mourning women into the social order as civic subjects. Situating the work of mourning as socially productive and culturally necessary work, Rose suggests that mourning women are neither "transgressors" nor ironic counterpoints to patriarchal law, but rather women who "reinvent the political life of the community" with their "delegitimate acts of tending the dead" (35).

Upon the completion of a "just act," the mourner returns to the city as a community and as a social organization: "If all meaning is mourning, and mourning (or absence) must become our norm (or presence) for there to be morning (dawning or future), and *not* interminable dying, then all meaning and all mourning belong to the city, to the polis" (103). Rose emphasizes mourning as that which bears meaning forward,

rather than remaining static as the speaking sign of an unjust death. For Rose, mourning is always active, always becoming. The mourner is one who makes meaning of death, grief, and the loss of the beloved, not only for herself, but for the larger community; the project of making meaning out of mourning finds purchase in the continuing health of the mourner and, by extension, the health of the citizenry.

Rose does not ignore the trope of the mourner as a voyager who is forever altered by the rigours of travel, but she emphasizes the voyager's return to the city – that is, to making meaning of mourning – as part of the “just act.” She cautions against resisting the imperative to mourn:

[...] to be deprived of, or to refuse, the work of mourning has *political consequences*. It tempts us to oppose pure, gratuitous love to the injustice of the world; to see ourselves as suffering but good, and the city as evil. [...] This opposing of our cherished good to public ill denies the third term which gives meaning to both judgements – the just city and the just act, the just man and the just woman. (103)

Given her emphasis upon a need for justice, it will come as no surprise that Rose defies all derivations of melancholia, advocating instead for “the reassessment of reason” (11-12). It is difficult to discern whether Rose proposes mourning as a function of reason, or whether she believes that mourning is necessarily contiguous to meaning. For Rose, as for Freud, the completion of mourning is vital for the maintenance of a civil society, though Rose's civil society is profoundly concerned with political responsibility that may be attained through balancing the forces of reason, ethics, and justice: “Completed mourning acknowledges the creative involvement of action in the configuration of power and law: it does not find itself unequivocally in a closed circuit which exclusively confers logic and power” (11). For Rose, the resistance to a closed circuit of logic and power with

the introduction of the concept of mourning as a “just act” are the keys to completing the process of mourning and to maintaining a balanced society.

Rose’s concept of inaugurated mourning as a political position invokes the *anagnorisis* dynamic: the “just act” as a discovery with the potential to revitalize the political life of the elegy. The search for consolation and a redefined subjectivity in the female-written paternal elegy must begin with the elegist considering the urgency of her mourning practice in the confines of elegiac convention. An examination of the elegy as a revelatory artifact must consider not only the power of the elegy’s metaphysical devices, but also its ability to function as “protest against arbitrary power” (Rose 26). While any woman who writes about her father’s death is already defying the “closed, hierarchal and patriarchal nuclear bond” (Boose 8), some elegies are more politically conscious than others. If melancholia can be a tool with which female elegists work for a feminist political consciousness, then their elegies, as “just acts,” are political works.

But considering the elegy under Rose’s terms is perhaps easier said than done, particularly if part of the approach requires a consideration of the “work of melancholia.” Like a true Freudian, Rose denies that melancholia has any political agency, even though her concept of mourning as a “just act” describes precisely the kind of “melancholic turn” that Butler links explicitly to the establishment of subjectivity (171). In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler suggests that melancholia precedes and even creates the conditions for mourning. For Butler, subjectivity is always a social condition:

The subject who might grieve is implicated in a loss of autonomy that is mandated by linguistic and social life; it can never produce itself autonomously. From the start, this ego is other than itself; what melancholia shows is that only by absorbing the other as oneself does one become something at all. (195-96)

If Rose's theory is correct, the more the daughter pursues mourning as a "just act," the more she may present her paternal elegy as a political defiance against the narrow terms of legitimation. The elegies of Page, Macpherson, Atwood, Tostevin, Carson, and Mouré are united in their quest to prove their love, and their losses, as legitimate and free of social and cultural pathology.

Gender and genre: Canadian female elegies

Shaw points out that modern elegies are characterized by their "paradox of veridiction," in which truth claims about the lost beloved or about the affect of the mourner are designedly undermined by the elegist's "self-critical style." This paradox of veridiction may be seen in the ways that the elegy "bears the stamp of truth by turning upon itself, allowing the poet to revise his most cherished premises" (170). Shaw asserts that this emphasis upon the inability of the mourner to discern the truth, even as s/he lays claim to it, results in more than "just a war of words" – a hallmark of modernist poetry – but that it yields "an antiphonal style that honours the force of resistance and the undertow of skepticism in an elegy, while using other devices to lift the poetry above internal strife and the perplexed persistence of despair" (178). If the dynamic of the *Trauerspiel* echoes in Shaw's identification of "the perplexed persistence of despair," is there a search for justice in that divided consciousness? The paternal elegy as a daughter's "just act" is defined by what the daughter demands of her own subjectivity, as well as by what the work of melancholia demands of the daughter.

In the following chapters, I will concentrate on how individual Canadian female poets risk a redefinition of feminine filial piety by investigating negotiations of female

subjectivity in paternal elegies. I focus on reading the fundamentals of mourning and melancholia through the poems, with an emphasis on how each poem challenges the genre as it both mourns the father and criticizes him. In declaring the poems as “the work of melancholia” remade as a political quest for female subjectivity, I question the elegy as a kind of paternal inheritance. Derrida’s contention that mourning inevitably involves an “unbearable paradox of fidelity” to the interiorized image of the dead pinpoints a central concern in this study: can the female-written paternal elegy escape that “unbearable paradox,” and, if so, how?

The kind of close reading that I perform on each of the texts traces the poets’ engagement with, and resistance to, elegiac convention, particularly as these tensions magnify Derrida’s “unbearable paradox of fidelity” into an unbearable paradox of genre. Fidelity, like filial piety, proves itself to be malleable in these poems, because the daughter personas and the poets who write them are relentless in their search for an elegiac subjectivity that legitimates their grief, their anger, and their belief in the “just act” of mourning. I read each poet’s texts through the work of critical and psychoanalytical theorists in order to debate the limitations and possibilities of the female elegiac subjectivity that grows from mourning the father in a literary artifact.

The chapters have been put in order according to two organizing principles: chronology and political audacity. But another order has emerged in the writing, and both principles invite a certain amount of dismantling when considered against the dare that each poet assumes within the text. Who can say which is more audacious: P.K. Page’s satire of phallic tropes in “War Lord in the Early Evening” or Lola Lemire Tostevin’s project of stealing the paternal name? If such comparisons are odious, then I invite the

reader to, instead, follow the development of the demanding female mourner throughout these texts, or note the way each poet (with the exception of Mouré) situates the daughter character as simultaneously obedient and disobedient to cultural norms of daughterhood.

I begin by exploring the father as metaphor for a cultural authority that is problematically heroic and frustratingly liminal in the poetry of P.K. Page, first in early poems that feature the father as a rigidly abject body, and then in a series of quasi-autobiographical elegies, culminating in her poem, "Father." Page writes the father as a series of militarized metaphors, exploring a shadowy father figure as a body and psyche traumatized by bellicosity, rendered vulnerable by the gaze of his silent daughter. These poems, written over three decades, move from the mythical father to the individual father, as Page herself strays (albeit temporarily) from her high modernist dependence upon the Eliotean "objective correlative" to attempt poems that traffic in autobiography. I regard the negotiations of power and Freudian Oedipal desire in these poems, from early attempts as figuring the heroic father to later attempts to negotiate the daughter as the father's inheritor, and consider the poet's de Manteau "autobiographical defacement" of the watching daughter's persona. In Page's shift from a distanced poetic narrator to a more demanding first-person daughterly persona who names herself her father's fellow-officer and "axeman," I read the beginning of a female paternal elegy that criticizes the father for his distance from his daughter.

In *Gynesis: Configurations of Women and Modernity*, Alice Jardine reminds us that the "woman-in-effect" emerges from patriarchal tropes, and cannot always be freed from the system that she criticizes (48). Neither Page nor Macpherson is immune to the kind of miming and rejecting of inherited patriarchal structures that Jardine emphasizes,

but they begin to situate melancholia as a creative position rather than a pathological one. From Page's configuration of the demanding mourner as "axeman" for her father, I move to identify the daughter figures of Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman and Other Poems* and *Welcoming Disaster* as melancholically subversive figures that both embrace and refuse Kristevan abjection. In both books, Macpherson's adamant mourners search for a mourning practice that challenges the symbology of the Bible and of Romance literature. The potential violence of the systems of authority against which both Page and Macpherson write suggest that the authority of the (literary) state is formidable, but both poets create defiant daughter figures that enact a rigorous search for subjectivity outside the proscribed patriarchal belief in transcendence. Macpherson's paternal alchemist figure in *Welcoming Disaster* predicts the failure of the Orphean journey for the grieving daughter. The daughter's position as a stubbornly abject mourner reinforces her potential as a Kristevan "subject-in-process" and Macpherson's position in Canadian literary history as Northrop Frye's protégée cannot be ignored as part of her struggle for poetic subjectivity. My examination of Macpherson's poetry regards her partial consolation in the failure of mythology as a Freudian "compromise" mixed with a hope for Kristevan subjectivity born from the lessons of abjection.

The metaphor of the Other as a figuration of mourning that leads the mourner to eventual elegiac transformation is a major feature in book-length poetic sequences by Margaret Atwood and Lola Lemire Tostevin, the focus of chapter three. In *Morning in the Burned House* and *Cartouches* respectively, Atwood and Tostevin negotiate the terms of female consolation, and do so largely by rejecting both the Orphean descent and the Derridean paradox of fidelity. Both poets resist the "completion" of mourning in order to

question the daughterly duty of the female elegist, in a self-conscious inquiry into the elegy as both celebratory and transformative. The daughter as a watching figure returns as Atwood explores the void of melancholia as a geographic and epistemological space. Her ironic inquiry into the limitations of the body moves towards a belief in transformation that replaces consolation as the elegist's prime consideration, and the text seeks ways for mourning to turn into "morning," as Rose has suggested. Tostevin rewrites consolation as transformation by considering the responsibilities of the wise daughter as a resurrective figure. Tostevin moves from mourning an individual father to debating Derrida as the symbolic father, and engages in a debate over the ability of the daughter to inherit "the body of her name" as a feminist gesture that challenges both filiation and the Lacanian symbolic order.

No study of the female-written elegy would be complete without a text that questions the Antigonal imperative for the daughter to sacrifice herself in order to legitimate her mourning. In chapter four, I examine Anne Carson's "The Anthropology of Water" as it proposes the pursuit of knowledge as a displacement of daughterly sacrifice. Carson, well known as a classicist, proves herself to be more Sophoclean than Freudian when she rewrites the Antigone myth to repudiate the demands of daughterly duty. Emphasizing the poetics of philosophical inquiry as it comments upon the vicissitudes of daughterly devotion, Carson employs the metaphor of a pilgrimage in order to test the tension between melancholia and consolation in a daughter's paternal elegy. The narrator's puckish riddles keep consolation at bay, despite her hard-won elegiac subjectivity. Even as Carson uses the metaphor of the pilgrimage to suggest a strong connection between epistemology and mourning, this prose poem struggles with

Derrida's contention that a willing acceptance of the incomprehension of corporeal death relinquishes one's responsibility for sorrow. "The Anthropology of Water" is perhaps the most overtly sorrowful of the elegiac texts offered by this study, for the consolation that Carson's narrating persona pursues is not just elusive: it is jeopardized by her willingness to ask questions but not answer them.

With emphasis on Gillian Rose's insistence that mourning is a just and inevitably political act, in chapter five, I discuss the clash of elegiac convention as a patriarchal construct with the "furious" bid for feminist subjectivity made by Erin Mouré's poetry. Mouré's Governor-General's Award-winning collection, *Furious*, is not strictly an elegiac sequence in the manner of the other texts of this study. The father upon whom the Fury of the text vents her anger is largely symbolic, though Mouré writes him into several human incarnations. However, his patriarchal stance is not mythic, like Macpherson's symbolic father, but, rather, Mouré's father figure can be found in the politicized power of language, most clearly designated as the keeper of "the civic house of memory" into which the narrator is refused entry (*Furious* 91).

Throughout *Furious*, the father figure is marked by his absence as a character and his overwhelming presence as a social and literary structure. That absence may be read as a force of oppression: a metaphoric masculinity behind the poetic structures of defiance. Mouré uses *Furious* to probe the absence that surrounds questions of female citizenship and sorrow, and, ultimately, to spur textual challenges to the tradition of sacrificial mourning. Mouré uses her text to explore feminist possibilities that denaturalize the written body in order to challenge the assumed subjectivity of the male body, and she begins this challenge by pointing out elegiac convention as an oppressive rhetoric that

expropriates sorrow. Mouré and Rose both pinpoint anxious attentiveness to language and the movements of public sorrow as the key to political change (“Polis” 202). Reading *Furious* through Rose’s theory is, as Mouré says about her poetic practice, “not easy. And it’s anxious. And it takes attentiveness” (“Polis” 203). My aim is to filter Mouré’s politicized subjectivity through Rose’s notions of just mourning, and to see how the “difficulties and injustices” of patriarchal social structure are filtered through Mouré’s politicized refusal of consolation. I read Mouré’s *Furious* through Rose’s “perennial anxiety” to suggest that politically disobedient melancholia can, in fact, reinvigorate the political life of a community.

What happens to the daughter’s notions of paternal authority when she assumes the authority of the elegy? As the daughter figures of each poem become more demanding of themselves as subjects, they are less defined by the object of mourning, suggesting that the efficacy of the daughter’s paternal elegy is predicated on its definition of consolation and its opportunities for subjectivity. Boose reminds us that father-daughter kinship “is locked in a conflicted text of desire and sanction” that is “recomplicated [by] asymmetries of age, authority and gender privilege” (46). The daughter, bereft of both marriage bond and inheritance, is the family outsider in Boose’s view, perfectly positioned to consider the various paternal personas available in Western literature and critical theory: Father as Freudian social authority, as Lacanian lawgiver, as Kristevan “stern and loving imaginary father,” or as a Butlerian Oedipus who demands “promiscuous obedience” from the daughter (*Antigone’s* 60). In elegizing the father without resorting to encomium, memorializing the father without sacrificing daughterly subjectivity, and thinking critically about daughterhood within the social order of

mourning the father as individual and as social structure, each of these daughterly elegists discover an elegiac subjectivity, a way that a female poet can represent herself “as a subject who is the subject of her loss” (Schiesari 65). A daughter’s elegy may be considered a literary artifact that sets the work of mourning against the libidinal politics of paternal authority, including the daughter-mourner’s desire to delineate, and perhaps dismantle, the fidelity demanded by the father’s death. These paternal elegies practice a felicitous infidelity to the Father as law, and practice an *anagnorisis* of skepticism, that is, a paradoxically critical take on mourning and filial duty that seeks to enlarge the capacity of the elegy to speak women’s experience of loss, while redefining a subjectivity that is not dependent on paternal authority or inheritance.

Chapter One

“Hid from his daughter:” P.K. Page and the Work of Melancholia

The darkness hid
a general toying with a broken water pistol.

Hid from his daughter, frail organza issue
of his now failing loin
the battle done:
so much militia routed in the man.

P.K. Page, “War Lord in the Early Evening”

The contention that women’s paternal elegies may be read as the work of melancholia rather than the work of mourning is inevitably haunted by a gendered reading of melancholia itself. But no poems could be further, in style or tone, from the “hysterical” and intense paternal elegies of confessional American poets like Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton than those of P.K. Page, a Canadian poet revered for her reserved sensibility, her refined spiritual sense, and her command of nuanced metaphor. Page’s poetry occupies a specifically gendered and curiously careful position in the canon of Canadian modernism. In her study of Page’s inclusion in, and resistance to, gendered modernism, Nancy Paul analyzes the ways that men’s “moral agency” victimizes the female characters in Page’s poetry (122), and concludes that Page herself may be “self-consciously following in a male tradition, while simultaneously purporting a feminine modesty in her public statements” (130). Paul’s identification of this gender split in Page’s work illuminates the poet’s reluctance to limit her work along ideological lines, but I propose that as she follows men’s “moral agency,” Page accesses the male rhetoric of melancholia, and eventually uses it to investigate the daughter’s duty in service to the

father figure. This chapter will regard how Page positions father and daughter figures in her work, and moves towards a discovery of melancholia as a tool of the demanding mourning daughter who first functions as a disturbing observer, and then begins to demand her father's attention in later, more specifically elegiac, work.

Writing in the post-war period of the 1940s and 1950s, Page situates the male body as debilitated by war and rendered vulnerable by its bellicose history to changing views of heroism and masculinity. During the 1960s and 1970s, her poems begin to question the place of military authority as a metaphor within the family romance, and finally, in her "autobiographical" poems of the 1980s and 1990s, she begins to confront her own deceased father and question his paternal legacy of authority and knowledge. Viewing this group of poems as a suite of paternal elegies, I will show how Page's early poems have rhetorical access to the heightened style of male melancholia that Juliana Schiesari identifies, and how, in this mode, Page writes the mythic father as "a cold man" beyond the reaches of affect. The later poems present a more familial argument about father-daughter kinship, arguing for greater subjectivity for the daughter, and searching for consolation into the bargain. Page uncovers the military father as a fit subject for a melancholic daughter's poetic exploration, and the tensions of father-daughter kinship as fit subjects for poetic dramatization.

As early as 1954, in his response to Page's first full collection, *As Ten, As Twenty*, Desmond Pacey makes special note of her "sensitive woman's response to the world of want, war and fascism" (167). Despite this early identification of Page's concern with the dynamics of power in a bellicose world, critics have not focused upon her military male figures, though several have noted the presence of difficult men in her poetry. In 1971,

A.J.M. Smith noted Page's propensity to feature "selfish, isolated, lonely men" (19). Twenty-five years later, Nancy Paul cites Page's concern with the "mineral-hard resistance of men who shut themselves up in their egoism" (122), referring to these figures as "fisted male[s]" to which Page responds as an "Apollonian shaping artist" (130). As Page's career passes the fifty-year mark, we can note the early appearance of these "fisted males" as aging men who struggle against transformation, initially written with ironic distance by Page. However, her more recent, and admittedly more autobiographical, work frequently situates this struggle within a military and paternal ethos. Contemplating the triangulation of power, gender and duty filtered through ideals of military authority, Page's background as the daughter of a decorated military officer suggests that she has an insider's perspective on what military honour might mean within a family, and what mourning the militarized body may entail.

In "War Lord in the Early Evening," a father and a daughter stand together in a formal garden, the man a retired general attempting to control the generative space of the garden, the silent girl watching his every move. Readers of Page's poetry will be familiar with the military man and his daughter as figures that recur over a number of years in her work, and the setting of the formal garden in the evening offers a pastoral atmosphere while maintaining the tone of a nocturne. Page is an accomplished visual artist as well as a poet, and her drawing "Night Garden" illustrates and lends its name to a section of *The Hidden Room*, volume one of Page's 1997 anthology of collected poems. Several critics have remarked upon Page's use of the formal garden as a site of physical realizations that presage change (Namjoshi 25; Sullivan 36), but the "night garden" in Page's work is also a site of strange growth and unusual transformation. In "War Lord in the Early Evening,"

the general's wilted authority is observed by his daughter, even though her gaze is impaired by the darkness that hides the general's "broken water pistol," the phallic metaphor for his "now failing loin" (*Hidden Room* 2 84-85).¹

This poem, with others by Page that feature the figure of the officer-father and his observant daughter, enacts a familial drama that questions the place of militarized masculinity within the cultural paradigm of father-daughter kinship. Showcasing the relationship between paternal vulnerability and the daughterly gaze, Page's officer-fathers act as hyperconscious representatives of regulated and socialized patriarchy, and the daughters as disturbing observers of the fathers' performances of commanding masculinity as a metaphor for paternal law. These poems show the aging officers estranged from civilian domesticity and thwarted by their own investment in military exigency. Stripped of command by age and debilitation, the officer figure is bereft of the status granted by his uniform, but still reliant upon the authority granted by such status. When Page writes "the battle done / so much militia routed in the man," does she mean that the military ethos has defeated him, or that the military ethos is routed through him, i.e. that he is its conduit? How might we read the "routed" father, hidden by darkness, in terms of a daughter's work of melancholia?

In many ways, Page resists the autobiographical elements of the paternal elegy, shying away from its confessionality and its sexual politics. But Page is interesting as a daughterly elegist precisely because of her resistance to the elegy. Her impulse to critique paternal militarism cannot be effaced, especially considering her frequent return to the material over a span of six decades. These poems lean towards the elegiac while refusing to articulate a complete admission of sorrow, a committed lament for the dead, or a

passionate search for consolation. They do not appear to pursue the Freudian work of mourning, completed when the ego attains freedom from the lost beloved; instead, they complicate the scenario with daughterly self-reproach that masks the sublimated faults of the father. Such self-reproaches are most evident in the daughter's migraine headaches in "Portrait of Marina" (*HR1* 72-73), in the daughter as the "frail organza issue" of the general's "failing loin" in "War Lord in the Early Evening" (*HR2* 85), and in the daughter as "a blank space in the air" in "Voyager" (*HR1* 183-84), but the daughter's first-person narrative in "Father" objects to being "crunched in a tiny space" with only his "dread of [her] grey gaze" as a weapon (*HR1* 147). Far from enacting any Freudian abandonment and devaluing of the lost object, the work performed by Page's melancholia, moving from self-reproach to indictment of the father, is more in line with that which Schiesari proposes, the poet as "disagreeable but justified rebel" (50). Eschewing the social limitations on immodest "exposure" of her own view of the world (Freud 147), the poet debates the need to reshape the dominant order, manifested in these poems as self-serving father and observant daughter. Page's melancholic iterations of the failing paternal body, complicated by military rigor, are as obsessive and as compelling as any figuration of an elegiac "lost beloved."

In order to consider these poems as elegies, I have subsumed Page's resistance to elegy as part of the "memorable puzzlings" over loss that Ramazani predicts. This situates the poems (and my reading of them) within the paradox that autobiography presents within the elegy, what W. David Shaw calls the "paradox of veridiction," or "lyric anxiety [as] a mark of truth" (147). In struggling against writing the father, Page synthesizes the elegiac mode with the melancholic and writes him again and again.

Though her refusal of autobiography, she reinforces the power of veracity within her poetry. By struggling to discuss a legacy of knowledge, she debates the “unbearable paradox of fidelity” as it manifests in father-daughter kinship. Page’s poems are elegiac in their struggle to reclaim an image of the father as lost beloved, to render him in a stable, fixed image, and to finally have the consolation of writing. In the process, Page traps herself (as daughter and poet) in the *Trauerspiel* dynamic, glossing melancholia as a joyless “mourning play,” in which the elegist is forever shunted between the desire for love and the desire for knowledge. Returning to the site of the paternal body as the place of labour, Page moves towards the work of melancholia, puzzling over how to interpret the magnitude of loss.

While from a Freudian perspective, the work of melancholia is supposed to be completed when the melancholic establishes herself as “superior to the object” (160), Schiesari suggests instead that the melancholic’s work is to establish herself as the “legitimator...of the dominant order by virtue of [her] overdeveloped conscience” (53). The reluctance of Page’s elegiac mode is bounded by the aesthetics of Canadian modernism, and negotiates its way through changing ideas of masculinity, literary daughterhood, and injunctions against poetic autobiography in mid-century Canada. What manifests as deeply melancholic in these poems is Page’s knowledge that her labour of longing after the father is endless. She seeks not consolation but, rather, a language in which to speak clearly about what is hidden by ideas about cultural masculinity in this era.

Certainly Page is not the only Canadian female modernist who was attempting to elegize, or criticize, the mythic or personal paternal body as early as the 1950s. Dorothy

Livesay's poem, "Lament," in memory of her father John Frederick Bligh Livesay, was published in her 1956 *Selected Poems*. Phyllis Webb's identically titled "Lament" also appeared in a volume of verse published in 1956, *Even Your Right Eye*. While the shared title of the poems recalls the tradition of female lament, Livesay's poem works within the bounds of elegiac convention by producing a traditional modernist encomium for the dead father, while Webb's philosophical inquiry into existence is more melancholic than mournful. Livesay's "Lament" parses the elegiac tradition with due modernist diligence, using the father's hand as a metonym for the enormity of her loss. Livesay's first-person narrator declares her sorrow, laments her loss, and ultimately finds consolation through an image of pastoral renewal: "As bird still breathes, and stream runs clear – / So your hand; your dead hand, my dear" (231).

In contrast, Webb's "Lament" is not an elegy so much as a poem marking the sorrow of a world in which "everything is wrong." The poet speaks through a disillusionment with, but metaphoric investment in, the authority of what Webb calls "the troublesome lie" and the "benediction of disease," rejecting the focus on a specific beloved figure to explore the melancholic "virtue" of "intense personal unworth" (40). The reflexivity of Webb's poem, as an indictment against writing poetry or maintaining the status quo, is at once ironic and desperate. The speaker "crav[es] the resolution of the earth" and seeks "that virtuous land / where one can die without a second birth" but knows "it is not here." She ends by pointing back to a lugubrious poetic tradition that includes elegiac convention, the return to writing "lonely poems in / the shape of a frugal sadness," forever longing after the "charm[ed] circle" of apotheosis.

As examples of poems written by Canadian female modernists, these “Laments” display two major branches of the modernist aesthetic: a poem of personal experience filtered through an imagist sensibility, and a poem of social commentary. Not coincidentally, the shared title points to the very different ways that grief was made visible in poems of mid-century in Canada: as political despair or personal loss. But only personal loss, as written in Livesay’s “Lament,” had recourse to the psychoanalytical trope of “the work of mourning” and subsequent consolation. Pauline Butling points to Webb’s “Lament” as a “typically anguished lyric” that explores an “ironic awareness of a performative and constructed subjectivity” (8). While Livesay’s poem is clearly an elegiac address to the lost beloved in the person of her father, Webb’s poem probes the melancholic failure of the elegiac tradition in the twentieth century, “active fear” and the “suicide of love” (40). The lyric metonymy of Livesay’s “Lament” avoids melancholia by strict adherence to elegiac convention, while the fragmenting melancholia of Webb’s “Lament” probes the rhetoric of mourning and doubts its efficacy in the modern world. Although it would be difficult to find a father figure in Webb’s “Lament,” the poem addresses grief through the complication of profound ambivalence, and finds that neither “resolution” nor “benediction” provides consolation for the speaker or the reader. The melancholic position that Webb adopts in the poem anticipates the movement of the female elegy towards an inquiring mourner, even as the inquiring mourner develops in poems that may appear as traditional and imagist as Livesay’s “Lament.”

Reading Page’s poems within these parameters of obedient mourning and fragmenting melancholia, it becomes immediately apparent that Page’s early access to male melancholia tempts her to assert a mournful daughter’s point of view from that

same melancholic perspective. A good deal of her puzzling over the parameters of the daughterly paternal elegy can be found in her resistance to simplifying the implications of father-daughter kinship through encomium or accusation. Instead, Page begins in a mythic mode, exploring the mortality and vulnerability of the male body in the early poems “This Cold Man” and “Portrait of Marina,” and leans heavily upon elegiac convention despite her “impersonal” tone. However, as she begins to see the debilitated father as a specifically military figure in “War Lord in the Early Evening,” Page combines her use of elegiac convention with doubt about that convention’s ability to examine the tensions of father-daughter kinship. Her horrific-humorous portrayal of the father’s impotence in that poem marks a turning point for her melancholic explorations of the elegiac mode. Later in her career, Page engages in debate with her dead father by examining her own experience as a daughter of a military officer in poems like “Voyager,” “Father,” and sections of her poetic sequence, “Alphabetical.” With the exception of the early poems, these poems have received little critical attention. The poems do not form a sequence, but rather function as reiterations that leave a trail through Page’s work that we can read from 1945 to 2002. The earlier poems focus on a militarized but now debilitated male body, and later poems on more specific, quasi-autobiographical kinship between a father and daughter. The distinction between the two is important, as it denotes a change from Page’s melancholic “high modernist” distanced tone to a more fragmented and inquisitive female melancholia, a “working” of melancholia that, like Webb’s “Lament,” begins to doubt the efficacy of the “charmed circle” proposed by elegiac convention.

To engage with autobiographical material within the confines of elegiac convention demands attention to the balance of what Paul de Man calls the “contractual agreement” of autobiography and what Shaw identifies as the “paradox of veridiction.” While female twentieth-century elegists do not, as a rule, style themselves as rustic swains, there is a degree to which elegiac convention usurps the autobiographical impulse, and re-makes the mourner’s sorrow, and the loss of the beloved, as mythological in scope. Despite the forays by poets like Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton into the elegiac confessional mode in mid-century American poetry, the elegy’s attachment to the dead relies upon mythological convention, even when such mythologies have been reconfigured as personal symbols. Shaw calls the impulse for the elegy to wrap itself in truth and fiction in equal measure the elegiac “paradox of veridiction,” i.e., the author’s vacillation between mythic/fictional figurations and “truth-telling” in the elegy. Shaw notes that modernist elegies are characterized by an “antiphonal style” (170) that engages in an ongoing debate about love and loss, characterizing a modernist’s “self-critical style that bears the stamp of truth by turning upon itself, allowing the poet to revise his most cherished premises” (Shaw 170). In modernism, the elegist can explore the verities and the difficulties of loss while refusing to commit to a single “truth,” maintaining “a respect for the conjunction of the many forces of life” as it “honours the force of resistance and the undertow of skepticism in an elegy” (178).

Page’s considerable resistance to having her poems read autobiographically demands, among other things, a definition of the terms of autobiography as they are problematized by the elegiac impulse. In “Autobiography as De-Facement,” with

Wordsworth's "Prelude" in mind, Paul de Man insists that poetry may be read as autobiography, particularly poetry that speaks through the figure of prosopopeia, the "voice-from-beyond-the-grave" (77). De Man proposes that the poet creates a mask through which to speak the autobiographical, and so "de-face" it with her diction, mythological underpinnings, or other literary devices. By examining the "faces" or "masks" (de Man 76) that Page employs in her construction of fathers and daughters, we can enter into Shaw's "paradox of veridiction" to consider the force of autobiography and skepticism in the poems. In moving from mythical father figures to figures that are grounded autobiographically, Page de-faces the autobiographical impulse of the early poems, but not so much that we cannot see the similarities between the petulant mariner of "Portrait of Marina," the retired general of "War Lord in the Early Evening," and the perpetually distracted commander of "Voyager." As Page pursues the officer-father figure through several poems over forty years, the daughter moves from absence to silent presence to a formidable opponent for the father, while the father becomes less mythical but less conceivable on the page, in a poetic trade-off analogous to de Man's "substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject" (70). If we read de Man's "substitutive exchange" against Alice Jardine's contention that "[w]oman – whether incarnated, banned from the Temple, or incarcerated in the oedipal family – has occupied the space of substitution on the paradigmatic axis of the metaphor" (32), we might regard the daughter's "substitution" of herself as the father's executor (in every sense of the word) as a bid for subjectivity.

As the subjectivity of the daughter figure gains strength in Page's poems, the father figure becomes "interiorized," in de Man's terms, within a text through which the

poet can declare herself to be the subject of her own poetry (70). De Man is quick to point out that this understanding of self as subject is necessarily limited, but that autobiography follows the trail of a regulated “comprehension” of the self. Page does not claim complete understanding of the elegiac self as subject, though she does establish the beginnings of an elegiac subjectivity in the final officer-father poems. Whether or not the poems “reveal reliable self-knowledge” (de Man 71) is less important than whether they move towards a reliable subjectivity.

Still, melancholia dominates Page’s father-daughter poems, and it feeds a dynamic that resists closure even as the daughter demands more of her own subjectivity within the elegy. Page’s officer-father poems act out de Man’s theory of the “impossibility of closure and of totalization” (71) by consistently trapping the daughter figures between the impossibility of earning the father’s attention and the necessity for subjectivity to be formed out of paternal attention. Adding to the frustration is de Man’s warning that “the reader becomes the judge” of the figure of the author within the poem, particularly “verifying the authenticity of the [author’s] signature and the consistency of the signer’s behaviour, the extent to which he respects or fails to honour the contractual agreement he has signed” (71-72). This aspect of judging the work’s autobiographical “authenticity” is one reason for Page to eschew the implications of autobiography, or at least be very careful about using the term. But questions of authenticity haunt these poems outside of the strict terms of the unspoken “contractual agreement” of autobiography, and such concerns contribute to the “antiphonal” modernist style of the poems. Is the father authentically masculine in the terms of the era? Is he authentically paternal, and authoritative? By turns, issues of authenticity include the poet. Is she an

authentic subject in her own text? Is the love (or anger) that she expresses for the father “legitimate,” as Judith Butler suggests? Is she “honouring the contractual agreement” between father and daughters?

In an interview with Sandra Djwa in 1996, Page emphasizes her tendency to “stay out of domestic politics,” a strategy she learned during her childhood “as an army brat” (42). Page juxtaposes domestic politics to “international politics” in her next sentence, discussing her interest in socialist issues in the 1940s. But domestic politics of another kind slips into Page’s figuration of the officer as father, a politics that does not depend solely upon her distanced poetic stance or her relatively recent willingness to use autobiographical material in her poetry, but as it may be used to question military convention as a marker of masculinity. In this context, the autobiographical figure of Major-General Lionel Page acts as a palimpsest, rather than a model; it provides a lens through which we may read Page’s negotiation of masculine power, familial authority, and literary daughterhood in the years following World War II. Major-General Page was a command veteran of both World Wars who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for meritorious service in combat. It was in his service in the Great War that we can locate Lionel Page’s early influence upon his daughter’s writing life. While stationed in France during the First World War, Page’s father, then a lieutenant-colonel with Lord Strathcona’s Horse, composed a series of didactic children’s poems that he mailed home. By 1918, Rose Page had illustrated the instructional verses and bound them together in a rag-paper book for the amusement and edification of their daughter, Patricia Kathleen, who was two years old at the time. Porcépic Press published the poems in 1991 as

Wisdom from Nonsense Land, with an Afterword by Page in which she constructs her father as a soldier-poet:

I imagine my father, in the trenches, scribbling cautionary verses in a notebook for his new daughter, whom he barely knew; and to amuse his young wife whose three married years had been years of acute anxiety. He would have written them quickly, as he wrote verses all his life, when the fancy took him. And he would have known as well as I do that some of the rhymes were less than perfect and that he was reaching for the meter now and again. (*Wisdom* n.p.)

While the cautionary rhymes in *Wisdom from Nonsense Land* do not suggest that Lionel Page was a trench poet in the tradition of Owen or Sassoon, his talents are of less concern than his actions. His decision to write and send such poems home from the French trenches could hardly have dissuaded his daughter from associating her father with both writing and war. Page's officer-father may be read as a figure through which Page criticizes agonistic culture, but, more importantly for Canadian criticism, the officer represents a changing paradigm of masculinity and paternity filtered through the abjection of his aging body. Embodying the disturbance of modernism and bellicose culture upon normative nineteenth-century masculinity, Page's daughters gaze at the father figure in an attempt to see beyond the cultural darkness that surrounds him. Page's poems provide us with snapshots of father-daughter kinship read through the cultural narratives of the returning soldier and the apprehension of the female gaze upon the military body. Officer-fathers appear in multiple manifestations throughout Page's poetic corpus; though varied in personality and circumstance, they are united in their struggle to balance kinship and command.

Of course, all attempts to consider autobiographical material in Page's poetry require an engagement with contradiction, for she emphasizes that a dependence on

autobiographical material can be aesthetically limiting (“Entranced” 115). However, Page has also identified the autobiographical basis for several of her later poems, “Father,” “Alphabetical,” and “Voyager” in particular (“Biographical” 36, “Entranced” 126, “That’s me” 63). Her claims are not so much contradictory as reminiscent of de Man’s rhetoric of autobiography as a “de-facing” mask worn by the poet in order to inscribe derivations of her/his life. Page’s discussion of “the tyranny of subjectivity” in her 1969 essay “Questions and Answers” (*Glass* 191) is echoed in her poetic argument for multiple perspectives in her poem, “The Selves” (*HRI* 109). Douglas Freake contextualizes Page’s multiple selves as a function of ironic distance that eventually, and progressively, emphasizes “the discovery of a self that is related to the universe on levels that the heightened and intensified consciousness that poetry itself makes possible” (98). For Freake, Page’s notion of the multiple self is “a source of fragmentation and loss” that is also “a blessing” (94), but we may also choose to read such a fragmentation as part of the work of melancholia, with Page acting as Schiesari’s “disagreeable but justified rebel” against a unifying vision (Schiesari 50). Certainly, autobiographical material like Page’s military daughterhood, far from being limiting, is as subject to be employed as poetic device as any distancing trope. In a 1999 interview, she emphasizes how the Second World War influenced her development as a poet:

I had been flung from the protected world in which I grew up to Montreal in wartime – a culture of two languages and sophisticated people. On my own. I was twenty-two. I was seeing many things I’d never seen before: stenographers, typists, and the effect of the war on all these people. I was fascinated, utterly fascinated by it. And so, inevitably, I wanted to write about it. Even more than I wanted to write about what was going on inside me and plenty was, I can tell you. (“Entranced” 121)

Page makes it clear that her early fascination with the complexities of the observed world overrode any impulse to write autobiography, and yet such fascination cannot be completely separated from the autobiographical; the “effect of the war” is as much an interpretation as an observance. Namjoshi points to the clash of internal and external worlds as Page’s great poetic project, noting that much of her work concerns “the individual’s attempt to bring the microcosm into alignment with the macrocosm,” and that “the outcome might be either frustration or despair” (25-26). This frustration or despair, subject to the tension of balancing multiple personas and perspectives as well as negotiating between the impersonal and the autobiographical, is a hallmark of Page’s poetry. Poet and critic Travis Lane provides a thread to guide readers through Page’s aesthetic maze when she notes that Page’s “descriptions of people are stylized, mythologized, almost impersonal,” creating characters like “figures on an arras” (104-105). As a mythologized figure, the military father becomes a symbol of protection from and integration with the bellicose modern world, a man caught between authority and doubt, between cultural iconicity and corporeal fragility. The officer-father’s struggle between his public service and his private life, between command and kinship, is paralleled by the daughter’s struggle between the desire for familial love and the desire to fulfill societal ideas of duty. Page examines the paternal archetype to suggest that the “command” of the officer-father issues a warning to the daughter about the price of her subjectivity and the humility of corporeal existence.

The cultural figure of the twentieth-century warrior has rarely been interpreted as unambiguously heroic, but has certainly been consistently mythologized. In *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Eric Leed discusses how veterans of the First

World War were perceived in their home communities as “liminal” figures, men who existed “between the boundaries of settled societies, the figures that practice transformations upon themselves, roles, morals, values, spiritual and physical states” (195). Identifying veterans as men who were “defined and refined by war, stripped of every social superfluity,” Leed emphasizes how the returning soldier can represent civilians’ fears of “disorder” and “petrification” (195). Even as the veteran “embodies the anxieties, acts out the guilts [sic], and attenuates the boredom native to domesticity,” the returning soldier must live forever with “an experienced knowledge of the fragility of his own substance and humanity” (Leed 194-5). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar gloss male fragility as a trope in women’s writing that reflects the struggle to redefine masculinity during and after the Great War. In *The War of the Words*, the authors suggest that the modernist literary daughterhood forced a new subjectivity onto the father: “as soon as even the most daughterly woman writer might become a plausible writer, male artists as well as their female contemporaries perceived for the first time the father’s potential fragility along with his compensatory ferocity” (Gilbert and Gubar 179-80). Page positions the military father as Leed’s alternately fragile and aggressive liminal being who traverses the inner and outer world, belonging to neither.

Page keeps this liminal father figure at a considerable ironic distance in her early work. “Portrait of Marina” and “This Cold Man” develop semi-paternal, quasi-military protagonists caught in painful or problematic resistance to transformation. The “fearful salty man” who commanded a “four-master” in “Portrait of Marina” (HRI 72-73) emerged from Page’s memories of Maritime fishermen who “looked so splendid in their oilskins – like gods.” But instead of performing heroic deeds, they “got drunk on lemon

extract” at the local bar, and Page laments the irony of the fishermen’s economic reality along with her own bewilderment: “[i]t had been a disillusioning period in my life. And it was World War II, remember” (“Biographical” 43). This disillusioned view of the fishermen becomes mythologized in the aged skipper of “Portrait of Marina,” between the demand for respect and the reality of pain, those of the father and of his beleaguered daughter. It comes as no surprise then to find the skipper both a pitiable man and a family tyrant, “a parent who imposes on the child his own favoured version of reality” (Rooke 182). The skipper finds that his command is still intact, though his sphere of power is private rather than public; he can give orders only to his daughter, not to an entire crew. He who was once splendid in his oilskin, like the Prospero-figure to which Page compares him, now “sews the ocean of his memory” with a “furious needle” that he cannot thread himself, and “his stitches, interspersed with oaths / had made his one pale spinster daughter grow / transparent with migraines.” Those oaths and his frequent calling of her name “fretted her more than the waves.” The “dimity young inland housewife” will romanticize the embroidered picture and her “great-great-grandpappa” grown “docile as a child again,” but his daughter Marina, “the sole survivor of his last shipwreck,” grows “warped / without a smack of salt.” Constance Rooke has noted Page’s tendency to create poetic characters who struggle against “a frightening dissolution, which means that the individual is unable to place himself in the surrounding world” (180-181). This poem offers two characters threatened by dissolution, the aging father and his spinster daughter. The mythologized father figure, though only quasi-militarized as a captain of a fishing vessel, struggles between his need for kinship and his need to command, between his private vulnerabilities and his public persona.

The old man in the garden of “This Cold Man” (*HR1* 59) is also caught in painful dissolution, though Page renders the dissolution through metaphor rather than narrative. However much the old man appears to be a personification of pastoral renewal as winter turns to spring, the metaphor of the man sinking into the ground, as many soldiers met their deaths by sinking beneath the mud in the trenches of World War I, cannot help but be fraught with anxiety. Rosemary Sullivan identifies Page’s tendency to layer “incipient terror under the smooth, urbane surface of her early poems” (35-36). Such terror may be read in Page’s double-edged diction, which implies the old man’s frightening dissolution even as it suggests transformation. The old man’s “stiff eyes slip,” indicating fear and doubt. Though he “kneel[s] in welters of narcissus,” his body is a “fossil frame” that is “held tightly locked”; does this connote a fearful paralysis? When “sharp green shoots [...] whistle for him,” do they evoke bayonets and bombs? A. J. M. Smith points out that this poem is driven by Page’s “concentrated angry wit” (25), and this wit paints a nightmare that parodies the elegy’s convention of the pastoral dream of redemption. The “cold man” is not “mounted high” as Lycidas is, and there are neither “fresh woods” nor “pastures new” for the unnamed elegist. These disturbing associations undermine the fantasy of regeneration, though they do not annihilate it. In “This Cold Man,” as in “Portrait of Marina,” the mythologized father, a spirited but debilitated old man, struggles to maintain his ego boundaries and his vision, though both are compromised by the inevitability of death.

The presence of compromised quasi-militarized male bodies in Page’s poetry becomes more explicit as her work matures, with the male body in question becoming more specifically paternal, as well as more militarized. The officer-father appears most

noticeably in “War Lord in the Early Evening,” a poem that raises questions about authority, gender and specularly. The sight of the father’s demobilized but resolutely militarized body becomes compromised by the multiplied gaze of his young daughter, of the adult narrator, and eventually, that of the reader. In *The World Wars Through the Female Gaze*, Jean Gallagher discusses the intersections of ideologies of war and gender, and notes that “acts of seeing and attempting to understand war – particularly in relation to the gendered subject – necessarily usher in a species of unease that can never be exorcised from sight in a belligerent culture” (160). Linking military trauma with modernist aesthetics may be nothing new, but identifying that “species of unease that can never be exorcised from sight” remains a vital project. By exploring the “unease” between officer and civilian, father and daughter, age and youth in a “belligerent culture,” Page’s series of paternal figures interrogates not only familial memory, but also the Western cultural expectation of daughterly duty. As Page’s poems about the father figure explore the degree to which the father’s military rectitude makes him visible or invisible to the daughter, the poems acknowledge how much the female gaze remains an uneasy social and literary privilege, even (or especially) within a familial structure. Such a brand of unease accompanies, and perhaps defines, the gaze of the female poet upon the militarized male body, especially since such a gaze cannot always discover a complete or unified image. Gallagher examines the ways that present “an emerging alternative model of fragmented or indirect visual apprehension,” making the body available to the gaze only through “failures, gaps or blocks in vision” (6). In an analysis of the limits and the possible revelations of this visual apprehension, Gallagher notes that the female non-combatant’s gaze most often reveals “two figures that resist representation in wartime

propaganda: the wounded or destroyed body of the soldier and the body of the female observer who looks in directions other than those authorized by the closed circuit of soldiers' vision" (158). The female modernist tradition of resistance to belligerent action that blossomed throughout the years of the First World War questions the rhetoric of the military machine and its concomitant cultural constructions, particularly codes of gendered behaviour. In keeping with this tradition, Page examines and questions cultural heroism as modeled by the military ethos, but she focuses upon the aging military commander as the locus of the daughter's visual apprehension.

Gallagher's concept of fragmented vision suggests the struggle for kinship between Page's officer-fathers and observing daughters, between men who invest in a culture of virility and restraint, and daughters who observe the dissolution of that investment. The "unauthorized direction" in which the female observer looks may be towards her estranged father; these poems emphasize the father's psychic wounds as corporeal affect. While Nancy Paul asserts that Page's "sympathies tend to come back to the lonely men" (130), Paul's assumption of this sympathy supports rather than challenges that "closed circuit" of militarized vision against which Gallagher warns. If we accept, with Gallagher, that the daughter's gaze on the military father is "continually subject to the various forces that constitute wartime visibility and subjectivity and that attempt to direct or constrain the act of looking and the interpretation of visual experience" (7-8), we cannot ignore the idea that duty, as it satisfies or frustrates daughterly devotion, is as important as sympathy within these poems.

To read the daughter's gaze on the debilitated father's body as sympathetic or dutiful is a daring project from the outset, one largely ignored by major movements in

psychoanalytic theory. In *Aging and Its Discontents*, Kathleen Woodward submits that old age is less like a tragedy and more “like a postmodern drama of interminable postponement,” noting that both Freud and Lacan ignore the aging process in their haste to theorize the death drive (43). In order to maintain his authority, the father must remain unavailable to his daughter’s gaze or, at the very least, subject to Gallagher’s “failures, gaps or blocks in vision.” As Page’s officer figures struggle with the loss of authority, their corporeal frustrations suggest Woodward’s assertion that “the body at the limit of its life is the bedrock of the real” (19). To inscribe this limit as “bedrock” seems to assert the subjectivity of the aging body at the same time as it places the aging person’s subjectivity in doubt, an apparent contradiction that produces poetic tension.

Sometimes the daughter’s gaze begins with duty but moves in Gallagher’s “unauthorized direction.” In “War Lord in the Early Evening” (*HR* 2 84-85), the general’s wish to impress his daughter with his “gentle and disarming” aesthetic sense is destroyed by his expectation that he can exert control over nature. The general orders a hose with which he may water the roses in a demonstration of his Romantic sensibility, but what ensues is more like an outrageous phallic farce than a sublime reverie. The garden hose arrives in six sections of “assorted sizes” with no connecting fixtures. The general’s frustrated orders recall Kaja Silverman’s warning about the vulnerability of constructed sexuality: “Even under the most auspicious circumstances [...] the fiction of a phallic masculinity generally remains intact only for the duration of the war” (63). The sectioned hose functions as a metaphor for dismantled masculinity, a construct that struggles to survive outside the symbolism of conflict. Determined to demonstrate his sensitivity while refusing the limits of reality, the war lord commands his servants to hold the hose

sections together with their hands. This father's call is as ridiculously ineffective as the ancient skipper's call is painfully powerful. The slapstick overdetermination of five fountains of water that spume into the servants' faces as they bind the hose parts together with their fists is undeniably comic, even as it offers up a grim reference to an uncontrollable aging body. Though Woodward claims that aging is castration, her theory seems only half right in this poem, where abundance and lack issue from the same unreliable source. The recalcitrant hose and the general's "broken water pistol" yield only a "trickle" from his "failing loin," all echoing Silverman's comment that military trauma manifests as a "psychic disintegration [...] of a bound and armored ego, predicated upon the illusion of coherence and control" (62). If the hose is a phallic symbol, it also operates as a metaphor for command and obedience. The failure to water the roses is couched in bellicose terms; it is a "battle done" with "so much militia routed." Proposing the general's impotent command as a case of *sic transit gloria mundi*, Page glosses the ignominy of his defeat with the irony of the mock epic, suggesting that "War Lord in the Early Evening" is a melancholic satire on phallic tropes.

But Page is not yet finished with this disassembled officer. Sullivan warns us that the "recurring image of stasis in a metaphoric garden [...] is Page's private image of hell" (36). The war lord's struggle to define himself through his own command moves beyond satire when the narrator intervenes with a statement of wistful melancholia in the final lines:

Sic transit gloria mundi. I would rather
a different finish.
It was devilish
that the devil denied him that one innocent wish.

This statement contains the poem's only reference to the narrative "I." The assumption that Page is projecting an omniscient narrative voice cannot entirely escape the implication that this first-person speaker adopts the voice of the daughter who has remained silent throughout the poem. Does the narrative "I" represent the nostalgic wishes of the daughter grown to adulthood? Does her "exposure" of this difficult moment indict her as forever melancholic? If the "different finish" is the daughter's wish for the preservation of her father's dignity, does the wish to maintain his command constitute an innocent wish? "His now failing loin" certainly indicates a "different finish" from the ideology of phallic mastery. But what of the devil who denies the war lord that one innocent wish? Has the devil granted his every other wish, innocent or not? How "innocent" is such a construction of innocence? Page's introduction of a devil's discourse suggests that the war lord is complicit with evil, caught in a Faustian bargain. Whether we choose to interpret this as a Freudian failure or not, the penultimate stanza repeats that the general is "hid[den]" from his daughter by "darkness." He cannot provide succour; he is not the regenerative vegetation god that he strives to be at the poem's beginning, tending the roses with his "beneficent care." The light and roses fade in the "early evening" of his life. His call is obeyed, but to no effect; innocent or not, his glory has passed away from the earth.

In more recent work, Page's paternal poems have taken on, by her own admission, a more autobiographical cast:

I've never claimed to write autobiography. Yet there is a fair amount of autobiographical material in my work – more so in the later than in the early. Usually people start writing about themselves and then grow up and extend their range of interests. I seem to have done the opposite. I started writing about other people and other things – all that early stuff about typists and stenographers and children. Now I find myself writing more about myself. ("That's me" 62)

In “The First Part” from 1985’s *The Glass Air*, Page admits to a “[g]reat desire to write it all. / Is it age, death’s heavy breath / making absolute autobiography / urgent?” (148). The urgency of this autobiography, “absolute” or heavily mythologized, recalls Gilbert and Gubar’s discussions of the freedoms and concomitant pressures of modernist literary daughterhood, pressures that some critics suggest Page has found a number of ways to refuse, or at least forestall.² In conjunction with locating paternal fragility as a subject of modernist literary daughterhood, Gilbert and Gubar claim that the female modernist writer struggles with an “affiliation complex [...] a desirous (even if agonistic) interaction” with the privilege of paternal literary tradition, a tradition that is inevitably bound up with questions of inheritance (169). Warning that these affiliations are often deeply ambivalent, Gilbert and Gubar note that the father-daughter paradigm “is so haunted by history” that it cannot provide an “entirely satisfactory motive for female creativity” (171-72). Whether or not a modernist affiliation complex is part of Page’s “great desire to write it all,” this very lack of satisfaction describes the tensions of dutiful daughterhood as a rendering of filial piety.

This female dissatisfaction with modernism turns from an “affiliation complex” ruled by desire to emulate the father to a more critical examination of the father’s legacy and a longing for a language to speak of women’s reality. This dissatisfaction with the rhetoric of modernism may be read as a return to the initial political concerns that fuelled the modernist movement in Canada: social justice, political freedom, and the ability of language to alter thought, as pursued by poets like Livesay, Webb, and Page, despite the latter’s claims to be apolitical. This dissatisfaction often mirrored the work of

melancholia, with its ambivalence and invocation of the ways that “love and hate wrestle together” (Freud 159).

An eloquent example of Page’s father-daughter poems, “Voyager,” originally published in 1981’s *Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*, describes a classic mourner’s dream in which the lost beloved returns but does not recognize the mourner (*HRI* 183-84). The long-dead father haunts his family with his refusal to look at them, until “reluctant to return / bored to be home,” he sets off again into his alternate dimension, as though death were the ultimate military tour of duty. In a painful irony, the brusque commanding officer leaves in order to seek his family, those whom he cannot see right in front of him: “he / sought us in other places / studied maps, set out in search.” Page writes with a wry anxiety about age and the persistence of memory, an anxiety that is only heightened by her inability to sustain the father’s attention even in her own dream. The father’s refusal to see his daughter even within the bounds of her own subconscious is dispiriting. Interestingly, this poem contains no overt reference to the father as a military man, though the father’s return may be read as a soldier’s return. The father’s disregard of the family displays the anxious attenuated boredom of Leed’s returning veteran, even though the family reacts as though he has in fact come home from war: “And we were always so eager, / welcoming each time, pleased / at his safe return/ glad at the sight of/ his face.” Leed reminds us that the veteran’s idealization of home was “an inevitable process in the trenches” and that this image of the ideal home environment was so powerful that many veterans found their return home profoundly disillusioning (188-89). The father’s blind spot parallels the awful irony of the returning soldier; he served in order to protect his family, who seem like strangers to him when the conflict ends. The

father's selective blindness in "Voyager" is set against the ability of his retinue (are they fellow officers? men under his command?) to observe the family, and the family's ability to see and recognize the father.

Even as "Voyager" reflects dissatisfaction with the dynamic of father-daughter kinship, the poem refuses to blame the father, but rather acknowledges his estrangement from his family in a world where he has the power of command but is denied the quotidian pleasures of a private citizen. "Voyager" confirms that the return of the elegiac figure of the lost beloved is forever desired, and forever deferred. Though her melancholia keeps the daughter-elegist inconsolable, she resists the temptation to render the father as solid and knowable. In fact, her melancholic rhetoric can understand and identify the father's blind spot. She dwells in "a blank space in the air," and so deprived of even a "glance of recognition," she cannot make herself visible to him. As he "set out in search" of the family that he remembers but cannot see, the daughter acknowledges, with chagrin, that this is intimacy as dictated by war and death: "the closest we have come / to meeting / during thirty years of dreams." This consolation is indefinitely postponed.

Ramazani points out that the elegy was a dangerous choice for modernist female writers of the 1920s and 1930s, for the risk of appearing sentimental in a literary atmosphere of austerity was great and could be critically devastating (21). However, Ramazani observes that a later generation of female poets, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich, writing in the 1950s and 1960s, took on the family elegy as a feminist project, examining the daughter's role in the family romance and appropriating the elegiac tradition in order to "scrutinize paternal power in its absence" (22). Additionally,

when Melissa Zeiger notes a trend in twentieth-century female-authored elegies towards a refusal of consolation, she emphasizes that “[m]ourning has been women’s work since at least classical antiquity” (12). However, ongoing relations with the dead, affectionate or otherwise, have their attendant frustrations, especially if they attempt to renegotiate the father-daughter paradigm. The female affiliation complex haunts the elegy with its desire to delineate, and perhaps dismantle, the fidelity demanded by the father’s death, and to investigate the unsolved question of the daughter’s legacy. Whether this means that consolation is flatly refused or simply unavailable to the female modernist poet is another question. Is the rhetoric of consolation offered by tradition satisfying or useful for the female elegist? Part of the awakening of female modernist poets to the possibilities of feminist postmodernism includes a testing of language as an epistemological project, while some of the changes in Page’s work emerge from a confrontation with the modernist aesthetic to forge a more open dialogue with language and the father.

Featuring confrontation of the dead as a twist of the elegiac tradition, Page comes close to a negotiated consolation in “Father” from her sequence “Melanie’s Nitebook” (*HR1* 146-148). In a 1996 interview, Page declares that while many of the poems in the series were fictional, the poem “Father” is very autobiographical: “The emotional feeling towards my father [in the poem] was true [...] I loved my father very much, and I always felt we belonged to each other. But we were never fully reconciled before he died” (“Biographical” 35-36). The expectations and tensions surrounding a reconciliation of fathers and daughters is an enduring tension in women’s paternal elegy that Page writes into “Father,” as the officer-father appears impeccably aloof in his uniform, and the daughter (first-person speaker of the poem) beseeches his attention. Page offers a half

rhyme with “father” and “farther” that underscores the distance between the two figures, and there is an echo of the daughter of Jephthah’s “My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth” (Judges 11:36) in Page’s use of seventeenth-century Biblical syntax: “Father, o farther / in what heaven circlest thou? / Daily and dearly / ask I for thy succour.” The daughter is “awaiting [...] benediction” from the father, even as the father begins to “crave [the daughter’s] grace.” He “tremble[s ...] with dread of [her] grey gaze / the twin of [his] grey gaze.” He craves forgiveness as she craves praise until she at last suggests a truce, predicated on a bargain that underlies the elegiac contract: “Let me your spokesman / and your axeman be.” In order to strike this bargain, the daughter calls up the power of “that one word which severs as it heals.” Given the syntax of the poem, that word appears to be “truce,” but Page leaves the possibilities unglossed. “[T]hat one word,” still unspoken and unwritten, remains conspicuous by its absence. Page’s conflation of the powerful unspoken word as an oxymoronic device that both severs and heals is intriguing from a psychoanalytic point of view. While castration is invoked by the employment of a cutting tool, the fact that the “one word” severs and heals simultaneously suggests something reminiscent of the cutting of an umbilical cord. Alternatively, the healing/severing dichotomy echoes Occam’s razor, cutting away the unnecessary plurality of discourse around father-daughter kinship. The unspoken word becomes the tool that severs the tension between father and daughter, and points to the compromise of the truce.

That same unspoken word dissolves a good deal of the melancholia as well, as in this poem like no other of Page’s, the daughter commands her father’s attention, not coincidentally by imitating his own officer’s stance. The speaker of the poem changes

from the daughter as a good soldier who is “obedient, house-trained / heel-trained, at [her father’s] call” into a fellow officer figure, an opponent formidable enough to require a truce. Dispensing with dog-like obedience, the daughter reinscribes herself as the father’s “spokesman” and “axeman” in the poem’s final lines. The returning father in “Voyager” is completely cut off from familial care, despite the welcome he receives. The general of “War Lord in the Early Evening” calls for “beneficent care” but receives only humiliation, and his daughter’s silence and beauty cannot succour him. But in “Father,” the daughter forges a truce, reconciling Gallagher’s unease of the female gaze in a belligerent culture with a militarized father-daughter homosocial pact.³ At last, the daughter becomes her father’s comrade-in-arms. She is “spokesman” and “axeman”: she is, in other words, a good son. She positions herself between her father and the abyss, and gives the father the opportunity to recognize himself in her words. Whether he recognizes his daughter in her guise of the good son is a complication that Page does not parse.

Page’s most recent father-daughter iteration may be found in her poem sequence “Alphabetical,” published in 1998 as a chapbook by Reference West, and republished in her 2002 collection, *Planet Earth: Poems Selected and New*. “Alphabetical” references each letter of the alphabet as a tile in a personal literary mosaic, and the military father resurfaces in the sections that explore the letters “q” and “r,” represented by the words “question” and “reference.” The father appears in this sequence as an instructor figure, a man with an educated mind who admonishes his daughter that her “questions are often laziness” and teaches his daughter intellectual “independence” by encouraging her use of reference books (*Planet* 130). John Orange’s 1988 interview with Page records her characterization of Lionel Page as “a free thinker” who was “great on mind over matter”

(76). In “Alphabetical,” the father inspires the daughter to “push towards objectivity” (significantly, not towards subjectivity), and the “R” section recommends that such objectivity ought to be sought in “reference books in general, those / faceless authority figures in disguise” (*Planet* 131). Is it too much to read the military references in these lines, the “general” as a “faceless authority figure [...] disguise[d]” in words? Is this a reiteration of the “war lord” and his “broken water pistol,” hidden in the murk of masculine authority while offering his daughter an inheritance of knowledge and the ability to assert her “mind over matter”? Faced with “that trickle, that distil,” the narrator of “War Lord” wonders how to read the father’s comically reduced offering: “Was this philosophy? It wasn’t plumbing.” Behind the blunt humour of the statement, the question lingers: what is left for the daughter in that “trickle, that distil” of the officer-father’s knowledge? The officer-general attempts to be “a faceless authority figure” but stands revealed by the daughter’s gaze, trapped in his own “routed” body.

Page’s officer-father poems testify not only to the tensions of father-daughter kinship, but also to the presence of the debilitated male body within the trope of the paternal hero. The abjection of this body is not necessarily a failure of the body, or of masculinity, though it can and must represent a failure of the heroic concept of masculinity. Dismantling the authority of power and the privilege of rank, Page renders fragments of the father visible, no longer “hid from his daughter” in the darkened garden, through her investment in a creative melancholia that challenges the vicissitudes of daughterly devotion. The negotiation of a truce means that the daughter must no longer choose between the officer-father’s ferocity and fragility, but dares to see that which has been routed from and through the man. The father’s body, “trembling with dread” in the

daughter's gaze, offers itself up to transformation, and submits to that truce which severs even as it heals.

By shifting her melancholia from a neutral persona to a daughterly one, a figure who moves from being ignored in her own dreams in "Voyager" to trapping her father in her "dread grey gaze" in "Father," Page sustains an inquiry into the daughterly duty of both caring for and mourning after the father. Consolation, such as it is in these poems, is provisional at best. The daughter's triumph is only in earning the father's gaze upon her. She assumes a homosocial partnership with her dead father; as his metaphoric "axeman," she controls the rhetoric of his death, and she chooses melancholia in order to stay in relationship with him, in a demonstration of the elegy as Zeiger's "ongoing affections with the dead." But because she establishes her affections through a program of insistent melancholia, Page establishes a self-reflexive *anagnorisis*, and despite her eschewal of autobiography, she discovers a daughter at the heart of the elegy.

Chapter Two

“Absence, havoc”: Mourning the Alchemist Father in the Works of Jay Macpherson

While we loved those who never read our poems,
 Answered our letters, said the simple things we
 Waited so long for, and were too polite to
 See we were crying,

Irony fed us:

“Some Ghosts & Some Ghouls”
Poems Twice Told

Like much that is ironic about the elegiac mode, the extent to which the daughter must demand the right to elegize her father creates a paradox that Harold Bloom glosses in *The Anxiety of Influence*: the elegist establishes himself as the inheritor of the older man’s poetic legacy. But a daughter’s inheritance from her father is always questionable, particularly when the father’s legacy is composed of “masculine” attributes. The appearance of a demanding mourning daughter in Page’s work suggests that the female elegist is often in the position of asserting herself as the rightful inheritor, and creator of a written legacy. That demanding female mourner appears again in the works of Jay Macpherson, in texts that assert themselves as elegiac, and locate the lost father as a problematic, wandering beloved that the daughter must pursue in order to maintain her melancholia. Macpherson’s work conducts an inquiry into great works of Western literature, as her literary daughters mourn for the magus-fathers they discover at the heart of the texts, and eventually, discover the fathers to be sinister and their transformative magic unavailable to the daughter. The daughter’s *anagnorisis*, in Macpherson’s work, is

the discovery of her subjectivity beyond the father's influence, and beyond the influence of the alchemical magic of his *logos*.

Jay Macpherson, poet, scholar, and Page's contemporary, charts a journey from good modernist daughter to defiant mourner of the paternal world in two books that regard the havoc that absence wreaks, and its potential oxymoronic "welcome disaster." In *The Boatman and Other Poems* and *Welcoming Disaster*, Macpherson tests the limits of de Man's "autobiography as defacement," offering a mythology that may intimate autobiography, but ultimately gestures toward the failure of elegiac convention to serve a discourse of female mourning. The mask of persona that Macpherson creates in both texts is formidable. Still, my intention is not to "unmask" Macpherson in the text but, rather, to regard the face that she presents to the reader. Lorraine Weir claims that the "[p]ublic parallax" of Macpherson's poems operates as "a technique of revelation" that contrasts with her "camouflage or deflection," and that this play of public and private desires is part of Macpherson's subversion of literary colonization by "patriarchal culture" ("Toward" 62). Heeding Weir's caveat, I propose that Macpherson reappropriates the conventions of elegy to question the role of mourning daughters in Western literature, and in doing so, criticizes the father in his guise of a learned man: an alchemist, a magus, an "anagogic man."

Irony does feed these poems. In *The Boatman and Other Poems*, Macpherson revives doomed Biblical and Shakespearean daughters so that they can mourn *and* mock the old sinful order; in *Welcoming Disaster*, the mourning daughter turns herself into a ghoul in order to haunt the father's ghost. Raymond Williams points out the irony of a modernism that "quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable

integration into the new international capitalism” (35), and certainly female modernist poets felt the irony of writing in a “new tradition” in which women continued to define their subjectivity through the approval of literary men, “those who never read our poems” (*Poems Twice Told* 71).¹ With these two books, Macpherson embarks upon a project of elegiac criticism of paternal mores, as did several other female Canadian poets who wrote during what is considered the late modernist period of the 1950s and 1960s. Miriam Waddington, in *Say Yes* (1969), declares that she is “Breaking with Tradition” in a poem of the same name, accusing the authoritative father as an outdated “old master” in the “modern” world:

Old masters
 turn around your
 fur hats black greatcoats
 shuttered backward
 glances speak to us
 in conspirators’
 farewell

(father
 don’t leave us the
 thermometer quivers
 forty below zero
 we are afraid of the dark)

“Breaking With Tradition” (187)

Waddington’s elegiac declaration of an ambivalent independence from the unreliable “old masters” is echoed in poems like Anne Wilkinson’s “Little Men Slip Into Death,” “Fallout,” and “Death in America” (Wilkinson 105, 127, 131), as well as in Dorothy Livesay’s poetic indictments of male literary authority in “Houdini Eliot” and “A Conversation” (Livesay 253). Locating an emerging debate about, and dissatisfaction with, the literary father as a mentor to these female Canadian modernists suggests that

Macpherson was not alone in adopting a poetic tone towards father figures that manage to be both melancholic and mocking.

Macpherson's poetry has received little critical attention in the past two decades, beyond a handful of articles and Weir's thoughtful 1989 monograph. Weir notes that critical discussion of Macpherson's work is "sparse, occasionally generous, but always incomplete" ("Jay"180). However, critics that have written about Macpherson agree upon the elegiac tone of her work. James Reaney writes that Macpherson is "a poet who makes both elegiac and comic equally rich" (29), while Suniti Namjoshi notes the importance of the Orphic journey to both *The Boatman* and *Welcoming Disaster* (55). Northrop Frye's review of *The Boatman* notes that Macpherson's "elegiac poems are the most resonant, and they make the strongest impression" (436). David Bromwich asserts that "Macpherson's more ambitious poems have been elegiac," in particular those that "lament [...] an alienated and/or repressed element of the self" (336). He suggests that Macpherson's use of allusion in *The Boatman* has a distinct elegiac purpose, in that "it helps us to cross the distance between ourselves and our losses; and it does so without giving credence to any fiction of a single voice or a single speaker" (337). However, though critics agree upon Macpherson's elegiac tone, no criticism to date elaborates on how Macpherson uses the elegiac mode to debate the efficacy of the daughter's mourning and subjectivity, nor do any critics concentrate upon the development of the mourning daughter as a character between *The Boatman and Other Poems* in 1968 and *Welcoming Disaster* in 1974. This chapter will discuss Macpherson's contemplation of the loss of a parent as the loss of paradise, and the ways in which she positions her daughter figures as rebel-mourners after the world of the lost father.

Critical discussion of *The Boatman* tends to focus on Macpherson's manipulation of classical and Biblical mythology into a narrative that re-tells the story of the Flood, complete with the hope for human redemption in an a post-apocalyptic world. Macpherson peoples her text with sleeping shepherds and fallen women, the saved and the unsaved, demonstrating her familiarity with the literary Christian philosophies of Blake and Milton.² Northrop Frye was Macpherson's dissertation advisor from 1955 to 1959, when she concentrated on the literature of late Romance for her doctoral degree. Not surprisingly, reviews and early articles about *The Boatman* emphasize Frye's influence on Macpherson's style and subject matter, and certainly, Frye's interest in Blake and his explorations of Christian consciousness had some influence on Macpherson's poetics and her hermeneutic work. But I maintain that while it is easy to detect Frygian influence in Macpherson's apocalyptic vision, strong evidence of her independence may be found in an increasing concern with a female subjectivity within her work, beginning with the 1968 edition of *The Boatman and Other Poems* and extending to *Welcoming Disaster*.

The Boatman elegizes the fallen world while exploring a Blakean world of Christian redemption, positioning the poet as an artist figure who, like Philomel, sings in "unmeasured grief," but who also, like Procne, "[p]erforms as she is able" and together, the sacrificial virgin and the vengeful wife tell a story that "[r]aises both Cain and Babel" (PTT 26). Macpherson's poetic voice in *The Boatman* combines wit with an elegant Christian philosophy; it offers a vision of a fallen world redeemed at last by the figure of the Anagogic Man, he who holds the future and, indeed, the whole universe in his head: "what sways when Noah nods? / The sun, the stars, the figures of the gods" (PTT 42).

However, this textual paradise lasts only until 1968, when Macpherson's addition of sixteen new poems to the reissue of *The Boatman* disturbs the unity of the original text's ending. The added poems introduce several daughter figures who, unlike the "fallen women" of the 1957 *Boatman*, distinguish themselves with their vitality: they refuse to die. Their presence in the post-apocalyptic world implies a paucity of attention to an anagogic woman who could match the powerful figure of Macpherson's glass-headed anagogic man. In the added poems, the mercurial, multi-voiced narrator of the 1957 *Boatman* coalesces into the voice of a defiant daughter, including a revived and aggrieved Ophelia, the silent daughters of Job, and a fictional fourth daughter for King Lear, the cruel and perversely constant Jenny Lear. These daughters occupy Macpherson's "seventh section" as embodied indictments of their fathers' behaviour, as well as an indictment of the traditions in Western literature that killed off these women in their original plots.

Macpherson resurrects these lost daughters and gives them the wit of defiance. As rebellious survivors who mourn their lost fathers but also insist upon their place in the post-apocalyptic world, these daughters reveal Macpherson's concern about the place of women in the Frygian "revelation" that went unexplored in the earlier version of *The Boatman*. These daughter figures are less elegiac subjects than revived elegiac objects, but, undeniably, their place among the living that survive the Flood suggests Macpherson's dissatisfaction with the ending of the 1957 *Boatman*. The grief and violence of the daughters in the seventh section, particularly the self-destructiveness of Jenny Lear, ushers in the gothic mourning daughter of *Welcoming Disaster*: a woman failed by psychoanalysis and by mythology. By amalgamating her rebellious daughters

into a single melancholic narrator, Macpherson creates a daughterly persona that haunts the dead in her attempt to understand her loss and, in doing so, writes an elegy for the father, for the paternal system of thought and language, and for her poetic self.

Alice Jardine claims that “[t]he crisis of legitimation in the West is necessarily a crisis in the status of knowledge – traditionally, the ability to decide what is true and just – functions that have remained inseparable up to the present” (65). *Welcoming Disaster* deals with such a crisis of legitimation as an allegory for personal loss. Within the struggle to differentiate love from reason, Macpherson acknowledges the frustrations of modernism and contemplates the possibilities of writing beyond the influence of the father, an unrealizable dream of *écriture féminine*. The disaster that is welcomed in Macpherson’s second book is nothing less than the crisis in legitimation funneled through a bid for a female subjectivity that does not rely upon paternalized permission. Like many modernist writers, Macpherson alludes to the great books of Western literature in order to debate the value of knowledge. However, she uses both of her poetic texts to cast doubt upon the efficacy of male-centred knowledge systems, and to suggest the need for a fully realized female literary subjectivity. Her elegiac tone mourns the obedient daughter as much as it mourns the mythological father, and her “melancholic turn” from the rhetoric of consolation ironically makes both consolation and subjectivity available to her daughter persona.

In *Welcoming Disaster*, the paternal figure appears in a variety of literary and theoretical guises. Macpherson fashions a literary father from the Romance figure of the alchemist which she identifies in *The Spirit of Solitude* as a “hypnotist” or “abominable showman (Frye’s term),” who bamboozles people with “the glittering world of illusion”

while pursuing the dark arts in the “surrounding darkness” of secrecy (194). Certainly within these bounds, the alchemist figure of *Welcoming Disaster* appears as the anagogic man turned demonic through his possession of absolute power – some combination of God, Noah, William Blake, and Northrop Frye – and Macpherson indicts the rhetoric of modernism as the alchemist father’s “world of illusion,” the paternal *logos*. In desiring the key to his secret art, the daughter desires the father’s knowledge, and as Macpherson points out, the pursuit of “[k]nowledge as treasure is usually ironic, and apt to bring destruction instead of fulfillment” (*Spirit* 184). Rosemary Sullivan notes that *Welcoming Disaster* begins “with the poet metaphorically orphaned” (498), struggling in vain to define herself with the magic formula of her father’s symbology.

The paternal figure featured in Macpherson’s poems seems to be no less than Kristeva’s version of the “imaginary father” as a rereading of Freud’s “father in individual prehistory,” a father who represents “love” rather than “law” (Oliver 69). Kristeva proposes this “loving, giving and gratifying” father figure (*Black Sun* 92) in direct opposition to the commanding Lacanian father figure. While Macpherson’s explorations of the father figure leave no doubt about the father’s power in a symbolic system, the abandoned daughter is greedy for his attention to the point where she haunts him after his death. Significantly, she does not fear him as an authority, but rather desires his sense of order and creation, his certainty and confidence in symbology. This “imaginary father” seems to be an alchemist of a kind; Kristeva describes him as the male figure who establishes “the link between pleasure and symbolic dignity [...] as he leads his child from primary to secondary identification” (*Black Sun* 92-93). So necessary is he as a figure of psychic gratification in *Welcoming Disaster* that Macpherson configures his

“absence” as first “havoc” (*Poems* 67) and then “winter” (85), invoking first chaos and then isolation as manifestations of the daughter’s grief.

The father-daughter kinship explored in these texts cannot be separated from Macpherson’s practice of “parody, pastiche and allusion” as Bromwich characterizes her style (334). The “paternal” in Macpherson’s texts does not refer to the autobiographical, biological father, but rather to the symbolic father, who for all his ephemerality, strikes a formidable figure, that of a “tranced master,” the magus figure in *Welcoming Disaster*.³ The father figure runs these texts, the anagogic man with the key to the mysteries of life and religion, the secret of alchemy, the maker of rules, the unquestioned authority: truly the Father. How can we read this pervasive Father, and how can we read his daughter’s grief at his loss and her mourning for her self? Macpherson’s shift in narrative persona from the distanced, multiple-persona narration of the good modernist daughter of *The Boatman* to the “greedy, devouring” first-person mourner of the dead in *Welcoming Disaster* presages the failure of psychoanalytic language as discourse that can capture that deep ambivalence of female mourning. Applying Freud or Lacan to Macpherson’s work only points out the difficulties both psychoanalysts have in construing female experience, particularly the limitations of theories of hysteria (for Freud) and female signification (for Lacan). Macpherson’s revived Ophelia may be read initially as a Freudian hysteric, but Macpherson grants her a resilience that belies such easy pathology. Jenny Lear may be read as a monster of femininity whose cruelty springs from a suppressed desire for her father, but what can Freudian theory make of the wit in her wickedness? A Lacanian reading would suggest that the rebellious daughters and the greedy devourer desire the symbolic father’s language and signifiers, but are thwarted by

the limits of the father as “register,” or image of the world. Such a reading seems ungenerous given Macpherson’s poetic skill and the subtle layers of her examinations of power and love in father-daughter kinship, as a literary or mythical relationship.

Macpherson mocks the tendency for psychoanalytic theory to infantilize female desire and female protest, and her creation of a *girl-narrator* – complete with teddy bear as a father “substitute” – is surely a parody of the elegiac substitutive trope. If we read the failure of psychoanalysis into Macpherson’s “Substitutions,” in which the narrator loves her teddy bear who is “[f]illing in for / Him not there” (*PTT* 68), it is clear that stronger measures will be needed to analyze the narrator’s grief. She will not be reduced to an Electra complex, or a melancholic madwoman, or a recalcitrant child. Michael Hornyansky notes that the bear’s inclusion in the text is “a big risk,” but as a symbol, it is “psychologically right and has been poetically anchored in myth” (337). Macpherson can pull off the audacious conceit of the child narrator and the teddy-bear “substitute” – a combination Atwood claims, quite rightly, that “only Macpherson could get away with” (410) – not only because she anchors the bear persona in myth, but also because she uses the stuffed bear to mock the psychoanalytical perception of women as children. The narrator is written as a child, but she is no naïve or ordinary child, or, truly, she is not a child in the psychoanalytical sense at all. I would like to take things a step further to suggest that the child-narrator is a parody of strict Freudian readings of the female psyche, and Macpherson’s employment of this child as a wry comment on the social infantilization of women’s desire and grief. In writing the grief of the girl-narrator, Macpherson welcomes the “disaster” of a belief system that takes adult female subjects and their grief seriously.

Kelly Oliver suggests that by claiming a loving father, the female theorist (and, I would add, perhaps the female poet) can lay claim to being the “imaginary son, the rightful heir” (67). But in *Welcoming Disaster*, the mourning daughter discovers that she cannot lay claim to the knowledge dispensed by the father-chemist figure, principally the mythology that serves him. In fact, her lack of access to his mythological systems shapes her mourning practice. Macpherson’s characterization of the father figure as an “enchanter” and “magister” who is the source of all knowledge and all magic aligns with the Kristevan imaginary father as “a metaphorical function that gives way to the metonymic paternal function” (Oliver 66). The figure of male magic and mastery holds the power of the word and of love, and at first, the narrator’s intense anguish at his absence invites comparisons to Kristeva’s “imaginary father,” her interpretation of Freud’s “loving father who helps the child overcome abjection” (*Tales* 26). But there is something too similar about Kristeva’s concept of “the imaginary father” and the Lacanian lawgiver – Father as arbitrator of law and the symbolic order – even though Kristeva insists that her idea of the father is both “stern” and “playful” (*Tales* 46) while Lacan’s father is completely authoritative. Something of this tension plays itself out in Macpherson’s text, as the daughters “admired how ignorance became” the fathers, how the fathers were with “coldness adorned,” while the daughters are “guilty most of suffering” (*PTT* 71). But she goes on to suggest that these fathers will reap the reward of daughters made in their own image:

They were our teachers: what we are, they made us.
Cautious our converse, prudent our behaviour,
Guarded our faces: we behind them lurking,
Greedy, devourers.

(“Some Ghosts & Some Ghouls,” *PTT* 71)

Despite Kristevan objections that a “crisis in paternity” is characterized by “the lack of love” rather than “the lack of law” (Oliver 69), the difficulty in representing the imaginary father makes him a shadowy figure, rather than a loving one at the mercy of the limits of paternal representation. Macpherson’s alchemist father is elusive in *Welcoming Disaster*, always invoked, always mourned, and rarely glimpsed until the text’s end. Oliver points out that the power of the Kristevan imaginary father may be no more than a “secular replacement for a dead Christian God” and warns that to dwell “without the loving father, we are abandoned by God and possibly devoured by abjection as well” (68). Macpherson mentions a “book of laws” in “Lost Books and Dead Letters” (*Poems* 62) and suggests that the magus has a stern side, something borne out by his abandonment of the daughter figure. He becomes a “man of stone, of ivory, of glass” (*Poems* 78), unyielding in his judgement, even though he remains the arbitrator of love as far as the narrating daughter is concerned.

I read the emergence of Macpherson’s grieving daughter figure as Jardine’s “woman-in-process” (the term itself is a play on Kristeva’s subject-in-process), and in doing so, I also factor Kristevan abjection into the picture. Macpherson’s rebellious daughter figures of *The Boatman and Other Poems* are so decidedly “outside” of the text that we could construe them as “abject-in-process.” Separated from their original plots and unaccountably surviving, these rebellious daughter figures embody the Kristevan “narcissistic crisis” of abjection *par excellence*. The mourning persona of *Welcoming Disaster* takes her abjection a step further. She assumes the persona of the melancholic daughter to an abandoning intellectual father, and “nurtures horror” – in the Kristevan sense – to launch her gothic explorations in order to bring him back into her life. Weir

points out that the text of *Welcoming Disaster* teases out the parallels between eschatology and epistemology (“Jay” 195) – the difference, surely, between nurturing horror and welcoming disaster.

The elegiac sequence of *Welcoming Disaster* plays upon the tendency for the elegy to swing between expressed grief for the “lost beloved” and the elegist’s grief for the self. The speaker of *Welcoming Disaster* begins by longing after the lost and abandoning father figure, but soon her loss grows to encompass her systems of thought and ways of expression, until she is mourning the loss of a world and a particular language. The play between the elegiac object and the elegiac subject, or between the elegized and elegist, is part of the disaster that the elegist welcomes not as a consolation, but as a part of establishing subjectivity. Such a project is fraught with potential pitfalls. Jardine cautions:

the ‘woman-in-effect’ can only be thought beginning with how the monologic structures we have inherited are constantly reimposed and rearranged, and (particularly) with how women both mime and reject those structures and even become their most adamant support systems. (48)

Macpherson acts out this kind of “mime and rejection” with her use of gothic symbology to expand the boundaries of the elegy, to use eschatology to welcome a new epistemology, and to mourn for the daughter figure while miming an elegy for the father. In situating the concern for language and language usage so close to feminist thought, Jardine emphasizes the need to identify moments at which women writers realize that the systems of thought and symbology in which they have been working serve neither their subjectivity nor their desires. Jardine coins the neologism “gynesis” to describe the feminist tenets of language inquiry, “the putting into discourse of ‘woman’ as that *process* diagnosed in France as intrinsic to the condition of modernity” (25). She warns

readers that such definitions are easier to suggest than to prove, particularly as the subjectivity of women has never been easily or completely addressed by language discourse. Concerned about the essentialism of reducing women to sexual difference or to biological function, Jardine proposes a mercurial subjectivity for the female subject, rather than a stable unified identity (25).

An overarching goal of modernity, as Jardine defines it, is the examination of and eventual participation in “processes that disrupt symbolic structures in the West” (42), and from this position, Macpherson’s project seems to be to reveal the structures of elegiac convention. She begins her literary production as a wry commentator on myth in the visionary wit of *The Boatman*, but undercuts the redemptive conclusion of that text with her addition of the resurrected daughters in the 1968 reissue. Macpherson’s exploration of apocalyptic revelation in *The Boatman* yields to her revisionary inquiry into women’s place in the redemptive world. On the heels of the resurrected daughter poems, the narrator of *Welcoming Disaster* acts out the daughter’s abjection and her loss of her faith in that paternal world and its promise of redemption, spiritual and literary. The elegiac mode serves as Macpherson’s literary compass; her play upon elegiac convention and the literary assumptions of its accompanying myths becomes the key to contemplating the difficulties of modernist daughterhood. In this light, I read Macpherson as revelatory in the Frygian apocalyptic sense, and also in Potts’s sense of *anagnorisis* as the revelation that defines elegy.

Resurrection and the Daughter: After The Anagogic Man

James Reaney sums up the end of the 1957 *Boatman* so well that it would be easy to ignore the 1968 revisions to the text, for the added poems question the integral vision of the original text. Referring to “The Book of Riddles,” the final section of the original text, Reaney writes: “The last section in effect says to the reader that Creation, Fall and Redemption are part of a dance whose final figure is the scene in which the Fisherman, in the very last poem, having corrected the Fall is corrected himself for all time” (34). Reaney’s analysis is inarguable as far as “The Book of Riddles” is concerned. However, if we apply his conclusions to the 1968 ending of *The Boatman and Other Poems*, how can we read the daughters’ “last word” in the text? The distinctly “uncorrected” voice of Jenny Lear commands that the curtain be brought down on what Linda Boose calls the “unstructured” state of daughterhood. Is this “curtain” another Fall or the same one? Is it Redemption? Is it Creation? What that curtain represents, as vicious and strangely vulnerable as Jenny Lear appears, is the coming literary and critical “disaster”: the dismantling of the obedient daughter in the rhetoric of sacrifice.

The resurrected daughters of Macpherson’s “seventh section” are figures of defiant abjection, manifesting in affective modes: assertive grief (Ophelia), plangent silence (Job’s daughters) and vicious glee (Jenny Lear). The distance between Ophelia’s grief and Jenny’s glee is alarmingly short, and is facilitated by the enigma of Job’s daughters, whose wordlessness seems balanced between acquiescence and accusation. Certainly these resurrected daughters presage the “eerie” and “ruthless” tone that results in what Atwood has called Macpherson’s “rigorous and sometimes bloody-minded self-analysis” in a review of *Poems Twice Told* (411). To the degree that we can read that

“bloody-mindedness” as a common attribute in Macpherson’s daughter-characters from the 1968 “Other Poems” onwards, we can identify with it a certain proto-feminist glee that emerges from that section’s criticism of the fractured mythos of modernism. There is a certain amount of irony in considering that these resurrected daughters are as potentially sacrificial as the young women of “Poor Child” who are “ruined from the womb” (*PTT* 12) or the “daughters mild and fair” in “A Garden Shut” who are “spit rudely on” the unicorn’s “sexual thorn” (55). It would be true enough to say that Macpherson practices feminist “revision” as Adrienne Rich exhorts, “entering an old text from a new critical direction, [...] not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (35). However, the literary daughters Macpherson resurrects are, in effect, ambiguously feminist. They suggest an elegiac problematic in Macpherson’s work, in the ways that the daughters “are all in their various ways betrayed by impulses that reach out for the conditions of an unfallen world” (*Spirit* 146). As Macpherson puts it in an early poem in *Welcoming Disaster*, even these rebellious daughters are “still waiting for the spark from Heaven” (*PTT* 64).

These “bloody-minded” daughters perform a feat of liminality; they assert their femininity in the timely addition of the section, and their presence questions the position of women in the earlier version of the text. However, since the daughters are refugees from that fallen world, they cannot quite find purchase in the new redemptive world. Though the glass head of Macpherson’s “anagogic man” holds “[t]he sun, the stars, the figures of the gods,” it does not seem to hold the idea of, or the manifestations of, any women. Though his head encompasses “[a]ll us and our worlds,” Macpherson warns that “to startle him” is to allow “some /Poor soul to its destruction come” and that seems to be

the case with women of original text of *The Boatman*. The “fallen women” do not survive the apocalyptic Flood, and any “woman-in-effect” seems to be the “soul” who cannot be encompassed in the mind of the anagogic man: the female soul “[s]lipped out of mind and past recall / As if it never was at all” (PTT 42).

The lack of critical attention to these poems and their implications speaks of another kind of liminality. Only Atwood has commented on the “Other Poems” in her 1982 review of *Poems Twice Told*. Even Weir, in her extensive discussions of Macpherson’s texts, does not venture near these poems. In “Jay Macpherson and Her Works,” Weir concludes that by the end of *The Boatman* “[c]ommunity triumphs over the temptations of solitude the avenger, and the word triumphs over silence” (209). But the resurrected daughters are without community, ghettoized within the text, those “Other Poems.” Their isolation, even from each other, is self-destructive. In affecting a literary resurrection of daughters who were originally sacrificed in line with the father’s death or debilitation, Macpherson creates a “new world” out of an elegiac impulse for the fallen world. In “a culture experiencing a violent ambivalence toward the father” (Jardine 47), Macpherson complicates her bloody-minded daughters by having them mourn the fallen world and mock the new redemptive world.

In the section of *The Boatman* titled “O Earth Return: A Speculum for Fallen Women,” Macpherson reflects upon the tendency for Biblical and classical mythology to condemn to annihilation whores and virgins alike: sexually savvy woman die in sin and shame, while virgins are martyrs to their innocence. In 2005, it is difficult *not* to read this “speculum,” that instrument of observation and diagnosis, as an instrument of Macpherson’s irony. The early version of *The Boatman* contains no human women at all

once the Flood has begun; in the final “Book Of Riddles,” the only females are supernatural ones that could not drown: angels, mermaids, and phoenixes. The addition of the “Other Poems” to the 1968 edition suggests a wry take on the Old Testament valuation of the daughter as generative beings, as purveyors of the Lord’s Blessing. These deliberately uncooperative daughters revise the ending of *The Boatman*, while their presence in the revised text reminds readers that the Anagogic Man and the Fisherman “hoick[ed] [...] in” by God’s “patient grin” may be read with considerable irony. Macpherson’s determination to worry the myths she appeared to support in the first six sections offers a chance to read *The Boatman and Other Poems* as a text that enacts more than a dutiful daughter’s obedience to her cultural, literary, and Christian fathers. What shadows do these “bloody-minded” daughters cast in the projected world of Macpherson’s male seer? With one foot in and one foot out of Macpherson’s apocalyptic world of revelation, these elegiac daughters position themselves over the abyss of modernist daughterhood in order to question the place of women in the post-Flood world, and in the symbology of Western literature.

The resurrected daughters’ demand to be taken seriously is of primary importance in the post-Flood world. When Ophelia warns, “None shall make a game of me,” she cautions readers that Macpherson’s argumentative daughter figures are deeply ambivalent to the tensions of patriarchy. To be “made a game of” implies participation in and capitulation to mockery on the daughters’ behalf, the kind of passive victimhood that Macpherson displays dispassionately in the first three sections of *The Boatman*. With this seventh section, Macpherson changes the rules of the game. These daughters dare to question the concept of redemption, but their most rebellious act appears to be survival

itself, and by surviving, they call into question the place of women in Western literary culture, trapped as they are between Biblical typology as the Frygian “Great Code” of cultural formation and as a force that is systematically fatal to women. If the “Anagogic Man” represents the hermeneutics of *The Boatman*, then the surviving daughter as “Anagogic Woman” counters with a female figure that refuses sacrifice and idealization, but survives nonetheless in the post-Flood world.

Atwood asserts that “[t]he central voice of *The Boatman* is one of a complex and powerful grief, and its central symbols revolve around separation and loss” (409). Part of this complex and powerful grief is the separation of women from God as a father figure who views his daughter as either a virginal object of sacrifice or just another fallen woman. Critics who suggest that Macpherson is too indebted to Frye are missing the irony of her creation of a God who “hoicks” men into His grace and forgiveness, but abandons women to oblivion, textual absence, or interpretive obscurity. Weir’s suggestion that Macpherson asserts a high modernist sense of the death of God, that the text must account for itself in a Godless world, is particularly useful in regarding the fate of the resurrected daughters (“Jay” 176-78). Macpherson begins by introducing doubt into the narrative of the “master text” as a defence against a surfeit of “feminine” emotion:

Ophelia on the threshold of the season
 Stands doubting, fears, lets fall
 Green love, green sorrow, shaken without reason:
 Poor maiden, not the girl for fall. (“A Winter” 51)

The idea of an Ophelia who stands on the threshold instead of plunging in, who dares to doubt, who “lets fall / Green love, green sorrow” rather than herself being befallen with

love and sorrow is a minor revelation. This is an Ophelia ruled by thought rather than affect. Neither sexual nor dead, Macpherson's Ophelia is not a fallen woman in any sense; she has already achieved more than the sexually doomed women of "O Earth Return" and "The Plowman in Darkness." Indeed, Macpherson's Ophelia is "not the girl for fall" so much as she is not the girl who *will* fall. We have left the fallen Shakespearean world in which Ophelia must be sacrificed on the altar of male desire and paternal death. Macpherson's Ophelia is more cautious at her threshold, "shaken" by the promise of winter. She is no paragon of reason, but she "lets fall" the two emotive concepts that dog her in *Hamlet*: love and sorrow. In "The Woods No More," Ophelia rediscovers her grief but, although her "tears run down" and her "heart is sore," she warns that "none will make a game of me" (PTT 56). She is no longer a pawn in a game of political romance; she has removed herself from the tragic equation, and no longer offers her drowned body to precipitate or resolve male desire. By the end of the poem, she warns her lover to "make no bones" – a warning against sexual congress and death and, perhaps against accusations of frivolity or being "without reason": make no bones and no games of her; do not die, do not make fun, do not make love. This Ophelia is a young woman as dedicated to mourning both her father and herself as she previously was dedicated to madness. In "A World of Glass," she is featured as "a small damp female" who pushes her weeping body against the glass as she cries (56). The display of such an image connotes this grief as very public and determined; the display connotes an active refusal of a diversion into madness. In refusing sacrifice and asserting her grief as a spectacle, Macpherson's Ophelia suggests that the acknowledgement of grief can be, in Gillian Rose's sense, a quest for justice.

In “The Beauty of Job’s Daughters,” a poem that Atwood praises for its “outwardly formal, flexibly-handled lyricism” (409), Macpherson debates the value of beauty in relation to justice. The poem shows Job’s sufferings rewarded, as they were in the Old Testament, with the devotion of his restored daughters. Macpherson’s first line, “The old, the mad, the blind have fairest daughters” seems to pun on “fair,” meaning both beautiful and just in this context. The daughters spend the first three stanzas of the poem supplying Job and his visitors with a welcoming environment, “[w]ide shining rooms more warmly lit at evening, / Gardens beyond whose secrets scent the air” (*PTT* 53). Whether Job is old or blind or mad, or possibly all three, is rendered moot by Macpherson’s description of how he has “[a]ttained in age to inwardness of daughters” (53). The implicit intimacy and unwavering faith of this “inwardness” seems deeply suspect, even as the word implies that Job’s silent daughters serve his inner life and his sons may serve him in the larger social world. To receive such daughterly devotion seems both heady and suspicious, even more so when Macpherson suggests that Job is so entranced by the attentions of his daughters that nothing else seems as interesting or delightful:

Not wiles of men nor envy of the neighbours,
 Riches of earth, nor what heaven holds more rare,
 Can take from Job the beauty of his daughters,
 The gardens in the rock, music at evening,
 And cup so full that all who come must share. (*PTT* 53)

This full cup, the bounty that must be shared (or flaunted) in its abundance that surpasses all other pleasures, warns the reader of the impossibility of this paradisaal dream. Neither earthly evils nor heaven’s temptations can move Job from the devotion of his daughters, who prove to be figments of his fevered imagination, mere “desert stumps.” These

devoted daughters have already served as sacrifices to God. Macpherson places this poem third in the “Other Poems” section, so that the hint of steel in her Ophelia is followed by a dismantled dream of the daughter as devoted servant. The woman as redemptive beauty, the woman who serves and demands nothing, the all-giving maternal figure in the body of a young girl, is a romantic construction. It is no wonder the old, the mad, the blind have the fairest daughters; these examples of womanhood are constructed from the hallucinations of delirium. The poet’s choice of “desert stumps” as corollaries for the daughters is not a complete parallel with the pillar of salt into which Lot’s wife turns, but the stumps are nevertheless reminiscent of the lonely annihilation of that cautionary tale.

If Ophelia lives to complain, as she never had a chance to in *Hamlet*, then Jenny Lear emerges in her two poems as a daughterly law unto herself. Combining the characteristics of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, Jenny is Lear’s fictional fourth daughter, the one who stays with him, but refuses to sing with him in prison “like birds i’ th’ cage” (*King Lear* 5.3.9). She is not above exploiting Lear’s infirmity under the guise of daughterly care; her attentions to him are sassy, crudely flirtatious, and sometimes cruel. Her irascible nature mirrors her father’s temperament, and allows her to survive by virtue of a rough poetic justice; she is, in many ways, the daughter that Lear deserves. As much as Macpherson has fun with the bawdiness of the limerick form, she offers a Shakespearean daughter who is a walking contradiction of devotion and disobedience. On one hand, Jenny proves to be a successful device in stirring up the reader’s sympathy for Lear; with her verbs straight out of broad sex farce and sadism, one shudders to think of Jenny’s harsh ministrations to Lear’s frail body. But in positing the “fairness” of daughters as a traditional literary virtue, Macpherson implies that Jenny’s actions are

“just desserts” meted out to Lear. Despite her cruelty, she acts as a textual tonic after the multiple passive deaths of lolling shepherdesses, sacrificed virgins, and the pale and righteous weepiness of Macpherson’s Ophelia. Jenny is no model of filial piety, but she is righteously vital and, as her two poems complete the 1968 version of *The Boatman*, she demands a serious reading for her audacity alone.

Jenny sneers at Matthew Arnold’s Margaret of his 1849 “The Forsaken Merman,” who left her merman husband and amphibious children to return to Christian devotion on land. Macpherson echoes Arnold’s rhyme of “whirl” and “pearl,” in a parody that displays Jenny’s contempt for Margaret’s piety and sets up her own assertion that she is “more of a hell of a girl” (PTT 60). Though Lear is glossed as a Neptune figure, Jenny does not appear to show any signs of leaving Lear to a watery repose like the “king of the sea.” Instead, she insists on a program of rigorous torture, thinly disguised as care. She recommends a walk by the sea and a “horrid long talk,” and pushes the limits further to imply sexual and physical violence:

Poor old fish, you’re no walker at all,
 Can’t you spank up that elderly crawl?
 I’ll teach you to hurdle,
 Led on by my girdle,
 With whalebone, elastic and all.
 (PTT 60)

By the poem’s end, when Lear is at last allowed to shut his eyes and seek the blindness that plagues him spiritually throughout Shakespeare’s play (but an affliction that he may devoutly wish for as relief from Jenny’s ministrations), she becomes a kind of cannibal “crunch[ing] down [his] bones / Guts marrow and stones,” consuming the father in order to “raise [him] up dancing again,” a resurrection that is ambivalent at best.

Jenny Lear's violence and taunts deliver a satire of Cordelia's tender care, and Jenny herself is a parody of the returning daughters who redeem their sinning fathers in Shakespeare's late Romances: Perdita in *A Winter's Tale*, Marina in *Pericles*, and Imogene in *Cymbeline*. Cordelia attempts to do the same for her father but dies before Lear secures redemption. Jenny's second "love-song" repudiates easy daughterly piety and suggests a deeply ambivalent perspective on this daughterly role:

Were I a Shakespearean daughter,
Safe restored through fire and water,
You the party in the crown
-- Someone get the curtain down. (PTT 60)

Is the call for the curtain a call for the play to end, or her wish for the father's death? Is she indicating that Lear is not worth saving, or that she herself is ill-suited to the role of the redeeming daughter? Suffice to say that Jenny considers herself a different species, and is not shy about saying so, though we are left wondering at the suddenness of that falling curtain. Is her voice aggrieved or mocking, or even ashamed? Undeniably, it is difficult to pinpoint Macpherson's highly ambiguous tone, but it is worth noting that, instead of the "hoicked" fisherman that ends the original *Boatman*, Macpherson's 1968 edition ends with Jenny Lear's decisive rejection of the daughter's restorative role. In the end, Jenny proves too self-destructive for her text. Far from being the anagogic woman, she is instead self-annihilative, but her wrung-down curtain on daughterhood presages the daughter-mourner of *Welcoming Disaster*. If *The Boatman* offers daughters who are caught in an ambivalent grief at the loss of the father's world, then *Welcoming Disaster* argues that this grief is a force for literary and cultural change, a turn from the "good daughter" of the modernist era to the "woman-in-process" that emerges as a late twentieth-century product of modernity.

Welcoming Disaster: the daughter's hauntology

The struggle for subjectivity in *Welcoming Disaster* develops into elegiac concern that is also existential; can a person exist outside reference, outside the master discourse, even if (or especially if) she loves and serves the master discourse? How can a female poet, as Macpherson characterizes her narrator, grieve after the “fatherly” myth and discourse that abandons her? As an example of a Kristevan “subject-in-process,” the daughter-narrator of *Welcoming Disaster* argues for subjectivity at the same time as she mourns the lost world of myth from which she enacts her exile, even as she probes the myths for answers to how to grieve, and how to find consolation. According to Kristeva, such an exile, whether forced or self-imposed, is the path to abjection: “being uprooted from psychic space remains always imaginary [...] Polyvalent, undecidable, infinite. A permanent crisis” (*Tales* 383). In *Welcoming Disaster*, the narrator’s displacement from the “psychic space” of her poetic tradition results in the abjection of the narrative voice. Kristeva asserts that the “abject is the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost” (*Powers* 15). Given Judith Butler’s historical suggestion that father-daughter relationships suffer from a “crisis in kinship,” it should come as no surprise that the “permanent crisis” of abjected love surfaces in these poems. That the abject daughter provides a poetic and psychic parallel to the “lost object” of the father is only underscored by Kristeva’s warning that “the abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*” (*Powers* 1). Macpherson’s melancholic daughter of *Welcoming Disaster* is the abjected self, estranged from the myths and symbolic systems that have served her as the father’s talismans. As the narrator claims in “Masters and

Servants,” she is “born unfree” and serves a “tranced master” (75). Kristeva is explicit in her definition of abjection as a force of preservation, a “narcissistic crisis” that draws a great deal of energy from desperation: “The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments [...]. Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (*Powers* 15). If the “alchemy” of *Welcoming Disaster* acts out an abjection that is also a resurrection of the mourning daughter, then the grieving narrator remains trapped in the paradox of welcoming disaster, much as she has “nurtured horror” in the Kristevan fashion.

Welcoming Disaster proposes a mourner who attempts to haunt the dead through her Orphic descent into the underworld – and finds that the journey and consolation of that myth fails her. The profound melancholia of *Welcoming Disaster* shows up in the daughter’s abjection and classic Freudian “lowered self-regard.” Macpherson’s daughter-narrator describes herself as “stupid – cumbering the ground” for news of the dead (*PTT* 66), until she transforms into a “lady” who “haunts ghosts” (72). Even though Jardine claims that the retrograde dangers of nostalgia are considerable when discourses conduct a “melancholic search for a recognizable solution” (68), the danger of nostalgia is even greater when discourses remain trapped in oppressive rhetoric. The narrating persona’s gothic conception of herself applies pressure to the elegiac convention of the grieving mourner, but this is not pure melancholia either, for all its self-consciousness. Though abandoned, the persona is energized rather than enervated. She is witty and sometimes sly; she calls upon an abundance of texts to support her argument for the return of the dead. Her mourning is neither stately nor silent; it is a performance of a Kristevan

narcissistic crisis, as Macpherson inscribes the abject daughter persona as performative melancholic.

Welcoming Disaster may be read as “a work of disappointment, of frustration, and hollowing” (Powers 210), which does not make the text a disappointment to read, but rather situates that disappointment along the continuum of contemporary forays into the elegiac mode. Weir suggests that, in *Welcoming Disaster*, “Macpherson’s vision is an inescapably tragic one” in which silence triumphs over the word (“Jay” 209). W.J. Keith takes a different view in his 1995 article in *Canadian Poetry*, noting that the book’s “deftly achieved balance” (35) depends upon an “essential ambivalence” (40) and a rich ambiguity (41). Macpherson’s method of harnessing the “powers of horror” in a search for female redemption and subjectivity seems to underscore the persona’s position not only as a “subject in process” or “woman-in-effect,” but something more strange, what we might call the “abject-in-process.” The abjection of the narrator-daughter drives the text, and to a certain extent, she clings to her abjection because she sees her abjection as a way out, especially when the pattern of descent and ascent proves unfruitful. The difference between nurturing horror and welcoming disaster is a fine distinction, but if the former is a Kristevan “narcissistic crisis,” then perhaps the welcoming of disaster gestures towards a larger social consciousness, that “first great demystification of power” (Powers 210) that forges a new subjectivity.

Weir focuses on the text’s emphasis on a “condition of disaster” as a manifestation of personal despair (“Jay” 207), and certainly her identification of the text’s “elliptical, circumscribed [and] self-reflexive” tone informs this study (“Towards” 61). However, Weir chooses not to focus on Macpherson’s use of elegy, nor does she

discuss the role of the father figure as an elegiac beloved. This figure is the narrator's focus from the start of the text, when the narrating persona establishes herself as a mourning daughter, abandoned by the word, struggling to deal with the loss of the paternal *logos*. Part one of *Welcoming Disaster*, a section titled "Invocations," begins with a fear of being abandoned by the word, and turns to a longing after a lost oracular figure. Macpherson implies a male muse in her use of a magus figure, not the least because his "absence" is equated with nothing less than "havoc," the wanton destruction of worlds (67). Here too the narrating daughter's poignant question echoes throughout the text: "is love haunted?" (68). In this text, love is haunted by the alchemist-father's "book of laws" (62), but even as the narrator sets these laws up as immutable, she cannot anticipate how the law of this father will betray her. Her invocations of the dead fail; the "old spells" of his mythology are unworkable, "hollow" (73). When the father departs, the power of myth wanes with him. As a mourner, the daughter's solution to being abandoned by mythology is audacious in its desperation. She tries to manipulate the myths into performing for her as they do for the father figure: as familiars to his magic. In "Lady Haunts Ghosts," the narrator mourns by haunting rather than by being haunted; because her "phantoms" are "too weak" to haunt her, she must "take the whip and urge them" into her world. Once in their presence, the lady of the poem ravishes the ghosts for sustenance:

Back in the light I rummage them, ransack them,
 Breathe them and suck them, wolfish, famished, rake for
 News of my lost ones, gone where gods of darkness
 Keep, unforgiving. (PTT 72)

Displaying a good deal of “bloody-mindedness,” the narrator does not shrink from her new identity as an abject mourner who demands attention from her dead. She calls herself, variously, a “ghoul” (71), a “goblin,” and a “familiar” (75), a “lost soul” motivated by “greed, pride and envy” (76). She labours at “conjuring the dead,” but finds even the living are trapped in “magic circles” and “dead-engrossed, they make no sign” that they are aware of her presence (66). The lost magus figure for whom she mourns is at once an “enchanter” (75) and a “man of stone, of ivory, of glass” who will not (or cannot) yield to the narrator’s “conjuring,” but instead remains “tranced” by his former power (75). The interplay of these two figures produces what the poet calls “complicities” (77), which includes poems as “painful, cautious offerings” (78). The daughter reveals herself in a self-lacerating view to be no more than a “cherished bosom-serpent” (76), recalling the gleeful viciousness of Jenny Lear, and her father’s injunction that “sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is / to have a thankless child” (*King Lear* 1.4.295-96). Macpherson carries this trope of the needy, vicious daughter into part three of *Welcoming Disaster*, titled “The Dark Side,” in which the narrating daughter enters a “castle with the mystic name,” descends a “[s]tairway to the underground/ Where the lost ones shall be found” (82). There she sits a lonely mourner’s vigil resolving to “[n]evermore behold the day, / Keep a lasting watch above / My undying monster love.” Though Macpherson invokes horror-movie phantoms throughout this “Karloff Poem,” “monster love” seems to describe the tenor of the daughter’s affections as much as the body she seeks.

The failure of the mythological journey to the underworld is played out repeatedly in this text, as the daughter fruitlessly searches castle dungeons, basements, and root cellars for ghosts to love or interrogate. But she cannot find an entry to the underworld

and, finally, she abandons her project of haunting the dead, only to find the father at last in a place she never thought to look. Searching for his image in “the well of truth, of images, of words,” she sees only her own “pupil head” backed by a sky of stars (83). When she turns to look at the sky, she sees the image of Orion, “the winter-king.” In searching for the lost father on “the way down,” she finds him above in the firmament. Frye designated winter as the mythos of irony and satire, and far from representing a Christian apotheosis of the father, this discovery of the “winter-king” reveals the magus father as the dark alchemist, a “fiend” who lives according to a reversed law of physics and morality: “[h]is up is down: his height is set/ In Hell, and yet he shines” (84). The irony of this reversal shocks – the father is not languishing in the afterworld but is a demon pinned to the sky – and it would be easy to construe this reversal as a cruel parody of Christian consolation. This image of the magus is not, as Raymond Williams warns, a “lonely, bitter, sardonic and skeptical hero” who could “take his ready-made place as the star of the thriller” (35), but, rather, a revelatory image that leads to *anagnorisis*; the “lost beloved” father figure is not lost, nor should he be beloved. The well of truth reveals to the mourning daughter the hollowness of the magus-father as a heroic figure.

Being “bloody-minded” means possessing inordinate powers of perseverance, the kind of perseverance Frye notes is needed to pass through “a dead center,” like the hole in the ice where Dante and Virgil climb down Satan’s body in order to climb up Mount Purgatory; passing through the ironic reversal of perspectives wakes the protagonist to understanding (Frye 239). As the daughter turns to see the image of the father in the sky, she embarks on what Judith Butler calls a “melancholic turn” towards subjectivity. By abandoning her dependence on traditional tropes of consolation, the mourner turns back

to contemplate the enormity of her loss and so faces the “loss of autonomy that is mandated by linguistic and social life” (*Psychic* 195-96). The “melancholic turn” allows mourning by asserting subjectivity, an “ego [that] is other than itself; what melancholia shows is that only by absorbing the other as oneself does one become something at all” (*Psychic* 195-96). The mourning daughter’s demand is answered at last; she turns to identify her lost beloved, and in doing so, finds the bedrock of her own subjectivity.

The final irony is played out in “They Return.” The dead return, as the elegist has “long desired,” “but they are changed” (*Poems* 85). They are not the loving beings of memory, but rather “[a]rmoured [...] in private shade, / Sullen, helmed against the light.” “Absence, winter,” instead of being “shed like scales” as the narrator anticipates in the first verse, invokes the very name of the dead, and they are unregenerate in laying blame for their uncomfortable return to the living: “Their resentment fills our arms, / Sifting from their ribs like night.” Because this scenario recalls all the gothic horror of an Edgar Allen Poe short story, the ending of the poem offers a kind of sobering insight that shocks the narrator out of the unrelenting “devouring” grief of the previous two sections. Understanding, at last, that these returned dead have had their “human places” not only devoured by death and entropy, but also “sold to darkness by our fear,” the narrator has room to admit her complicity in the final two lines of the poem: “They, returning, bring us back / Absence, winter, what we gave.” The absence that began the elegiac sequence has now been returned to the narrator, in a matched pair with winter’s irony. The dead cannot return not only because of a spiritual injunction placed upon them, but also because they can never be equal to elaborate encomium or iterations of loss.

The final sections of *Welcoming Disaster* show the narrator returning to the teddy bear as a substitution for the loved one, a trope Macpherson suggests is both larkish and deadly serious. But the gothic spell has been broken; the devouring daughter is nowhere to be seen. The fourth section, "Recognitions," shows the bear's "way down" as the daughter's surrogate beloved. In the end, the bear becomes a symbol of pastoral renewal, buried beneath "the world-tree" where the daughter "repos[es] in his shade" and can see "[p]unished giants, monsters dim – / All the heaven turns on him" (*Poems* 89). By becoming the still point in the earth around which the stars turn, unlike the Orion-father who is impotently pinned to the sky, the bear fulfills his symbolic destiny as the daughter's substitutive "messenger" (88) to the dark side.

When the mourner's persona moves "beyond consolation" in the terms that Melissa Zeiger has laid out, the tendency for the mourner's crisis of faith to emerge as the subject of the poem looms as a possibility. Kristeva warns that such a literary project is tied to stubborn abjection, and not to an expiation of grief: "Death would thus be the chief curator of our imaginary museum; it would protect us in the last resort from the abjection that contemporary literature claims to expend while uttering it" (*Powers* 16). But Macpherson's narrating persona in *Welcoming Disaster* is insistently abject as a strategy; for her, abjection is a methodology, a system of symbolic eschatology that she calls upon to restore her former epistemological powers. This "nurturing horror" resembles the Freudian work of mourning in its attempts to grieve a lost attachment, and detach from the lost beloved, but its Gothic insistence resembles the immovable indulgence of melancholia. The grief of Macpherson's abject daughter draws energy from an inquiry into her own state of abandonment. The inquiry itself is "ghoulish" in its

intensity; the persona is determined to endure the rigours of mourning, including the unanswerable question, “Is love haunted?” This question receives no definitive answer, unlike the circular “riddles” of *The Boatman*, in which each title contains the answer for the poem’s proposed question. Whether or not love is indeed haunted, the question itself loves the text of *Welcoming Disaster*, as well as the emergent designation of “woman-as-subject.”

Failure and the Mourning Daughter

Reading failure in *Welcoming Disaster* is fundamental to reading the text’s comment on the inaccessibility of elegiac convention to female poets, as well as for the text’s sequence-long intimation of the potential failures and frustrations of father-daughter kinship. Failure is omnipresent in *Welcoming Disaster*, from the daughter’s failed invocation to an arrested descent to frustrated desire and finally, to a failed consolation. Knowing that the elegiac mode courts the failure to reclaim the dead, it is no small wonder that Macpherson’s abject daughter welcomes disaster. What is left to her? What if failure is a daughter’s only certain inheritance, a sign that she cannot inherit the paternal *logos* because it is not, and never has been, her father’s to leave as a legacy?

The function of failure in *Welcoming Disaster* is paradoxical: the more the daughter tries to invoke mourning, the less successful she is as a mourner. The ghoul-mourner fears the loss of words; she begs to be included in the orthodoxy of knowledge as the Father has defined it; and ultimately, in identifying the Father as a satanic figure, she learns to live with the absence of firm epistemological ground. The mourning daughter of *Welcoming Disaster* continues to crave the unveiling of a revelatory

consciousness filtered through mid-century feminism, but instead reaches an uncomfortable and even mournful comprehension that the myths she loved do not, and cannot, represent her reality. Whether this makes Macpherson the kind of poet Frye calls “a poltergeist in the city of God” (*Anatomy* 128), a poet who haunts religion for answers rather than for inspiration, remains to be seen. In the end, the failure of the daughter’s quest brings her to the “conjecture” she imagines at the end of the text’s fifth section, “Shadows Flee.” But Macpherson poses an intriguing series of questions in a poem titled “Playing.” She wonders about life beyond the tenets of the father’s alchemical poetics, querying about her lack of success at “Square One” and speculating about the operation of “Square Two,” which she believes “[n]ever got marked on this / Board.” The narrator is clear that “[l]ife on Square One” was an exercise in frustration: its “[s]urface not solid, though / Hard as a stone” (*PTT* 94). In spite of her energy, she gets nowhere: “I venture runs, but I’m / Always bounced back.” The daughter-narrator goes on to consider the move from failure and frustration to the next “square” in the game:

Hardly a player,
 Nothing to win,
 Clocking how long I might
 Take to clue in.
 Now we’ve exhausted the
 Charms of Square One,
 Maybe you know a
 Game that’s some fun?
 (“Playing” 94)

Without acknowledgement, the despair of the mourner goes unabated and the elegist must fall back upon the struggle for her own subjectivity as a consoling act. *Welcoming Disaster* performs this struggle for subjectivity within the bounds of mourning, but mourning, in turn, operates as a metaperformance for the poet’s turn from

the rhetoric of abjected daughterhood to the approach of a new female subjectivity, “Square Two.” The daughter is a liminal figure who attempts to reoccupy the centre of discourse. She refuses to be a sacrifice and struggles to cast herself in this drama in another way. Macpherson’s dismantling of elegiac convention defeats her mourning persona and, ironically, this dismantling underscores the need for an elegiac mode in which tropes of mourning and consolation are available to all speaking subjects.

The final irony may be found in Macpherson’s “Notes and Acknowledgements,” in which she thanks Frye, in perfect rhyme, for being the “best of readers [...] sure to cast an arranging eye” on the text (*PTT* 96). (Both books were dedicated to Frye as well. The dedication page of the original *Boatman* reads “For Northrop and Helen Frye,” while the more casual salutation of *Poems Twice Told* reads “For Norrie as always.”) But Macpherson’s “Notes and Acknowledgements” in *Welcoming Disaster* situates itself as ironic not only because Frye who mentored Macpherson in her interest in “the relationship between life and myth,” but also because *Welcoming Disaster* remains a revelatory or apocalyptic text in the Frygian sense. Donna Bennett reminds us that Frye used the term “apocalyptic” to connote the idea of an “unveiling” of an as-yet-unperceived world (818).⁴ *Welcoming Disaster* strives toward an unveiling of a feminist future, but does so in careful terms. Weir notes that the text operates as “an elaborate strategy of camouflage which strives paradoxically for both concealment and revelation” (“Toward” 61). Macpherson operates within the “profound paradox” that Jardine identifies as characteristic of a woman writer who quests after a reconfigured subjectivity: “she proceeds from a *belief* in a world from which – even the philosophers admit – *Truth* has disappeared” (31). Jardine warns that the tension of such paradox may

result in “at least three possible scenarios: a renewed silence, a form of religion (from mysticism to political orthodoxy), or a continued attention – historical, ideological, and affective – to the place from which we speak” (31-32). *Welcoming Disaster* charts the narrating persona’s struggle with all three of these scenarios for the female writer: the ghoul-mourner fears the loss of words; she begs to be included in the orthodoxy of knowledge; and ultimately, she learns to live with the elegiac absence of firm epistemological ground and a guiding “father.” She has, in Jardine’s sense, been “set in motion both rhetorically and ideologically” (36). To paraphrase Lyotard, the daughter’s “incredulity” at the failure of “master texts” operates as a metaperformance of the poet’s profound ambivalence towards a paternal system of language.

In *Welcoming Disaster*, the narrator’s displacement from the psychic space of her poetic tradition results in the abjection of the narrative voice; she is an outsider in her own text. “Let me not be put to silence, / From thy page blot me not out,” the daughter begs at the beginning of the text (62). The negative characteristics that the narrator attributes to her own behaviour are part of the “inescapable boomerang” of Kristevan abjection, “a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (*Powers* 1). Macpherson’s method of harnessing the “powers of horror” to find a way to inscribe female mourning underscores her narrator’s dedication to abjection as a possible escape from a static system of mourning, especially when the pattern of descent and ascent proves unfruitful. The difference between nurturing horror and welcoming disaster is a fine distinction, but not without its own kind of energy to challenge the usefulness of elegiac convention. The demanding mourning daughter, by casting herself into abjection, emerges with a subjectivity that will not be blotted out.

Chapter Three

Alterity and Inheritance: Margaret Atwood's *Morning in the Burned House* and Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Cartouches*

Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task.

Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

[...] a frog teeming
with recollection sang:
“I am the daughter,
I am the resurrection.”

Lola Lemire Tostevin, *Cartouches*

[...] mute sister,
left-handed shadow cast by an absence
that moves you nevertheless to love:

Margaret Atwood, *Morning in the Burned House*

When Jacques Derrida asserts that inheritance is a task, he asserts the performativity of that task, as a work, a labour, a creation that is undertaken on behalf of one person by a designated “other.” This task is a conscious and deliberate undertaking that functions to preserve possessions or attributes, at the same time as it confirms the relationship between the granter and the inheritor. Inheritance, too, depends upon a central paradox. The inheritor must prove him- or herself worthy of inheritance by demonstrating him- or herself to be both dependent and independent of the granter – enough alike the granter to be named as inheritor, and different enough from the granter to receive the inheritance as a gift. But not all inheritances can be easily transferred over the gender divide. As Linda Boose suggests, because a daughter is “set apart from the other [family] members as the only one who does not participate in extending [the family’s] integrity into history,” she remains an “alien” in the filial system until she

“change[s] her sign” by giving birth to a son (22). However, the possibilities for a daughter’s legacy to emerge outside of the bounds of patronymic inheritance are mediated by Derrida’s assertion in *Specters of Marx* that “inheritance is never a given” but “always a task” (54).

The work represented by the elegy as an artifact of mourning offers hope for the reconfiguration of the daughter’s ability to inherit from her father, if inheritance can be construed, as Derrida seems to suggest, as task-oriented work rather than a cultural “given.” This language of attentive labour suggests strongly that the work of mourning and the task of inheritance are contiguous, if not mutually inclusive. Peter Sacks cautions that an elegist must engage in “frequently combative struggles for inheritance,” including the possibility that he may need to “wrest his inheritance *from* the dead” (37). In elegies by Margaret Atwood and Lola Lemire Tostevin, the daughter-elegists labour to inherit a transfiguring alterity and, in doing so, do not so much wrest inheritance from the father as they forge subjectivity through mourning the father.

Both poets fashion the daughter as the father’s other, but they also create alter egos that are other to the daughter figures, suggesting that the *anagnorisis* of these elegies concerns a subjectivity that is enlarged by mourning without remaining trapped in melancholia. A frog sings of a daughter’s resurrective power; a silent alter ego leads a mourning daughter away from grief and towards transfiguration. With these guides, Tostevin and Atwood explore paternal elegies that not only enact the cultural imperative of a daughter’s paternal mourning, but also consider the significance that a daughter’s alterity plays in the paternal elegy. *Cartouches* and *Morning in the Burned House*, while governed by different aesthetics, are poetic sequences in which a father’s death re-

introduces a daughter to a sense of social and literary “otherness.” However, this alterity is not abjection but transfiguration; the daughter is not estranged by otherness but, rather, she remakes herself as a subject through an experience of otherness that proceeds from the father’s death. The degree to which these poems situate alterity as a daughter’s legacy is problematized by the absence of daughters from systems of patrilineage and filiation.

As artifacts that record the effort that underlies the task of inheritance, elegies display the “unusual degree of self-consciousness regarding the actual performance of the work” of which Sacks warns, as well as “the elegist’s reluctant submission to language itself” (2). In *Morning in the Burned House*, the mourning daughter is temporally dislocated into a “nothingness in motion” (120) until she recognizes her “dark twin” as the ultimate Other who facilitates her mourning. The mourning daughter of *Cartouches* locates the power of alterity in the multiple figures of the “wise daughters” of Egyptology, and reconfigures the act of naming as female transformation rather than reiteration of patronymic inheritance. Both texts suggest that a daughter’s inheritance involves asserting her Otherness, in direct opposition to the son’s implicit need to prove himself worthy of inheritance through his resemblance to his father.

The significance of filiation, as a system that accompanies and often defines the parameters of mourning, is a primary concern to rethinking the possibilities for daughterly inheritance from the father. Derrida’s discussions on the work of mourning in Western culture are situated within, and problematized by, fidelity to a spectral father figure. In *Specters of Marx*, he identifies a ghostly figure that “conjures” commitment from the living and demands responsibility in a constantly displaced space between the public and the private (50).¹ This “spectralizing” element leads to Derrida’s concept of a

hauntology, ghostly tropes that “make possible” other systems of thought that have been historically predicated upon the idea of filial inheritance, specifically, “ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology” (*Specters* 51). In “By Force of Mourning,” Derrida identifies a “fantastic force of the specter” that pushes mourners “beyond the alternative between presence and absence” (*Work* 153). The tension between presence and absence is the realm of the elegiac mode. The “force” which Derrida attributes to the paternal specter in the process of mourning works within and perhaps even defines such tensions. To begin to identify daughterly negotiations of inheritance, it will first be necessary to examine how the daughter may fit into, or choose to reject, filial hauntology. The assumption of a male mourner in elegiac work is old territory. Peter Sacks reminds us “the right to mourn was from the earliest times legally connected to the right to inherit” (37). The need to situate the female-written paternal elegy while considering Sacks’ reference to a “combative struggle” to inherit brings me to Nancy J. Holland’s question:

what becomes of the daughter in [Derrida’s] hauntology, the daughter for whom both the symbolic and the literal F/fathers, and thus also the duties and debts they engender, are always simply Other, beyond any possible filiation or inheritance? (65)

The growing body of female-written paternal elegies, particularly elegies that query the rhetoric of mourning over memory, may be seen as textual evidence that daughters can and do negotiate actively to situate themselves as their fathers’ rightful inheritors. The “otherness” that Holland attributes to the fathers may be an integral part of the father’s legacy, and the daughter’s tropological bid for “otherness” is a central concern in the epistemological and kinship struggles inscribed in these “inheriting daughter” elegies.

Inheritance and Interiorization: Another Other

Morning in the Burned House and *Cartouches* share a striking similarity of form and movement toward elegiac subjectivity for their daughter-narrators. Each text features a section that elegizes the father, and then devotes another section to exploring the force of mourning upon the daughter. But more importantly, both *Morning in the Burned House* and *Cartouches* propose that alterity is the key to the daughter's inheritance, and set their daughter-mourners to the task of exploring the otherness that the father's death precipitates. In turn, Atwood and Tostevin deliberate about how tropes of otherness proceed from the father's death without being issued by the father's authority. The Other, in their terms, is a figure of absence that ironically leads to subjectivity; though the Other is made available to the daughter through the catalyst of her father's death, her claim on alterity (and subsequent transfiguration) depends upon how she recognizes and embraces the Other as her own "resurrection" in the face of death. The Other is a female force; though this potential for alterity does not issue from the traditional sovereignty of the father, these elegies do much to distinguish the dying men as examples of "good fathers," and both Atwood and Tostevin imply that the death of the Kristevan "loving father" precipitates a daughter's transfiguration into a larger subjectivity.

The distinction between mourner and elegist is crucial for both Atwood and Tostevin. The mourner functions as a character within the text, while the elegist engages the rhetoric of resurrection and transfiguration that Derrida asserts "stem from...the power of alterity that works over the being-to-death of every image" (*Work* 150-51). The mourner remains subject to elegiac convention, while the elegist challenges and expands the generic concerns of the elegy. The mourner is placed at the service of the *anagnorisis*

that the elegist pursues. The father's alterity as an elegiac object is "worked over" by the elegist in order to achieve deliverance after his death. Viewed this way, the "being-to-death" in Derrida's hauntology is not nihilistic. If "power comes to" the dead body after "the imaginal representation" (*Work* 151), Atwood and Tostevin extend this power to the daughter figures of their poems, so that the work of mourning performed by the paternal elegy also works to transfigure the mourner as Other. In reconfiguring the elegist as a transfigurative daughter, rather than a dutiful supplicant to the paternal tropology of death, these poets resist Derrida's claim that tropes of mourning succumb to "inevitable interiorization" (*Work* 159). Derrida's "force of mourning," in these paternal elegies, becomes that which prompts the mourning daughter to situate herself as the father's inheritor by accessing her subject position as the Other, and so refute Derrida's "unbearable paradox of fidelity" (*Work* 159).

In "By Force of Mourning," Derrida is frustrated by, yet insistent upon, the "idealizing incorporation" of the dead beloved father figure. Discussing his theories of mourning with Louis Marin's theories of the image, Derrida proposes an interiorized image of the dead as the gazer and the mourner as the "gazed upon": "the force of the image has to do less with the fact that one sees something in it than with the fact that one is seen there in it. The image sees more than it is seen. The image looks at us" (160). The apparent absence of the beloved father only underscores the power of his internalized gaze, capitalizing upon the play between absence and presence that is so central to the elegiac mode. For Derrida, the father's gaze, stronger after death, not only describes the "unbearable paradox of fidelity," but demands that such a paradox is served and strengthened through filiation. For female writers of paternal elegies, the "unbearable

paradox” is not necessarily one of fidelity but, rather, a paradox of daughterly duty that must demonstrate fidelity beyond filiation and without the right to inheritance.

Though Derrida offers the interiorized gaze of the dead as a revelation about the mourner’s inheritance, that the mourner becomes the object of the gaze – even one as idealized as the gaze of the lost beloved – does not represent a new position for women. Significantly, there is a dearth of “inevitable” interiorization of the dead in Atwood’s or Tostevin’s work. Of course, this does not mean that such female-written interiorizations cannot be found, merely that they are not as “inevitable” nor as enduring as Derrida suggests. For feminists who read Derrida’s often-persuasive discussions of mourning, images like his perpetually pregnant mourner or the internalized gaze of the Lacanian lawgiver may read as tropes of oppression rather than of mourning. Kate Meheuron, using what she calls a “queer-theoretical reading stance,” praises Derrida for “assuming an effeminate tropology” to “displace the aggressively phallogocentric tropes of exclusionary homosocial address that so often orchestrate men’s encomia to men” (177). Meheuron’s reading assumes that a displacement of phallogocentric tropes will displace the homosocial address. Unfortunately, Derrida’s choice to characterize the frustrated body of “impossible” and “necessary” mourning through metaphors of female reproduction manages to maintain homosociality while presenting yet another literary/critical example of a female body trapped by its physiology.

Though Derrida’s tropology may be misaligned, I suggest that there is hope for a feminist analysis of his paradox of fidelity, especially considering what may be bearable or unbearable about it. The condition of being “beyond filiation” could precipitate a model of inheritance that values alterity. If the daughter is as Other to the father as he is

to her, her difference may become an argument for inheritance rather than against it, providing that she can appropriate the potential power of Otherness.

Inheriting the Father's Ghost: Other as Ideal Woman

If a daughter's inheritance requires her to embrace the power of her own alterity, what does this idea imply about the force of mourning in father-daughter kinship? Both Nancy Holland and Kelly Oliver identify possibilities for reading the daughter as the father's truest Other and, as such, his best inheritor. An heir, she who inherits, is charged with creating a future for a father's memory and his legacy. His daughter, in Holland's and Oliver's formulations, is situated as the person most likely to build a future from the tension between her similarity to, and difference from, her father. The daughter's task of inheritance involves laying claim to an exchange of Otherness with her father that does not trap her in the crushing paradox between love and reason.

In *Subjectivity Without Subjects*, Oliver questions fatherhood as a "promise of ethics" that anticipates the future, and argues for the daughter's Otherness as a potential for inheritance: "How can the son be an absolute other if he is also the same? [...]" Wouldn't the daughter be the stranger child? Because of sexual difference and the nonlinear cyclical effects of feminine time, wouldn't the daughter be other enough to open up an infinite future?" (35). Regarding a daughter as the future of the family has most often been construed as a generational metaphor, in which a daughter is valued for her reproductive capacity rather than for her ability to carry forward a moral or psychological legacy. However, Oliver contends that inheritance is less concerned with a

child's gender than it is with paternal "election" of an heir, asking, "if fatherhood is a promise for the future, could this future be a daughter?"(35).

Like Oliver, Holland stresses a daughter's estrangement from her father as the key to defining her as a possible heir. To this end, Holland points out that a daughter is doubly estranged from her father. She fulfills the uncanny requirements of "another Other" as the most appropriate inheritor; because the daughter is "neither enough one's own to trust or include in the patrimony of full citizenship/personhood, nor enough other to exclude or to kill," she is, from the father's perspective, "an Other not one's own" (Holland 69). The ways in which Holland suggests that kinship implies "ownership" are deeply problematic; if the daughter is truly this kind of "Other" who is inevitably "not the father's own," she seems equally likely to inherit everything or be completely erased from history. In an attempt to legitimate the daughter's loss of the father, Holland and Oliver imperil the cause of daughterly inheritance as much as they argue for it.

However, Holland also offers a different formulation of the Other in the guise of an idealized female figure, and her proposal of this figure is of particular interest in reading the powerful female figures in Atwood and Tostevin. If the daughter as inheritor is haunted by her own "strangeness," Holland proposes that such an idea of strangeness can be both alleviated and promoted by the father's death. With a wry nod to the difficulties of her own formulation, Holland contends that the daughter's inheritance does not follow "the simple line of father to son or master to disciple, or even master to slave," but rather involves a triangulated relationship of father, daughter, and spectral Other (67). The spectral Other in Holland's formulation is not the ghost of the father, but rather the ghost by which the father himself is haunted, "the ghost of the perfect image of the

Imaginary female...the ghost of a woman who never lived" (67). By inheriting the father's "ghost" of an "ideal woman," Holland suggests, the daughter resurrects herself rather than the figure of the father, using the father's "ideal" as a springboard to vault into her own version of the "ideal woman."

It seems nearly impossible to ignore the similarities between Derrida's internalized, idealized paternal gaze and Holland's reading of "the father's ghost." In both formulations, the daughter's mourning practice is dominated by the father's standards even after his death. Holland glosses Derrida's "interiorized gaze" when she asks "what if the ghostly apparition looks at us [and] sees not we ourselves, we daughters as we are, but only its own ghost, the spectral image of what it wants to see, desires to see, must see when it looks at a female form?" (67). The implications of this formulation are troubling, particularly the idea that the daughter is doomed to act out the father's desire as her task of inheritance. Holland's final question about this female "rupture" in Derrida's hauntology is poignant: "if one is haunted, not by the ghost of the father, but by the father's ghost, how could any salvation come out of that?" (68).

Salvation, such as it is, arrives when the daughters appropriate Otherness for themselves, and perform their own "paradox of fidelity"; by acquiring and performing otherness, daughters become both "other than" and "similar to" their fathers. When Atwood and Tostevin appropriate their daughterly alterity, they also refigure the ideal woman from an impossible rival to a psychopomp that leads the mourners to transfiguration. This mediating "ideal woman," as the father's ghost and tutelary Other to the daughter, lives in Atwood's "mute twin" and Tostevin's "wise daughters," particularly as such figures act as guides to a transfigured subjectivity for the mourning

daughter. Intriguingly, daughters in both texts use the dead father as a figure of permission rather than oppression, contrary to Holland's warning that the father can only teach the daughter about the limits that the world will place upon her (65). *Morning in the Burned House* and *Cartouches* emphasize the daughter's task of inheritance: to seek alterity for both herself and her father's memory, supported by Kelly Oliver's assertion that "paternity is a special case of alterity" in that it "is the only relation in which the self becomes other and survives" (31). Unsatisfied with tracing the father's illness and death through a traditional mode of panegyric, Atwood and Tostevin construct daughters that resurrect and enlarge themselves through mourning. They make of their mourning something more than a monument to the father alone, and propose, in contrast to Oliver's formulation, that it is daughterly existence that forms a special case of alterity; the successful daughterly mourner takes on the "ideal woman" as "father's ghost" and appropriates the power of otherness for herself.

Incandescent Alterity: Atwood's *Morning in the Burned House*

Margaret Atwood has spent much of her career charting the struggle between old forms and the emergence of new ways of writing. Though she is often read as a student of Northrop Frye, her wry iterations of myth, her resistance to the Orphic journey, and her ironic take on the psychopomp "mute twin" figure suggest that Atwood is a good student of Jay Macpherson. But just as Macpherson has said little about possible autobiographical readings of *Welcoming Disaster*, Atwood too has been resistant to readings that reduce the elegy to a personal expression of grief made available for public consumption. In an interview with Mark Abley in *Poetry Canada Review* to promote

Morning in the Burned House, she stresses that elegies begin with autobiographical detail, but that they quickly lose that version of the “truth” to emphasize concerns with genre, myth, and reader response: “when you write a poem, and the reader reads it, the reader is not reading about you. The reader is reading about himself” (“Dire Things” 3). She confronts Abley when he questions her about the autobiographical basis for the poems, and, in doing so, Atwood asserts that elegies are affective but not necessarily easily consumed: “So it’s really a biographical question. Do you want to wring some feeling from me? Do you want me to express emotion? Is that what you have in mind?” (“Dire Things” 3). Atwood dispenses with the populist notion that elegies are therapeutic or magically cathartic, and also abandons the descent pattern of the Orphic journey that has served her so frequently in other works.

Since its publication in 1995, critics have sought to situate Margaret Atwood’s *Morning in the Burned House* in context with the rest of her work by emphasizing how her previous mythological and elegiac explorations manifest themselves in this later poetic text. Articles by Janice Fiamengo, Sara Jamieson, and Kathryn van Spanckeren concentrate on the paternal elegies of section IV without much reference to the mourner’s elegiac transfiguration in section V. The exception is an article by Coral Ann Howells, in which Howells posits a “radically altered frame of reference for the surviving subject” in one of the earliest published articles on the text (74). I propose that the subject’s frame of reference begins to shift early in the text, and that what is ultimately altered by this shift is her subjectivity.

The first indication of this shift can be noted in Atwood’s lack of reliance upon the Orphic descent pattern in the text. Atwood has employed the descent pattern so

frequently in her texts that Rosemary Sullivan names a chapter of her biography of Atwood “a descent through the carpet,” referencing Atwood’s early poem of the same name. Despite evidence of the descent pattern in poems like “Down” and “Shapechangers in Winter,” a more compelling and consistent pattern in *Morning in the Burned House* is Atwood’s metaphorical dislocation of time and fragmentation of consciousness. This dislocation begins as uneasiness about aging in “You Come Back” and “Waiting” in section I, appears as the monologic hindsight of history’s powerful women in section II, and takes on global proportions in the environmental and scientific mortality of section III. “A Pink Hotel in California” (MBH 76-77) sets up a temporal and geographical dislocation for the narrating daughter between a hotel room in 1994 California and a cabin in the northern Canadian forest in 1943, a setting familiar from Atwood’s earlier work, particularly the novels *Surfacing* (1972) and *Cat’s Eye* (1988).

While in section IV of *Morning in the Burned House*, the father will experience this temporal and physical dislocation in “Wave,” “King Lear in Respite Care,” “A Visit,” and “Flowers,” it is the daughter’s sense of displacement that dominates “A Pink Hotel in California” and presages the way nothingness will usurp her in section V. Because the daughter’s task of mourning requires her to seek out Otherness, it is tempting to suggest that Atwood rejects the descent pattern as insufficient for or inappropriate to an exploration of mourning a parental death. The thematic juxtaposition of “Down” with “A Pink Hotel in California” suggests that the daughter’s task of inheritance is resistant to the Orphic descent, that she must extricate herself from the descent pattern in order to discover her own potential for alterity. There is, of course, a certain irony to reading Atwood against her own beloved conventions. As she writes in *Negotiating with the*

Dead, the figure of the poet “can bring the knowledge held by the Underworld back to the land of the living” (174), but I will argue that the knowledge to pursued by the work of melancholia in section V of *Morning in the Burned House* is very temporal and mortal. The mourning daughter cannot escape to the Underworld to pursue romantic knowledge, but must meet mourning in the bland and sometimes banal light of the physical world.

For Atwood’s text as well as Tostevin’s, I will consider the degree to which the father is presented as the daughter’s Other of which she is deprived by his death. This is the premise with which Holland begins, that “the symbolic and the literal F/fathers” along with “the duties and debts they engender, are always simply Other” to daughters (65). Considering Holland’s contention that the “father’s ghost” haunts the daughter in the shape of his concept of the “eternal idealized woman” that the daughter can never achieve (67), Atwood’s female figure in section V, the “girl without hands” and the “mute twin” of “The Signer,” operates as an idealized mourner, a figure who truly is beyond consolation. In *Morning in the Burned House*, the haunting image of the father takes the form of neither an internalized paternal gaze nor a Hamlet-like “father’s ghost” but, rather, in the shape of a woman whose Otherness exposes the dislocated daughter to her own doppelgänger. Throughout section IV, Atwood gives the reader fair warning of the daughter’s growing sense of self-estrangement and experience of time as “doubled,” manifested as present and past through the medium of her father’s illness. “Man in A Glacier” uses an image from a “box of slides in the cellar” to situate the father as “alive or else preserved, younger than all/ of us now, dark-haired and skinny” (81), reminding the daughter that “this freeze-framed / simulacrum or slight imprint” cannot approach the “everlastingness” she longs for (82). In “Bored,” Atwood uses the “myopia” of the

extreme close-up view to emphasize the father's scientific patience, his legacy of "looking hard and up close at the small / details" (91), which becomes painful for the elegist as she watches his final illness. Ironically, Atwood's *The Labrador Fiasco* shows up the fallacy of close observation when the dying father figure looks at a gleaming hardwood floor and deduces that the shine indicates he is on a river (37). The myopic view in "Bored" is itself partial sight, depriving the narrating daughter of the larger focus of time spent with her father.

From her position in the future, the daughter claims that though, at the time, she "could hardly wait to get / the hell out of there to / anywhere else," her father's illness has re-cast those "boring" moments as sublime in their particularity: "sunnier" with "more birdsong." Her wish to return to the past and abandon all knowledge of mortality makes her final claim one of frustration and desire:

Perhaps though
boredom is happier. It is for dogs or
groundhogs. Now I wouldn't be bored.
Now I would know too much.
Now I would know. (92)

This "knowing" presents part of the daughter's inheritance but, taken by itself, it shares the overtones of Derrida's interiorized father figure, the "law" that cautions the daughter about the price of knowledge in love. Between "boredom" and the weight of her future "knowledge," the daughter is trapped in a reverse Cassandra position that frustrates temporal existence; it may be banal to recognize disaster too late, but this recognition can be agonizing nonetheless. The discovery that human beings cannot "stop, or live backwards" (82) is central to these poems, as temporality is central to the elegiac mode. Atwood nominates "Chemistry and Physics" as "our bad godmothers," whose curse upon

humanity is at once entropy and consciousness: “*You will not sleep forever*” (82). The poems “Man in A Glacier” and “Bored” suggest that, while the daughter may inherit knowledge from the father, this knowledge cannot efface a more creative melancholia aimed at accomplishing her task of inheritance, and, subsequently, the work of mourning.

Though her father’s departure initially hastens the daughter’s dislocation, that dislocation is the means by which she becomes aware of her potential for alterity. For instance, in “The Ottawa River by Night,” the father’s disappearance down the river recalls apotheosis: a divine vanishing that blesses the mourner with his absence, at the same time as his absence becomes that which she grieves. In this poem, the father disappears down the river in his canoe, navigating the rapids “so skillfully / although dead,” towards a “safe arrival” that may not be in a Christian heaven, but is definitely Christianized in its view of the afterlife as a haven. As the father canoes not towards the “real sea” but the “other sea,” his transformation into his vigorous youthful self reaches its apex: his pain is over, his passage completed. However, this completion does not translate into consolation for the daughter; in fact, as the father becomes more like his younger, competent self, the daughter is significantly displaced by his departure. The gap between the expectation of consolation and the lack of it creates a tension in the text, and with it, a new demand on the mourning daughter. She must discover, in Melissa Zeiger’s words, what lies “beyond consolation” for her. “The Ottawa River by Night” may be Atwood’s most distinctly Canadian elegy, from the echo of Tom Thomson in the father’s disappearance down a river to the suggestion that the Ottawa River functions as the waters of Lethe bringing forgetfulness to the mourner. Nevertheless, the river brings nothingness rather than forgetfulness. The daughter is haunted by “the sound of nothing”

in her head (104). On second thought, she determines that it is “not nothing” but something she can no longer identify, a sense of temporal displacement that echoes the father’s fateful “wave [that] washed over him” until his family “remained to him in fragments” (83). Similarly, at the end of “The Ottawa River By Night,” the narrator can only partially classify her own perception:

it was a beach, or shore,
and someone far off, walking.
Nowhere familiar. Somewhere I’ve been before.
It always takes a long time
to decipher where you are. (104)

In trying to “decipher” her location, the daughter takes up her father’s sense of displacement, but the legacy of alterity left by the father operates as a model for her. However, since the father finds his alterity through his journey toward death, how then will the daughter perform this work of mourning that seems to, in the Antigonal mode, require self-sacrifice? Part of Atwood’s answer can be found in the longest poem in the text, situated just before the section on the father’s illness. “Half-Hanged Mary,” the poem about Atwood’s ancestor Mary Webster who was hanged as a witch in the 1680s, presents an image of a woman who becomes powerful through her fragmentation; she may be “half-hanged” but her survival makes her fully conscious. She is “all fullness, all vacancy” by the end of the poem (69), a conflation of opposites that emphasizes her newly-found power of alterity. Through her engagement with death, Mary achieves a kind of worldly apotheosis, cut down like Christ from her perch but feared rather than revered. Nevertheless, “[h]oliness gleams on [her] dirty fingers” and she “speak[s] in tongues,” knowing that her only “audience is God, / because who the hell else could understand me? / Who else has been dead twice?” (69). Mary fuses together her naïve

victim self who was “hanged for living alone” and for “having blue eyes” (58) with the cynical other she discovers during her all-night vigil: “Before, I was not a witch. / But now I am one” (67). In a similar manner, the daughter, dislocated by mourning, must be transfigured by an encounter with an Other in order to perform her task of inheritance. Mary’s alterity makes her over into a powerful seer; the mourning daughter eventually recreates herself as the “incandescent” being of the eponymous ending poem, “Morning in the Burned House” (126-127).

The father’s departure leaves the daughter “filled with dread” despite the presence of “birdsong,” unable to eat or rise from her bed, figuratively “lying on [her] deathbed” (“Up,” 110-111). She is surrounded by nothingness, rather than being filled with emptiness; this is not an interiorized image of Derridean “pregnancy” of mourning but an external image of being encompassed by nothingness:

Where is it coming from, this echo,
this huge No that surrounds you,
silent as the folds of the yellow
curtains. Mute as the cheerful

Mexican bowl with its cargo
of mummified flowers? (111)

The narrator is situated in a stasis that parallels the father’s illness, proceeding from a collapse of time, or what Derrida calls “the disappearance of the present as death” (*Work* 149). It is not only the present that oppresses with its emptiness; “the future” has become “immense as outer space” and the “density” of the past, with its elegiac “drowned events,” fills her lungs “like gelatin” (111). The temporal collapse that characterized the father’s confusion and illness remains with the daughter; the symptoms do not vanish with the beloved but remain with the mourner, a transferred “inheritance” that seems very

Freudian indeed. But the poems in section V turn from “impossible mourning” to act out what Derrida calls “a re-gaining of force or a supplement of intensity in presence” (*Work* 149), leading the daughter to encounter her doppelgänger as the ultimate daughter-in-mourning. Far from acting as a Derridean trope of interiorization, the nothingness that precedes the appearance of the twin figure is, rather, an exteriorization of grief, an inheritance of shifting space that plagues the daughter with visitations of violent murder, ambush, and drowning (“Vermilion Flycatcher, San Pedro River, Arizona,” 107-108), as well as with a fear of space as annihilating (“The Moment” 109). The nothingness erodes the daughter’s perception. In “Girl Without Hands,” this nothingness melts the landscape before her:

you can’t hold any of it. Distance surrounds you,
marked out by the ends of your arms
when they are stretched to their fullest.
You can go no further than this,
you think, walking forward,
pushing distance in front of you (112)

The poem identifies “the distance” as the space of mourning, but its limitations and emptiness imply that it is more like a refusal to mourn, and the concomitant refusal to see “each leaf / and stone quickened and specific” that holds the daughter in stasis.

Nothingness, like Gillian Rose’s aberrant mourning, refuses the alterity of the Other. As much as the mourner wishes to remain inside “that clean circle / of dead space you have made / and stay inside, / mourning because it is clean,” she recognizes the “girl without hands” as the Other when she appears without explanation; she is a ghostly apparition who is, ironically, more solid than the shimmering pyramids and offices surrounding the protagonist. The girl without hands is similarly “surrounded” by a soundless scream; like the mourner, “[e]verything has bled out of her” (113). The girl without hands is the

Other figure that begins the process of transfiguration for the mourning daughter; her touch feels like “nothing” but changes everything; as Atwood insists, “you would be / touched all the same” (113). The twin figure reappears in the next poem, “The Signer,” still mute but with hands as eloquent as her “absent” touch has been. She is acknowledged as the daughter’s “unknown twin,” “mute sister,” and her “left-handed shadow” who can “translate [the daughter] into bone” (114-115). This psychopomp figure guides the soul of the narrator back to life by taking on the grief duties of the ultimate mourning daughter; as that psychopomp figure becomes affect personified, the daughter-narrator is bereft of her own melancholia and finds that she cannot exist in nothingness. In a twist on Butler’s melancholic turn, Atwood’s narrator banishes stasis for the potential of alterity.

After the appearance of the twin as Other in “Girl Without Hands” and “The Signer,” Atwood introduces the idea of the shapeshifter in “A Fire Place” and “Statuary,” before using the metaphor of the shifting self in “Shapechangers in Winter” and “Morning in the Burned House.” Atwood’s shapeshifter metaphor has signified slyness from its earliest appearance in her work (“Eventual Proteus,” “Circe/Mud Poems”), a way to evade responsibility or avoid the past. But “A Fire Place” and “Statuary” emphasize inevitable temporal change rather than a willful mythic force, and Atwood’s choice of eventual “shapechangers” over the science-fiction term “shapeshifters” seems apt. In each poem, the effects of entropy mirror the force of mourning, distinguishing grief from nothingness, and alterity from depression. The burned place in the forest – another frequent trope in Atwood’s work – is featured as a body with “a gash,” “a scar,” something that humans tried to save “with hand-pumps and axes to a damp and acrid

standstill" (116). Such a standstill is intentionally deceiving, for the burn turns to new growth, bringing people and animals to feed off its berries and eventually sprouting "scrubland, a light-green / sticky new forest." "A Fire Place," as a burned spot in a forest, and a "fireplace" as a hearth that warms and sustains human life, recalls the daughter's advice to the confused father that it is "better to watch the fireplace / which is now a beach" ("A Visit" 89). The father makes a final allusive appearance in "A Fire Place," in the guise of the "youngish (now dead) men" with "high-laced lumberjacks' (obsolete) boots," an echo of the paternal image from "Man in A Glacier." Atwood's nod to pastoral renewal as a convention of consolation does not go unnoticed here, but her persistent image of the earth as a human body that "rips openings in itself" only to "skin over" the "wound" points to a deep ambivalence about what it means to have a body.

"Statuary" picks up on this idea, beginning with a comic grotesque of lopping off of body parts, but soon settles into an aesthetic of erosion that emphasizes the entropy of the human body. Language decays as the body does, Atwood warns: "Our mouths erode in the rain / you send, and all our bright definite / nouns and quick verbs with them," until the statue's head is filed down to "a tongue / cut out of a face and frozen" (118). The poem is addressed to a "you," in this case the "nothingness / that by its moving / edges defines time" (119). The statues speak as beings shaped by the weight of that absence, the force that creates "those knotholes the world turns itself inside out through" and that ultimately grants the statues an ambiguous form of life: "lets us fly and embody, like you. Until we are like you" (119). The tension between absence and presence remains a paradox at the end of "Statuary"; the statues are both embodied in flight and "ground down" to a profound absence; they are "like you" despite (or because of) that fact that

they are “pebbles / on the shore of a vast lake that doesn’t...exist yet.” The force and motion of nothingness, glossed earlier in “Girl Without Hands” as profound grief, presages a more existential concern: somatophobia, a fear of dissolution or fragmentation of the body.

“Shapechangers in Winter” returns to three tropes that are nearly iconic in Atwood’s corpus, neatly divided into three parts within the longer poem: part one reiterates Atwood’s “descent through the carpet” motif; part two revisits the primitive human/animal perspective that appears in *Procedures for Underground* (“Midwinter, Presolstice,” “Habitation,” “Procedures for Underground”) and *Power Politics* (“At first I was given centuries,” “They are hostile nations”); and part three echoes the final poems of *You Are Happy*, with their winter claustrophobia and sense of danger. By the end of “Shapechangers in Winter,” the Other reappears as “you,” the necessary twin as partner. The poem begins by reminding readers of the “nothingness in motion” in the previous poem, “the power of what is not there” that Atwood’s narrator sees as either “indifference / on the part of the universe, or else a relentless / forgiveness” (120). Atwood uses the nothingness to precipitate the descent pattern in part one of “Shapechangers,” in which the “pressure” of “nothingness in motion” pushes the perspective down through layers of the earth and then “sideways, out into the city,” and further out to encounter “the air, and then the scintillating ions, / and then the stars. That’s where / we are” (120-22). When in part two, Atwood’s narrator refers to her shape-changing tendencies, she does so with nostalgia, as though the desire to escape in a different form has become foolish: “Once we were lithe as pythons, quick / and silvery as herrings, and we still are momentarily, / except our knees hurt” (123). Atwood questions recognition and kinship, citing “eye

problems: too close, too far, you're a blur. / I used to say I'd know you anywhere but it's getting harder" (123-24).

The irony of the shapechangers who lose their power to change but are harder to recognize in their stasis becomes the turning point for the final part of the poem. Part three shows us an acute sense of dislocation, with the narrator and the "you" figure "lost in a six-dimensional forest" at the solstice, "[t]he year's threshold / and unlocking" (124). The solstice's temporal shift prompts nothingness to perform its trick with space: "The walls of the house fold themselves down, / and the house turns / itself inside out." The house shifts shape, but the humans do not, and in the destruction of the house, the narrator is left to recognize the Other with whom she endures the nothingness. A comparison of this last piece of "Shapechangers in Winter" to the *You Are Happy* sequence suggests that the "you" figure has become a partner or husband figure. As the dark and cold converge on the narrator as another form of nothingness, the Other remains constant even when "the visibility is zero: *Yes. / It's still you. It's still you*" (125). These final lines might also be read as an affirmation of subjectivity: "It's still me," a recognition of identity against the force of nothingness. This recognition prepares the narrator for her transfiguration in the text's eponymous poem, "Morning in the Burned House."

The burned house, a conflation of the collapsed house from "Shapechangers" and the burned space of "A Fire Place," is another Atwoodian trope, the "small cabin" of *Procedures for Underground*. That the time can be identified as morning suggests that time has stabilized in its collapse, or merely that the narrator has defined morning in her own terms. Past and present are conflated now, and the narrator is present within that

conflation. She is double-bodied at last, in the realm of the Other; she is simultaneously a child and an adult, “eating breakfast” in a house that has already burned and, indeed, the narrator herself is still burning in a fire of transformation, a blaze of glory that seals the hard work of mourning. This is the final step in becoming Other; the protagonist is present and “non-existent” in her “cindery...radiant flesh” (127). The poem’s final word, “incandescent,” from the Latin *candeo*, “to be white,” describes the narrator’s flesh and the hot light of the fire, as well as the whiteness or blankness of nothingness, now finally assimilated into the narrator. This incandescent daughter is reminiscent of Jay Macpherson’s “Phoenix,” part of Macpherson’s “Book of Riddles” in *The Boatman*:

That fire is my element, consumes and lights me,
Heals and accuses and again requites me.
I feed on the dew of heaven and live without desire:
Reader, consider a life in the fire.

(*Poems Twice Told* 47)

While Macpherson’s Phoenix is no figure of mourning, there is a suggestion of the kind of paradoxical destruction and creation in the fire’s ability to “heal,” “consume,” and ultimately “requite” the narrative “I,” just as with the mourning daughter of “Morning in the Burned House.” The Phoenix’s invitation for the reader to “consider a life in the fire” is typical of Macpherson’s monologic address to the reader, and when Atwood’s mourning daughter chooses the transfiguration of “a life in the fire,” Macpherson’s influence on Atwood, as her former professor and mentor, is evident.

In Abley’s 1995 interview, Atwood refutes his distinction between mourning and celebration in poetry by asserting that elegy is both “a natural Canadian form” and “a celebration” (29). Though it seems odd to suggest that any literary form is “natural,” Atwood’s final poem definitely implies celebration, and her homonymic pun on morning

as the end of mourning connotes hard-won consolation. Using the same pun for similarly serious ends, Gillian Rose suggests that “inaugurated” mourning does end: “mourning (or absence) must become our norm (or presence) for there to be morning (dawn or future), and not interminable dying” (Rose 103). In embracing alterity as part of the father’s legacy, Atwood’s mourning daughter completes her task of inheritance through transfiguration. Her incandescent subjectivity moves into a transformative future, secure in the knowledge that she leaves “death worked and unworked,” in Gillian Rose’s terms, behind her (101). I propose that this transformation serves as an alternative to Derrida’s “impossible” and “necessary” mourning, with Atwood negotiating not with the dead, but with her own poetic persona. She discovers a median position from which the mourning daughter achieves “incandescent” rather than “transcendent” transfiguration.

Theft and Inheritance: Lola Lemire Tostevin’s *Cartouches*

If Atwood’s mourning daughter receives the Other as a way to work towards transformation, the strategies for reconfiguration and Otherness take a different direction in Lola Lemire Tostevin’s *Cartouches*. To examine the text, I would like to begin at the ending of *Cartouches*, for reasons that ought to become clear shortly. The final page of the text dedicates the book to Tostevin’s father, Achilles Lemire, whose illness and death from cancer are the subjects of the book’s first section, “Small Amulets.” On the penultimate page of the text, “Acknowledgements,” Tostevin outlines her interest in and use of the cartouche motif, and acknowledges writers who have influenced her as a writer. Included in these influences is bp Nichol, the Canadian poet whose experiments with language Tostevin admires for their displacement of “the privilege of authoritative

speech” with the result that Nichol’s poetry may be read as “less phallic and more oral, moving towards what the French call *écriture féminine*” (“Paternal” 78). Regarding the “paternal as outlaw” in Nichol’s work, Tostevin sets Nichol up as a mentor figure whose death parallels that of her father, and dedicates a poem to him in *Cartouches*.² She also refers to another influence on her writing, a third, shadowy father figure whom she resists naming but whom she describes as “that other master-name who gave me the definition of a cartouche that best describes the nature of this book.” The subsequent quotation is not credited with a name, but its syntax and style are nearly unmistakable as that of Jacques Derrida.³ The quotation is from Derrida’s essay titled “Cartouches” regarding Gérard Titus-Carmel’s art project “The Pocket Sized Tlinglit Coffin” from *The Truth in Painting*: “I not only have a cartouche, I am it. This is my cartouche, I’m the one who’s stolen it. This is my body, the body of my name” (232). This quotation, wrest from Derrida’s text and “appropriated” by Tostevin, crystallizes the central concerns of Tostevin’s daughterly mourning practice in her *Cartouches*: the patronym, the politics of stealing, and tensions of inheritance.

Tostevin’s refusal to declare the “master-name” intrigues for the ways it cheekily names and does not name Derrida, both acknowledging him and denying him full acknowledgement in a book that questions the power and ownership of names, and what it might mean for women to inherit a name as an elegiac legacy. Tostevin’s willingness to name two beloved men in this text (Achilles Lemire and bp Nichol) only emphasizes the absence of Derrida’s name, and places the idea of “acknowledging” the “Name-of-the-Father” defiantly *sous rature*. Her choice to quote Derrida’s reference to a cartouche as a “signatory” act that invokes “the body of my name” emphasizes the kind of “presence in

absence” discussed in “By Force of Mourning” without using either idealization or interiorization. Derrida is present “in theory” and absent “in name” from this text.⁴

In a long line of performances of creative thievery, Tostevin’s “theft” of Derrida’s quotation is only the most recent. Derrida claims to have stolen the cartouche as a repository for the body, but, in *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida seems to steal these words from the mouth of Titus-Carmel, although no quotation marks actually attribute these words to the artist. Additionally, Titus-Carmel claims to have stolen the idea of coffin as cartouche from the Tlingit tribes of the North American Northwest Coast. These cascading acts of thievery underline the significance of theft as a combined (and muddled) act of creation, appropriation, and inheritance. Derrida notes that Cartouche is “the name of a great robber,” referring to the legendary eighteenth-century French thief (*Truth* 231). Tostevin takes up this heritage of thieving not only to “steal” the language of power as part of a daughterly mourning practice, but also to appropriate the history of writing in order to redefine or rework the name. When Derrida calls the cartouche “the body of [his] name,” Tostevin assert her right to both cartouche as written artifact and name as a way to inherit the spirit of the father.

Derrida stresses the function of the cartouche as “both title and signature” carved onto the outside of a tomb (214). The cartouche speaks for the “mute” coffin that would otherwise “keep the last word” (209). As the assertion of the daughter’s signature upon the text, Tostevin’s cartouche marks the text with her name rather than the name of her father, and thereby suggests that while the text mourns his passing, the text remains hers, in title and signature. On her Acknowledgements page, Tostevin pinpoints her elegiac task of inheritance as an act of exploring “the intricacies of the history of written word, of

naming and how, historically, it was connected to death.” The gold cartouche that “puts into play / the bodies / of [her] name” adorns the cover of the book, a set of four hieroglyphics – “a lion / a dove / a lion / a vulture” – one image for each letter of her first name.⁵ The naming cartouche makes an amulet of the book, a way to guard against forgetting, just as the poems of the “Small Amulets” section ward off the chilliness of consolation, that “detachment” from the loved one that “completes” the Freudian work of mourning (Freud 144-145). Tostevin enters the daughter’s chaos of “exaggeration,” released from the father’s “[m]emory arranged / in neat rows.” This exaggeration in itself may be read as a manifestation of Derrida’s influence on the text, as is the animal featured in the cartouche that is often associated with Derrida: the lion. Stephen Scobie, among other critics, has suggested that Derrida “looked like a lion, the shock of white hair carried with the pride of a mane” and even goes so far to say that Derrida “was writing [the text] with his hair” (*Ghosts* 22). Tostevin writes that her cartouche shows “all I am and all I want to be”; she subsumes Derrida in the trace of the lion’s head.

Tostevin’s dedication of *Cartouches* to her father performs this paradoxical act of theft by writing the name of the dead (Achilles Lemire) on the “outside” of the coffin that is the text (i.e., the text’s final dedication page), creating a parallel with Tostevin’s given name in hieroglyphics on the front cover. As Derrida suggests, the cartouche as theft, naming, and mourning encompasses the text: “The dedication belongs to the book’s cartouche. Like the title and the signature, the exergue, the epigraph, the epitaph. Where does a cartouche end?” (*Truth* 228). The cartouche is offered as a construction in this book, an object Tostevin has made for herself and an artifact for which she has paid; it is not glossed as an inheritance so much as a declaration. As one of the book’s epigraphs,

Tostevin's choice of Anne Hébert's lines from *Le tombeau des rois* is telling: "*Les signes du monde / Sont gravés à meme ses doigts.*" Tostevin engraves her own sign – her name, her poems – onto the world with *Cartouches*. She chooses her second epigraph from H.D.'s "Helen in Egypt," suggesting that a woman whose name is partially erased by history may be read as "a hieroglyph."

Proceeding from the idea that "[a] name is as much / a part of a person / as the soul," Tostevin affirms on her Acknowledgements page that a cartouche "decorated a pharaoh's temple walls and was worn on the body so the wearer wouldn't forget her name, wouldn't forget who she was." The implication that the pharaoh was female is borne out by Tostevin's inclusion of Egypt's only known female pharaoh, Queen Hatshepsut, as one of the "daughters of wisdom" that Tostevin names throughout the text. She even calls the Sphinx "Fille de la Sagesse" invoking not only the order of Catholic nuns who work in service of the poor, but also the idea of the wise daughter. Tostevin tweaks Genesis when she writes of buying a picture of a bird in the "tree of life. Or is it the tree of knowledge?" Are the tree of life and the tree of knowledge indistinguishable, or ought they to be? Egyptian deities included in this company of wise daughters are the resurrective goddess Isis and a "daughterly" version of Thoth, the god of writing that Derrida discusses in *Of Grammatology*. Tostevin proposes an alternate to Thoth in the goddess figure Seshat, the "Mistress of the House of Books" and "true inventor of letters and numbers." In emphasizing the resurrective potential of a wise daughter, Tostevin's mourning moves away from obeisance to the father as a manifestation of the Law, and instead demonstrates the daughter's task of inheritance: to resurrect the father as memory and the daughter as subject, by using her "facility with words."

Derrida warns that a cartouche yields an “autobiographical performative of the signatory” (219) in ways that may intentionally “disconcert” the reader, “like that of a narration the site of which would remain improbable” (*Truth* 220). As a paternal elegist, Tostevin performs as the disconcerting daughter, making an autobiographical text that plays upon the father’s absence, and would perhaps discomfit him. As he is “a man of few words” who is “intimidated” by his daughter’s “facility with words,” he worries about her tendency to “exaggerate everything.” Even as she counters with “exaggeration is the summit of every living image,” she struggles with the elegiac concern that her words, be they description or encomium, will never be adequate:

I know. This order of language is not easy
to accede to. Sentiment, they’ll say.
Yet these words also lie in the realm
of my other, father, and you are not just
another arbitrary sign.

In asserting “my other” as both father and not-father, Tostevin talks back to the theorists, agreeing with Lacan and Derrida that the father is a powerful cultural symbol, but resisting characterizing him as a dread *nom du père* figure.

What seems to be at stake in these lines is Lacan’s contention that filial patricide “is the fruitful moment of debt through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law,” the result being that “the symbolic Father is, in so far as he signifies this Law, the dead Father” (*Écrits* 199). But why must the f/Father signify the Law of the filial “murder”? If anything, in this text, the father represents parental devotion: “a father who never abused his daughter,” but worries about her enough to be angrily relieved when he finds her after believing she may have drowned, a father who shows his fear, a father who

fixes the child's doll when God does not. The father in the poems is more admiring than forbidding, more Karen Press's "everyday saint" (133) than Lacan's "ultimate signifier."

Lacan's reliance on the alpha father's dominance over, and eventual murder by, a primal horde of sons in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* presages a strange gender twist on Derrida's insistence on mourning as a pregnancy or abortion. Derrida's iteration of the lost beloved as an invasive force, not unlike an inner primal horde, glosses Freud's take on the primal horde as a violent physical force that cannot be stopped, and Lacan's authoritative dead Father. However, Tostevin, in writing this particular father-daughter kinship as "unmediated by concept or mastery," proposes a filial connection rather than a filial rivalry or divide:

These poems
are of a body that links us, inescapable,
given. This amulet is but a small conjunction
to compensate for this afternoon when you sighed
for the last time, and, slowly, your hands
took on the temperature of the room.

Tostevin designates the elegies as a "conjunction" that links the bodies of beloved and mourner, as well as linking the "Small Amulets" to the Egypt section, the work of mourning to the search for wisdom, and ultimately the father to the daughter as inheriting Other. Kristjana Gunnars finds that Tostevin's contrast between the "dour silent bedside" of the "Small Amulets" section and the dynamism of the Egypt section emphasizes a "self-consciousness" in the text that "keeps the poems from losing their ground," even when bombarded by an "environment of dead things" that only "thicken[s]" as the text progresses (134-35). Examining both "the tourist as a consumer of dead culture" and "the scholar as purveyor of that which is no longer there," Gunnars reads *Cartouches* as

Tostevin's investigation of "the strange present" (134). However, the "strange present" cannot be separated from the familiar absence of the dead father, so the Egypt section becomes a peripatetic search for new metaphors for recollection and inheritance. Karen I. Press speculates that Tostevin explores Egypt in the second half of *Cartouches* partly "because of her interest in foreign-ness, in not-belonging or lack of place," but Press also notes that "[t]he non-place of the desert [...] facilitates creation rather than prevents it" (136). Tostevin begins the Egypt section by asserting the fear and possible freedoms of "foreign-ness," the benefit of being lost amid one's own inability to make meaning, which echoes the father's lack of facility with language: "In a country where you can't always read the signs you can't always measure the extent to which you are lost."

The choice of a frog as the daughter's resurrective alter ego not only glosses the title of Tostevin's novel *Frog Moon*, but also brings to mind the associations of being "frog-voiced" and "tone-deaf" that Tostevin brings to light in her novel (*Frog* 15). However, in *Cartouches*, the frog sings in the morning, signaling an end to mourning. Her voice is "teeming / with recollection" as she sings her song of transfiguration: "I am the daughter, / I am the resurrection." Tostevin's "gender trick on Jesus" (Press 133) in the frog's reconfiguration of John 11:25 is not a direct or complete reversal. Jesus' promise to raise Lazarus from the dead – "I am the resurrection and the life" – is not quite the same resurrective declaration as the frog's reflection on the daughter's powers. The daughter, as frog and Tostevin's speaking persona, claims the Son's privilege of "resurrection," but does not claim to be able to bring the father back to earthly life. Instead, Tostevin's narrator first declares herself "the daughter," and then a force of "resurrection." Thomas M. F. Gerry's article on *Cartouches* claims that "the poet's father

is resurrected through the powers of language” (198), but this is not true even in metaphoric sense. An elegy may mourn the loss of the beloved in the most profound terms possible, and it may constitute ongoing affections with the dead, but it does not resurrect the dead. Tostevin’s daughter figure cannot bring her father back to life, but she can recollect him – as Isis actually re-collected the scattered pieces of Osiris’s body – through “transmuting elements of reality into the shining, enduring element of fiction,” that which Tostevin calls “the magical art of transfiguration” (*Frog* 161).

For the daughter of wisdom, the task of inheritance includes “getting lost” in order to steal the name, appropriating the word in order to declare who she is. (The paradox and irony of needing to steal what one already owns may be said to sum up much of the tension of daughterly mourning throughout this study.) The wise daughter does not take on her father’s voice, but discovers her own. In recollecting her father, the frog-daughter resurrects herself and enacts the tendency for a cartouche, as a site of theft, to “steal itself” (*Truth* 220).

Nancy Holland considers the daughter’s role in inheriting the father’s name, and quotes Derrida on the incredulity of patriarchs who “do not cease to be surprised and to remain skeptical about the possibility that the daughter could speak in her own name” (“Archive” 31; qtd. in Holland 66). As Holland asks, “[d]oes the daughter have a name of her own?” (66). The daughter’s inherited patronymic surname may or may not be construed as “her own.” When Derrida asserts that “paternity [...] is always inferred from a sentence, a declaration in the form of a judgement” (*Truth* 222), he implies that the name, as a declaration of paternity, may be withheld from a son or a daughter, at the pleasure of the father. But Tostevin challenges this assumption when she begins her text

with her own act of naming; urging young writers to give a name to death and love, she reveals by the end of the short poem that, for her, “each word, / each awkward line invokes one name / and one name only. My father. My father.” The speaker already knows that naming does not “rekindle” life or love, nor does it necessarily create kinship, but it does challenge the daughter to consider the parameters of paternal love, and parental death.

Tostevin does not debate whether or not the patronym belongs to or even represents the daughter. Stephen Scobie points out that in *Double Standards*, Tostevin she puns on the name she shares with her father in a poem titled “*les trios ailes de mon nom*.” The poem’s final words are “*le monde où je le mire*” – the world where I reflect it – and Tostevin’s use of the first-person pronoun “*je*” with the broken syllables of her last name comprising both verb and object, can also be read as “*je le mire*” – “I Lemire” (*Signature* 77). But it is her first name – Lola – that is inscribed on the cartouche and on the book’s cover, Derrida’s “title and signature”: “All I am and want to be: at the same time lion, dove and vulture.” The animal bodies inscribed on the cartouche as name signify courage, peace, and an acknowledgement of physical death. While the song “Lola” popularized by the Kinks in 1970 may not have played a part in Tostevin’s decision to feature her name as a sign, the song’s well-known chorus spells out the woman’s name “L-O-L-A” in praise of the eponymous character’s powerful and ambiguous sexuality, and I read a trace of this musical utterance in Tostevin’s use of hieroglyphics.

Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, reminds us that proper names are “always caught in a chain or systems of differences,” and that the figuration of a name is as important as

its pronunciation: "Metaphor shapes and undermines the proper name" (89). Tostevin demonstrates with equal conviction that names can shape metaphor, as she invokes Isis as a resurrective goddess. Tostevin locates the daughter's power of alterity in the image of Isis, a goddess with the power to "bewitch the heavens" and raise the dead. "If only I were Isis," she writes during her father's illness: "I would transform myself into a swallow / and fan you with my wings." The figure of Isis draws the text towards a peripatetic journey of mourning, a trip into the past in which Tostevin's daughter figure inherits the future by transfiguring herself: "Time and space, / water and desert, every / woman knows you by her name." Isis is a poet figure who "fashion[s] words into perfect bodies" in her "effort to recapture Yesterday." Even the name of Isis can be read as an ontological statement, her name a repeated verb of existence: "is is," an insistent assertion of female being.⁶

But Isis cannot grant the daughter access to "the box of silver and gold" which holds the "book whose words disappear into thin air." This box of disintegrating memory, like a sarcophagus, holds the fragmenting corpse of written discourse. Tostevin conflates it with the "marble box" that contains the father's ashes, suggesting that "the trace of a lingering story" hovers indelibly about the word and the body. Recalling Derrida's idea of the cartouche as Titus-Carmel's tiny coffin, the daughter's trip to Egypt becomes part of retrieving the box of disappearing words; the book becomes the cartouche as box. The trip is nearly thwarted by the realization that, despite Isis's power, all the narrating daughter can do is "continue to cling to" the engraved hieroglyphs "on either side of [Isis's] forehead"; the goddess's resurrective powers will not be granted by request. To access the father as elegiac object and to embrace her own alterity, the daughter must

transcend “time and space, / water and desert” and understand that “every / woman knows you by her name.” The ambiguous possessive of this last line implies that for a woman to know Isis means to know her own name, the woman’s own name as the apostrophe that asserts presence. Working with the elegiac impulse to tell that trace of story, asserting her own name into a story that begins with the father but ends with the daughter, Tostevin implies that Isis’s gift to the narrating daughter is not eternal life but “*a starting over* *a writing down*, a new becoming, ongoing till the end.”

The final poem of the Egypt section, in the form of a journal entry, notes that the “traces” of the two beloved men, bp Nichol and Achilles Lemire, linger on two separate public memorials. Nichol’s memorial is a poem carved into the concrete pavement of a lane now named after him behind the Coach House Press building in the east end of Toronto. Achilles Lemire’s name is carved into a plaque at the base of a tree in a conservation area, an allusion to the Canadian forest that he worked in as a young boy. In *Frog Moon*, the narrator claims the daughter’s voice joins the father’s story to “establish their proximities and their differences” (*Frog* 152). In *Cartouches*, both men are memorialized with literal signs in which their names are inscribed, and “continue to sidetrack” off the authoritative paternal pattern, “at least as far as two names can.”

When Derrida calls a cartouche a “descriptive or definitional utterance” that is also “a *performance without presence*,” he emphasizes how the deviations of such a performance “dislocate” from its own self-production (*Truth* 236). Such a dislocation is fundamental in an elegy in which mourning may be enacted or inscribed in deviation from tradition or anti-tradition. But this “performance without presence” retains an elegiac quality. Early in *Cartouches*, Tostevin notes the Egyptian hieroglyphic symbols

specified in *The Book of The Dead*; the heart is rendered as an AB, “represented by an inkwell in the shape of a heart,” and the soul as a BA in the shape of a “a human-headed hawk / that bears the words ‘Let me be true of voice.’” She goes on to offer the text as “[h]ieroglyphs in lieu of a heart, / an engraved stone to weigh the body down,” suggesting that words can be both ephemeral and weighty.

But it is her final question that *Cartouches* attempts to answer: “What other part for an ABC?”⁷ This enquiry implies that something is lacking from the formulation of the dead person as heart and soul. The daughter, as “other,” supplies the “other part” without substituting herself in sacrifice to the father. Instead, she initiates “*a writing down, a new beginning*” that presages the end but relies upon the power of her own resurrector abilities. In an interview with Barbara Carey, Tostevin declares “[w]riting is a kind of burial,” and compares *Frog Moon* to a “tombstone,” a “concretized inscription of memory” (5). Tostevin’s eschatological metaphors for books as tombstones or cartouches point to her play upon the name as an expression of absence, a concept she proposes to a “shrugging” Derrida in *’sophie* (47). On the heels of Derrida’s assertion that “God as name is the origin of the law and he can only maintain his role if he remains hidden, which means he can only be experienced as absence” (46), Tostevin proposes that “the absence of God and the absence of woman” could be “the same thing,” woman as “only [...] a name” (47). Derrida’s disinterested answer, despite being in the affirmative, only reinforces Tostevin’s conviction that a woman writer’s narrative “I” “can only differ from nothing by the smallest possible margin” (47). With the “smallest possible sign,” a woman’s name may find purchase on the language:

[...] even an apostrophe in addressing absence turns that absence into presence. *’sophie*. Name of a woman, title of a book. On its own, a title has no meaning,

which must be very uncomfortable for philosophers in search of meaning, but a title is at least a promise. Lives up to its promise by giving voice to words in which a figure is described. (47-48)

While the title to which Tostevin refers in this passage is '*sophie*, *Cartouches* also hides a woman's name on the cover, in the hieroglyph made from representative symbols for the author's name. Writing is not always a burial; *Cartouches* resembles an archaeological dig, where the ancient treasure of the daughter's name is rediscovered and asserted as a sign. The resurrected daughter, concealed yet revealed on the book's cover, turns her absence into presence in *Cartouches*, and asserts her subjectivity by taking on "the promise of the future" that Oliver attributes to the father. The daughter becomes her own promise: for the text, and for her own frog-like voice.

Some of the work of that transfiguration is accomplished by tracing the mourning practice of the daughter as a parallel to the father's death journey, while resisting the traditional mythic descent pattern. Certainly the Christian apotheosis of the lost beloved is a common enough elegiac convention, but the transfigured spirit within an elegy is traditionally the lost beloved. Recall Milton's Lycidas who is "mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walked the waves" (lines 172-73) or Shelley's "soul of Adonais, like a star" who ascends "burning through the inmost veil of Heaven" (*Adonais*, lines 493-94). But in *Cartouches* and *Morning in the Burned House*, the transfigured spirit is that of the mourning daughter, not that of the dead father. The fathers in both texts are equipped for the journey toward death in conventional elegiac terms, though neither text allows anything so grandiose as an apotheosis. Atwood pictures her father canoeing "downstream" to "the other sea, where there can still be safe arrivals" (104). Tostevin makes her poem a gift to accompany her father on his spiritual journey:

So with these words, father, I make you a pillow
to cradle your head toward the horizon.

With these words I give you a cake to eat
on the eastern side of the Lake of Flowers.

With these words I give you a heart
of lapis lazuli – a stone heart maybe,
but, nonetheless, everlasting.

Notably, the convention of equipping the beloved for transformative travel does not console completely, and Atwood and Tostevin spend significant portions of their texts working out the terms of the daughter's transfiguration as a parallel journey. This transfiguration does imply a kind of consolation and an elegiac "remaking of the world" after death, with female subjectivity at the core of that remaking.

I began this chapter with Nancy Holland's question: "what becomes of the daughter in this [Derrida's] hauntology?" The key is of course in Holland's apt choice of verb: the daughter *becomes*. She refuses Derrida's "tendency to accept incomprehension" in mourning (*Mémoires* 31), and instead aligns herself with the Otherness that her father's death has emphasized for her. Favouring alterity might mean refusing Derrida's "inescapable" tropes of interiorization, but it does not mean refusing mourning. Atwood and Tostevin show that a daughter's mourning, a feminine filiation and inheritance is not necessarily attached to Derrida's "unbearable paradox of fidelity," but rather works within that paradox, using the force of mourning to imply enhanced subjectivity for the daughters, a subjectivity that is neither vengeful nor neglectful, but grows nonetheless from the father's departure.

The extent to which it could be said that Tostevin and Atwood "sign themselves to death" (*Truth* 237) as elegists depends upon their performance of the daughter's task of

inheritance. This elegiac performance includes refusing the rhetoric of mourning while exploring the elegiac impulse. The injunction for female elegists to mourn without inheritance is itself paradoxical, and any ventures into the possibilities of female inheritance require an audacious assumption of filial right. In proposing daughterly mourning that does not bury the daughter beneath her duty to her father, but rather proposes mourning as a trope of female inheritance, Atwood and Tostevin situate their mourning daughter figures as productive inheritors rather than supplicants.

Chapter Four

The Pilgrim and the Riddle: Kinship in Anne Carson's "The Anthropology of Water"

When is a pilgrim like a photograph? When the blend of acids and sentiment is just right.

Anne Carson, "The Anthropology of Water"

While almost every elegy could be described as a literary journey through the genre's conventions, or a revelatory journey through the mourner's argument against death, or even an affective charting of mourning to consolation, the journey as a process of discovery presents problems as a metaphor for mourning practice. On one hand, undertaking a long journey will demand the daily exertion of any devotional practice, including the work of mourning or melancholia. On the other, though consolation in particular is an attractive concept as a geographical destination, the work of mourning is not so easily folded into a cartographic movement. In chapter two, I examined the ways that the narrator of Jay Macpherson's *Welcoming Disaster* is frustrated and ultimately remade through her inability to access the ancient trope of the journey to the Underworld. In Anne Carson's "The Anthropology of Water," the elegiac prose poem from her 1995 text *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*, a mourning daughter undertakes the journey only to find that defining herself as a pilgrim/philosopher thwarts mourning rather than facilitates it. Carson does not show the reader an unsuccessful mourner, but, rather, the ways that mourning resembles a journey for which we cannot plan. In Carson's text, the narrator's pilgrimage to the medieval Christian shrine of St. James functions as a quest for viable mourning practices, framed by the narrator's attempts to read the father's body and

speech through his dementia from Alzheimer's disease. The text considers the difficulties of male-female relationships (filial, sexual, and fraternal) as these relationships are precluded by the father-daughter relationship. The daughter's relationship to the father is explored as a parallel to the pilgrim's relationship to the saint, he who inspires the pilgrimage and the contemplation; for Carson's pilgrim, "Love is the mystery inside this walking" ("Water" 145).

A reader could hardly fault the narrator's instincts in attempting a pilgrimage as a way to complete mourning. After all, for centuries, millions have used the practical and spiritual aspects of a pilgrimage to enact penitence, enter into contemplation, pay spiritual debts, and relieve unrelenting psychic pain. The pilgrim, as a devotional practitioner, blends physical exertion and deprivation with spiritual contemplation, excoriating the body in order to exhilarate the soul. In *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, Victor Turner points out that pilgrimages are "liminal phenomena" that represent both a refusal of the contemporary world and a desire to impress the contemporary world through a ritual gesture (Turner 166). The pilgrim, in Turner's view, is a ritual paradox in action: a person who undertakes a pilgrimage motivated by equal parts social obligation and "voluntariness" (175). Pilgrimages represent "an amplified symbol of the dilemma of choice versus obligation in the midst of a social order," which is perhaps best expressed by the pilgrim's concept that "it is meritorious to *choose one's duty*" (177). The same conscientious choice of duty plays a strong role in the daughterly elegy, and Carson's prose poem is no exception.

Practicing another form of devotion, the traditional elegist contemplates the grief of corporeal loss in order to reach a spiritual consolation. Movement towards consolation

is conducted through the trope of seasonal change that implies infinite renewal, a pastoral symbology of resurrection through which the poet and the lost beloved are offered up to immortality. Ian Rae notes that Carson consistently reminds readers “the frameworks of myth, genre and gender are volatile” (38). She demonstrates that volatility in “The Anthropology of Water,” by using the trope of the pilgrimage to test the tension between mourning and resistance, read against the vicissitudes of filial devotion. However, Carson resists the simple equation of the labour of a journey with the work of mourning, and is similarly resistant to consolation as a physical or psychic “destination.” The desperation of daughterly self-sacrifice is never far from the surface in this text, especially since the narrator’s survival is accomplished, as is that of Macpherson’s demanding mourner, by a “melancholic turn” in her thwarted journey to consolation. The daughter-elegist of “The Anthropology of Water” confronts the future with the wry knowledge that the worthiness of completing mourning may be forever undercut by the fundamental despair of daughterly existence. Carson never loses sight of the dynamics of productive melancholia. “The Anthropology of Water” parses the Oedipal and Antigonal tensions of father-daughter kinship, using the myths as a filter through which Jardine’s “feminist gesture is as much a derivative of the law it is fighting as are its Others,” and through which “to lose sight of that fact” of derivation is the special peril of the text (Jardine 101).

Such play with classical mythology establishes Carson’s milieu for all things joyous and tragic, and it comes as no surprise that she begins “The Anthropology of Water” by addressing the central classical issue of determining “the truth.” The search to determine “the truth” also begins the drama of *Oedipus Rex*, and while Carson’s results are less tragic, her text takes on the trappings of that tragedy from the beginning.

Beginning “The Anthropology of Water” with the father’s contention that some truths are “as obvious as a door in water” (119), Carson sets up the paternal function as both “obvious” and revelatory, positioning the father as bearer of Aristotelian *logos*, rational speech (*Glass* 128). But this debilitated father has lost the capacity for rational speech; Alzheimer’s-related dementia has “released some spring inside him, he babbles constantly in a language neurologists call ‘word salad’” (“Water”120). This stream of indecipherable speech suggests paternal knowledge that has been codified by divinity as well as by disease: “Father had always been a private man. Now his mind was a sacred area where no one could enter or ask the way” (121). The father figure remains beyond the reach of the narrator’s love, even as she strives to read him as an untranslated (and ultimately untranslatable) text that will not yield to traditional consolation.

The father figure haunts various sections of the text – “Diving,” “Thirst,” “Very Narrow,” and “Just for the Thrill” – but his influence on the pilgrimage in “Kinds of Water” situates him as an elegiac figure. The Compostela pilgrimage is echoed twice more in the text, in the narrator’s trip across the continental United States with her lover in “Just for the Thrill,” and also in the brother’s journey around and through a lake in “Water Margins.” Carson uses the trope of the pilgrimage to test the tension between mourning and resistance, although her larger project concerns an epistemological inquiry into the vicissitudes of filial devotion by examining a daughter’s duty to her dying father. The endless road operates as an inscription of melancholia, emphasizing the tenacity of the narrator’s grief.

Recent scholarly interest in the twentieth-century elegy has prompted a number of investigations into negotiations of power and subjectivity in women’s elegiac poetry,

particularly in family elegies. Celeste Schenck argues that the fundamental conventions of the traditional elegy act out “a gesture of aspiring careerism” that imitates a Freudian Oedipal initiation (14). She goes on to assert that the female elegist “deconstructs the genre’s valorization of separation by means of apotheosis” by refusing consolation (18). The list of American female elegists that Schenck cites (Anne Sexton, Amy Clampitt, Adrienne Rich, and Judy Grahn, among others) goes a long way to proving her case, but ultimately, Schenck limits her own argument by resorting to a feminist essentialism that was progressive at the time of publication, but has not aged well in the ensuing years.

¹Rather than falling into line with Schenck’s assertion that women do not fall prey to “careerist” notions of ambition, Carson’s deconstruction of the elegy attends to the eerie strength of the daughter’s longing after apotheosis. Her protagonist’s refusal of consolation is formed from that longing rather than from refuting what Schenck calls “the absolute rupture that is death” (18). Carson does, as Schenck suggests, “deploy writing as a strategy for prolonging attachment” (22), but her background as a classicist seems to offer an elegiac apotheosis to the father if only his daughter could write him as a hero unmediated by the modern age, if only she could resist writing him with that “blend of acids and sentiment” (170).

If the limits of corporeal representation are a fundamental concern in any elegy, the ambivalence towards filial piety in women’s paternal elegies suggests a desire to delineate, and perhaps dismantle, the fidelity demanded by the father’s death. Carson’s depiction of “ongoing relations with the dead” are concerned with the daughter’s desire to inherit her father’s knowledge, but this inheritance is problematized by the father’s debilitation with Alzheimer’s-related dementia. Nevertheless, Carson’s prose poem

situates the father as a man whose attention the daughter craves despite his illness. In “The Anthropology of Water,” the father’s debilitation is presented as a parallel to the narrator’s emotional stasis. She mirrors his distress, rocking her body as he rocks his, “making little lunges with [her] chest,” and answering his utterances with a prompt “Yes Father” (120). Although his single clear statement – “Death is a fifty-fifty thing, maybe forty-forty” – is bewildering and intriguing, she does not ask the “simple questions” that it inspires (120). The “forty-forty” proportion of death implies a surplus; the missing twenty percent may imply something beyond death, something redemptive beyond physical deterioration. But Carson leaves this interpretation for the reader; her narrator offers no gloss on possible meaning.

In an effort to negotiate her way through the unasked questions that crowd the father’s presence, and indeed the whole text, Carson makes her elegist both a pilgrim and a philosopher. The narrator assumes the elegist’s persona in order to inquire into ways to live within the limits of the body. She assumes the pilgrim’s persona to search for a way of asking for penance, and she takes on the philosopher’s persona in order to question the function of knowledge in a limited, sinful body. The roles of philosopher and pilgrim, devotees respectively of the brain and the soul, function as disguises for the elegist, that devotee of the body. The pilgrim and the philosopher ask questions that the elegist forbids herself, just as she forbids herself “the unwary use of a kinship term” (“Water” 190, 232).

The urgency with which contemporary theorists examine questions of loss and mourning underlines the danger of living with a mind that may be swallowed up by its thwarted desire. To situate the elegiac impulse at the intersection of mourning and critical

theory is to observe the ways in which those two demanding and capacious practices are ravenous consumers of death and desire, poised at what Carson calls the “blind point from which you watch the object of your desire disappear into itself” (*Eros* 145). Carson defines Eros as “the ground where *logos* takes root between two people that are having a conversation” (*Eros* 145), and the garbled speech between the father and daughter in “The Anthropology of Water” seems part mourning, part desire, part demand, a search for knowledge that is not so much thwarted as circular. The pilgrimage appeals to the narrator-daughter for linearity and geographic certainty as much as for its spiritual dimensions; putatively freed from the frustrations of kinship, the pilgrim can seek answers on a higher plain, be that plain spiritual or critical.

But, of course, the desire for the freedom from the limitations of structuralist kinship is not the same as attainment of that freedom. In *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, Judith Butler wonders: “Is structuralist kinship the curse that is upon contemporary critical theory as it tries to approach the question of sexual normativity, sociality, and the status of the law?” (66). Butler discusses Antigone as a victim of “kinship’s fatal aberration” (15), emphasizing how Antigone’s position as a female mourner for male family members (both her brother Polynices and father Oedipus) complicates notions of cultural privilege and gender in mourning practices. When, in a 1997 interview for *Matrix*, Mary di Michele inquires about Antigone’s position in a just society, Carson asserts her view that Antigone operates as “an absolute insider, however radical that may be in any given time or place. It becomes very radical when other people value only outside things” (“Interview” 13). The “insider” nature of Antigone’s devotion is the imperative against which Carson’s daughter-narrator struggles

to define her mourning practice. The narrator “wakes up inside a question” (“Water”135) and cannot distinguish for herself the duties of mourning that Antigone takes up with passionate deference and decision. There is a definite possibility that Carson may be punning on Antigone’s incestuous status as an “absolute insider,” in that Antigone is both sister and daughter to Oedipus and so is doubly compelled to mourn his death, through the once-removed corpse of her brother Polynices.

This tension undoubtedly informs Antigone’s appetite for justice, and negatively impacts on every female mourner who follows her. Antigone, with her pure devotion and simple-minded purpose, hardly seems a melancholic figure, but, rather, a woman determined to perform a ritual that will complete healthy mourning. Who could follow the imperative to mourn with as much devotion as Antigone brings to the task? But Butler suggests that because Antigone represents an impossible model for mourning practice, the political exigency of melancholia has gone largely unexplored: “melancholia [is] a performance that negotiates for power, proposing that autonomy is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice” that functions as “a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority” (11). If the paternal elegiac text pursues the father’s knowledge as a function of mourning, then the appropriation of the father’s voice is problematized by the search for feminine subjectivity. The narrator of “Anthropology” attempts to appropriate authority through her manipulation of epistemological systems, but these systems only point to language as “an event of grievance” rather than a mourning practice (*Antigone’s* 80). How would a mourning language sound if it moved beyond the “event of grievance” and situated mourning as Rose’s “just act”? In “The Anthropology of Water,” the acquisition of the father’s knowledge demands a kind of

righteous melancholia in which the daughter declares herself unwilling to repudiate the father's word despite his loss of rationality.

The emergence of epistemological concerns in women's contemporary paternal elegies is not surprising when considered alongside feminist psychoanalytic theories about the daughter's need to identify with the father. Jessica Benjamin claims a daughter's desire for her father's love is identificatory, "a homoerotic desire, a desire for likeness that often surfaces in the latency wish to be a buddy" (128), and asserts that "the complex nature of the father-daughter relationship has often been obscured by analytic acceptance of the fallacy that all opposite-sex love is heterosexual" (128). Jane Gallop proposes that the daughter's desire for the father yields an idealized fantasy of identification:

'Love' has always been sublimated, idealized desire, away from bodily specificity and towards dreams of complementarity, and the union of opposites, difference resolved into the One. 'Love' is tangled with the woman's complicity; it may be the bribe which has persuaded her to agree to her own exclusion. (Gallop 79)

The daughter's homosocial desires maintain the father's status as a desired subject while she remains excluded, even as his "buddy."

Are contemporary female elegists writing out of a desire to acquire the intellectual privilege of *logos*, or in order to dismantle privilege altogether? Carson seems to want both. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, she traces the epistophilic drive back to "an ancient analogy between the wooing of knowledge and the wooing of love," in which she claims that Socrates' knowledge was "*nothing but* a knowledge of 'erotic things'" (170). In "The Anthropology of Water," the father's body and speech become an amalgam of knowledge and love that idealizes identificatory inheritance, though neither he nor his daughter can

attain this ideal. The father's knowledge is trapped in his cryptic utterances; his pouring eyes become the physical manifestation of his silence, emphasizing the white space surrounding the text of his disjointed words.

The daughter, for her part, is haunted by myths of demanding fathers and vengeful daughters. Early in "The Anthropology of Water," Carson retells the Greek myth of the daughters of Danaos, fifty women who "loved their father so much it was as if they were parts of his body. When Danaos stirred in his sleep they would awaken, each in her narrow bed, staring into the dark" (118). The beloved father marries off his devoted daughters, all on the same day, to fifty bridegrooms, but the daughters' paternal loyalty asserts itself: "at midnight on the wedding night, fifty bedroom doors clicked shut. Then a terrible encounter took place. Each of forty-nine of the daughters of Danaos drew a sword from alongside her thigh and stabbed her bridegroom to death" (118). The forty-nine murderous daughters are cast into the Underworld (which Carson calls "hell" in a bit of a Judeo-Christian anachronism) to haul water in sieves as their punishment, but Carson reserves special attention for the fiftieth daughter "who did not draw her sword. What happened to her remains to be discovered" (118). That which "remains to be discovered" concerns the agency of the fiftieth daughter, as well as her future. By allowing her husband to live, is she obeying or disobeying her father? Are her actions quiescent or defiant? Like Lear's Cordelia, the fiftieth daughter proves her love to her father by not proving it. She allows her husband to live and effectively to replace her father as her beloved. Is this devotion or betrayal? The murdering daughters are pathologically faithful; when the fiftieth daughter resists a fate in which she would remain "part of" her father's body, her filial piety is impugned. By refusing to behave

dramatically or pathologically, the fiftieth daughter escapes banishment but also refuses the only form of father-daughter kinship offered by the myth.

Carson uses the discipline of anthropology to form her questions about father-daughter relations, mindful of dangers of claiming kinship, suggesting, “love makes you an anthropologist of your own life” (217). Butler asserts that female representations of the death of paternal figures are often problematically situated in sexual melancholy, and propose “a certain heterosexual fatality that remains to be read” (72). Between what “remains to be discovered” and “what remains to be read,” Carson and Butler, in separate projects, are zeroing in on a gap in father-daughter kinship that is, as Carson writes, as dangerous as deep water. Butler suggests that female elegiac practices move towards a subjectivity in which “schemes of intelligibility make our loves legitimate and recognizable” (24). Assuming that questions of legitimacy in this context refer to love and not genetics, under what conditions could a daughter’s love for her father be considered “illegitimate”? Such excursions into auto-anthropology are irrevocably challenged by the demands of filial piety. When the narrator of “Anthropology” admits that she is “afraid I don’t love you enough to do this” (139), the ambiguous “you” suggests an expectant listener, an interiorized subject to whom she is obligated, by love and/or kinship structure.

While the previous chapter in this study explored how Atwood and Tostevin resolve Derrida’s “unbearable paradox of fidelity” by embracing alterity as a means to elegiac subjectivity, Carson’s persona engages fully with “the doubts and debts” of daughterly piety caught in the paternal hauntology (Holland 65). The subjectivity of Carson’s daughter persona is formed largely by her engagement with what Butler would call “kinship’s fatal aberration”: the inability of the daughter to escape the father as an interiorized object. In

“The Anthropology of Water,” the narrating daughter’s filial piety is more than paradoxical; it is concatenated to an imperative of loss. Paternal knowledge is denied to her no matter how “true” her mourning.

Carson’s version of “true mourning” has a stronger tie to Sophocles than to Freud. The narrating daughter of “The Anthropology of Water” is haunted by the ancient desire to be as devoted, and as satisfied to be devoted, as Antigone. When the narrator introduces the metaphor of men as water, an element in which women may swim or drown, she reminds readers that water is an element in which, historically, women have been asked to affect proofs of their virtuous femininity. Carson glosses the Salem witch trials when the male anthropologist figure tells the narrator about “a culture he had studied where true and false virgins are identified by ordeal of water. For an intact virgin can develop the skill of diving into deep water, but a woman who has known love will drown” (117). Women in Salem were determined to be witches if they floated, and innocent (though drowned) if they sank. But in Carson’s formulation, floating is not enough; her juxtaposition of diving with drowning suggests a virgin with a hermetically sealed body, an untouchable Artemis figure whose virginity gives her power. Ordinary women, by contrast, are drowned by their weight of their romantic entanglements; to “know love,” in this text, is to be made dangerously vulnerable.

Carson’s virgin as the standard of “whole” woman questions the value of sexual experience. If a woman has “known love,” would she not better understand the dangers of men as “deep water,” and so increase her chances of survival? Carson emphasizes the dangers of men as water, warning that “[t]he mechanisms that keep us from drowning are so fragile” (128). When Carson writes that men are like water, she confirms women’s

vulnerability to drowning in the uncontrollable force of their own desire. This romantic motif of the drowning in desire is intimately associated with elegiac transcendence, wherein the death by water acts as a deliverance from emotional and sexual frustration. Carson's "deep water" is as dangerous as the river or ocean of a traditional elegy, but water's masculine alliance with a Neptunian principle suggests that the danger of water threatens the female elegist as much as, or more than, the lost beloved. In elegizing her father, the elegist first invokes her own sacrifice to the elements, and implies that "anthropology," as the word is used in this text, does mean the study of *men*, rather than of humankind.

But if men are the water in which women may easily drown, what prevents a daughter's disaster? Carson's metaphor of the father as "a door in the water" (119) creates a hinge on which gender binaries swing back and forth, from solid to liquid, from male to female, from father to daughter. A psychoanalytic reading would suggest that the father stands for the door through which a daughter must pass in order to reach adult womanhood. The father-door is a solid form in the threatening sea of the Lacanian symbolic order, a paternal life raft for the drowning daughter. When the narrator's war-hero father succumbs to "madness," her discovery that dementia is "continuous with sanity" (121) can be read as an insistence upon making meaning from the father's cryptic utterances, just as she constructs love from his smallest gesture.

Just as the daughters of Danaos loved their father so obsessively "it was as if they were parts of his body" (118), so when dementia begins to manifest in the narrator's father, he loses "the use of some of the parts of his body" (119). His dementia is a mirror for the narrator's emotional stasis; during a visit to the father in the hospital, the narrator matches her body movements to his, duplicating his compulsive rocking motion to gain access to his

rhythm. The text's concern with his corporeal degeneration and cryptic utterance interrogates all the ways in which the "eye" of the daughter's gaze cannot be spoken through the "I" of narration. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry asserts that the pressure of the gaze upon a body in pain reveals the process by which "other persons become visible to us, or cease to be visible to us" (22). In "The Anthropology of Water," the father's body clashes with the historical concept of the heroic male body, and with his own history of military service. While memories of a strong healthy body are commonly used in elegiac writing in order to reify the body's waning prowess, in this text, the father's military experience is punctuated by a wartime episode in which German soldiers find nylon stockings on his plane and question him "*Wo ist die Dame?*" ["Where is the woman?"] (209). Since he does not speak the language, the father cannot reply; his silence and incomprehension parallel his tacit refusal to see, and accept, his daughter's increasingly feminine body. "Where is the woman?" is the unanswered question. If the narrator has difficulty in making her father visible to her questioning gaze, neither has the father, as a benighted Laius figure, recognized his daughter's physicality since her early adolescence.

The father's garbled speech presents as much a problem to the narrator does his opaque body. As her father's dementia advances, his speech becomes increasingly cryptic and oracular. His inarticulate speech and uncontrolled body barely resemble his "known" text of order and masculine reserve: "Father was a man who knew the right way to do things" (198). But his love of order attempts expression even through his limitations, his "forty-forty" conception of death. The narrator offers no possible interpretation of this utterance, for as much as it demands explication, the daughter does not ask; because the father can barely control his speech, she cannot (or will not) speak her question. The

father's uninterpretable speech acts as an elegiac prosopopeia, a voice from the edge of consciousness that echoes Holland's contention that the father's *logos* will remain forever out of the daughter's reach. If the Lacanian Law-of-the-Father ushers all children into the symbolic order, the daughter's struggle to find a key to "remaking all the meanings" inscribes both a return to and a rejection of the father as the bearer of *logos*. The father's struggle against his illness, and the daughter's struggle to receive the father's love, are certainly physical efforts, but they also represent the family's attempts to assimilate multiple versions of reality into their quotidian existence: "To live with a mad person requires many small acts of genius – the reverse of the moment when Helen Keller shouts 'Water!'" (121). This "reverse discovery" of water as the *logos* of madness and genius reminds us that the daughter was looking for "a door in the water" that only the father could provide. His mad utterances are as garbled (or as gargled) as though he is speaking underwater, thematizing his madness as a genius that is extra-human, even oracular. His daughter must remake all the meanings, beginning with her father's puzzling speech, to which she attributes the gravity of prophecy and the weight of wisdom.

The narrator's gaze upon the father's body, her "eye," is intrinsically bound up with, and frustrated by, Carson's play upon the confessional "I." The act of riddling steps in as a substitute for the demands of the gaze to become a way to "be gentle when we question our fathers" (122). Despite the questions that the father inspires, he is interrogated very little in this text; the narrator's refusal of consolation manifests itself as a refusal to ask the questions that haunt her, especially the poignant "What is it that others know?" (127). Adam Phillips speculates in an earlier article on Carson that she defines "the power of love as a craving for something – knowledge, a person, or the

knowledge that another person exists – that makes the difference visible and by doing so intimates the possible infinity of such differences, the sheer horror and exhilaration of how different we can be from ourselves” (115). Such studied horror at the differences between the father and daughter, and between the daughter’s lived experience and her desire for love, examines the role that love and knowledge play in the desire for penance.

In “The Anthropology of Water,” the legitimization of mourning is conflated with the legitimization of meaning. The text’s use of riddles inscribes a melancholic mercuriality, proposing the pilgrim as philosophizing clown. Her first riddles display a vaudevillian razzle-dazzle, as her initial witty answers facilitate her deferral of mourning even as she moves, geographically and psychically, down the road to the place of devotion. The pilgrim seeks meaning as part of her penance; she embarks upon her pilgrimage in order to “look for the simplest question, the most obvious facts, the doors that no one may close [...]. I was a strong soul. Look I will change everything, all the meanings! I thought” (123). The usual purpose of a pilgrimage to Compostela is to “ask St. James to change your life” (123), but the narrator wants “all the meanings” to change, and eschewing divine intervention, is determined to do it herself. However, a reconfigured meaning is very different from an answer. Her riddles represent an attempt to circumvent the rules of traditional philosophy, refashioning Socratic dialogue as a monologue that flirts with meaning while evading clear answers. The narrator’s refusal of consolation echoes her refusal to ask the questions that haunt her, especially the plaintive “What is it that others know?” (127).

What “others” may or may not know is how to balance private grief with public affect, and the narrator’s declaration that a successful pilgrimage (or a successful

mourning practice) will be one that helps her to “change all the meanings” is a clue to the narrator’s confusion with her role in this drama. For a drama it is, and gender becomes significant to the narrator’s actions. Judith Butler points out that Antigone, too, struggles with the tensions between the “breeding imperative” (76) and the “distinctly manly excess” of melancholy “hubris” (80) manifested in her insistent public grieving. Instead of manly excess, Carson takes her Antigonal character down the road to manly contemplation tinged with a quixotic quality. As the narrator nears Compostela and potential consolation, her riddles become more simple and, ironically, less answerable. Carson notes that the heroes of Kafka’s texts are trapped in their own psychic nightmares because of their inability “to ask the simplest question” (119), and so situates her narrator as both she who questions and she who will not, or cannot, give a simple answer. In an unpredictable world, Carson reminds the reader that “it is already late when you wake up inside a question” (135), and she allows the questions to hang in the air, unanswered. The need to form and ask the simplest questions can impose order upon chaos, but even ordered, logical answers may bring about the pain that makes the most “alphabetical” ordered pilgrims “cry out” (“Water” 143). “What is it that others know?” the narrator asks; how do others manage to love and not be destroyed by it? When the narrator suggests, “a pilgrim is like a Noh play. Each one has the same structure, a question mark” (148), she establishes the pilgrim as a philosopher who is also her own recalcitrant pupil.

Carson’s inquiry cannot ignore the body’s complicity in the structure of mourning. The riddles take on a corporeal concern, designed to “riddle” the human body full of epistemological holes: “When is a pilgrim like a sieve? When he riddles” (127). While this question cannot help but recall the punishment of the daughters of Danaos, its

cheekiness also suggests subversive methods of survival, the fiftieth daughter's choice; Carson's pilgrim wishes for water (and men) to pass through her without drowning her. Riddling makes this particular trick of gender possible. She suggests the physical resistance to filial love and duty: "How is a pilgrim like a blacksmith? He bends iron. Loves bends him" (176). The daughter bends towards her father's love (or the lack thereof), while the father fears bending to love his daughter. The father's illness softens him and confuses them both. Moving away from elaborate puns, the narrator begins to ask the "simpler" but ironically less answerable questions, the result being that she goads her own speech into seriousness. "What are we made of but hunger and rage?" (175), she asks, invoking the insatiable Sphinx. David Solway, perhaps Carson's harshest critic in Canada, has made much of his concern that Carson does not "radiate an impression of lexical authority" (24) but, in doing so, he misses the lexical inquiry that is central to Carson's work. Proposing a series of riddles as a philosophical inquiry positions the Sphinx as philosopher, and eventually, the Sphinx as Oedipus' challenging (and unacknowledged) daughter, complete with riddles and a frightening, misbegotten body.

If the narrator acts as a Sphinx figure, the obvious Oedipus figure would be the father, and, good classicist that she is, Carson suffuses the text with images of blindness and madness, and frames the father as the embodiment of the Sphinx's riddle. Recall that the Sphinx's riddle concerns the aging body: the crawling infant Oedipus; the vigorous young man who kills Laius and governs Thebes; and the enfeebled blind Oedipus, a wanderer with his daughter, old before his time. Carson presents a parallel trio of vignettes about the father figure in "The Anthropology of Water." The father is a naïve young man who refuses to believe that his daughter will grow up to become a woman,

then an older man who emphasizes a kind of righteous domestic order, and, finally, the enfeebled “madman” who speaks in cryptic utterances and, though not blind, is sightless. Like the cursed king of Thebes, whose physical blindness is paralleled with his despairing insight, the father in Carson’s text experiences a dementia that is “continuous with sanity” (121). This disconcerting play of sanity and madness manifests in an interpretative crisis whenever the father speaks to curse himself with “a sound not human” that Carson likens to a bodily mutilation (121), an utterance reminiscent of Butler’s caveat that “language carries a violence that brings it to the limits of speakability” (80). These limits on the father’s self-condemnation continue even as he smiles: “You bastard, you stupid bastard you goddamn stupid bastard you goddamn stupid useless bastard you” (216). The cumulative structure of these curses suggests a more structured utterance than the “word salad” about which the doctors have warned the narrator. He curses himself and, and in so doing, robs her of the privilege.

The father’s difficulty with answering questions impedes his function as an Oedipus figure, and a curious shift occurs about halfway through the text. Carson’s contention that “a pilgrim is a person who is up to something” (145) should be taken as a caveat, for the pilgrimage seems to transform the narrator into an Oedipus figure. In asking the simplest but paradoxically most difficult questions, the narrator becomes a version of Oedipus in the grotto at Colonus, a wanderer whose knowledge of horror cannot satisfy the quest for meaning. Carson’s reconfiguration of Oedipus as a young woman emphasizes the fundamental despair over gender that marks this text. Is this Butler’s “heterosexual fatality that remains to be read?” When the narrator notes “My father and I shook hands on Christmas birthdays and farewells” (211), the controlled

physical contact locates the father's fear of femininity in his daughter's body. The handshakes symbolize a stark, immobilizing fear of the physical body hidden behind a veneer of WASP politeness: "It wasn't until he went mad that I began to see I had always angered him. I never knew why. I did not ask" (122). The daughter is left with another "simple question" that is as demanding as it is impossible to ask.

"The Anthropology of Water" is haunted by a persistent riddle about the location of femininity: where is the woman? What is it about the daughter that "always angers" her father? She turns into a woman, and, even worse, she turns into what the father refers to as "one of those helpless women" who cannot change a tire (198); her incompetence in outdoor living is painfully evident during the camping trip in "Just For the Thrill." But her adolescence was spent rejecting this kind of helpless femininity, presaged by her father's gloating, "Oh, she won't be like them" (188); she won't grow up to be like other women, womanly, full of mysterious uncontrollable fluids. Upon hearing this comment, the daughter attempts to erase her gender. She grows into a body that is "hard and flat as the armour of Athena," sprung metaphorically from her father's wish to keep his daughter in an angular pre-adolescent body (189).

But if the father does not want the daughter to become a woman, neither does he seek manly competition with her. The narrator's attempt at embodying a paternally pleasing androgyny reaches an ironic crisis as a direct result of the father's physical debilitation. When the daughter returns from the woods with a Christmas tree she has cut down herself, a task she and the father have always performed together, Carson explicitly figures the father as Laius and the daughter as Oedipus:

He was there in the kitchen. He looked at the tree and the saw and the ax. It was something perfectly quiet. "I didn't think you could do that," he said.

Perfectly quiet. His hands hanging down. The tiny ticking kitchen. The snow-dark morning. It was draining from him into me. I had killed him. (205-206)

The narrator's possession of phallic tools, the saw and the ax, plus the signifier of the freshly cut tree, strike the father as surely as Oedipus struck Laius. Her pseudo-masculine performance is read as a usurping action instead of a filial homage. As father and daughter stand devastated in the kitchen, she feels his masculine privilege "draining" from him into her, and this extension of the metaphor of watery exchange suggests that she is flooded with guilt over accessing her father's agency. She becomes a pilgrim to seek penance for her symbolic patricide.

The daughter acts as Sphinx and as Oedipus, a philosopher without answers, a mourner without a ritual to express loss, cut loose from Antigonal deliverance while still subject to the Antigonal imperative to mourn. Her body attempts to create an internal ritual of mourning; to appease her father's fear of femininity, the narrator does not menstruate for thirteen years ("Water" 190). That "hard flat body" recalls descriptions of anorexic women who strive to maintain a boy-like body, accompanied by amenorrhea, a loss of the menstrual period brought on by maintaining a low body weight. The daughter's desire to "suppress the natural facts of 'woman' altogether" (189) becomes a bid for gender safety, as Susan Bordo asserts:

As [the anorexic's] body begins to lose its traditional feminine curves, its breasts and hips and rounded stomach, and begins to feel and look more like a spare, lanky male body, she begins to feel untouchable, out of reach of hurt [...] [and] she has unexpectedly discovered an entry into the privileged male world, a way to become what is valued in our culture, a way to become safe, above it all. (Bordo 23)

In order to obtain the father's perpetually withheld approval, the daughter limits her female possibilities and attempts, with some success, to become asexual, "a young, strong, stingy person of no particular gender – all traits advantageous to the pilgrim" (123). Gender neutrality is another way for the daughter to try on the persona of the "good son" of father-son filiation.

However, female desire emerges in this text through the imagery of elemental fire. Phillips suggests that Carson is a Freudian, "if only in her sense that all language is the language of love, the language of self-betrayal" (116). In "The Anthropology of Water," Carson's fire imagery speaks the desire for the father's love that overwhelms the daughter. One of the pilgrim's early questions concerns the heat of desire that longs to be spoken: "What is the fear inside language? No accident of the body can make it stop burning" ("Water" 141). The fire worsens on the journey, prompting the pilgrim's self-definition: "Pilgrims were people who were glad to take off their clothing, which was on fire" (154). The burning pilgrim endures the fire of rejection by imagining her father's attention as soothing water, but his final utterance foregrounds the daughter's desire for paternal love to be unquenchable: "Fires are the furthest in you are and the worst you are" (240). The twisted syntax of this sentence, with its assonance of the half-rhymed "furthest" and "worst," is disturbingly lyrical. The "worst" and "furthest" fires in the human body are existential, and the "you" of the father's final utterance may be either self-referential or accusatory. In this anthropology, what does the daughter-elegist do with the questions she forms? Is it preferable to drown in love or burn with memory?

Much in the way that the narrator attempts to transcend femininity through her occupation of a body with "no particular gender," Carson writes the performance of

penance as an attempt to go beyond pilgrimage. At the end of “Kinds of Water,” the narrator travels past the cathedral that houses the bones of the apostle to arrive at Finisterre, the end of the earth (184). At this *ultima thule*, the text suggests a death as mysterious as that of *Oedipus at Colonus*, the corporeal vanishing that left no grave at which the distressed Antigone could mourn. The Sphinx throws herself into the sea when Oedipus answers her riddle, and “Kinds of Water” ends with the narrator lying, dead or dying, in the ocean off the rocks at Finisterre, a poetic death-by-water that suggests the drowning about which Carson warns readers at the beginning of the text: “Clothe yourself, the water is deep” (118). The narrator’s most difficult riddle remains: “What is it that others know?” (127). The assumption that others have knowledge that makes love less bewildering makes the pilgrim almost unbearably covetous.

While the grandiose gesture of throwing herself off a cliff affirms (and perhaps parodies) the tradition of the suicidal melancholic genius, the daughter acts out her monstrous self, and becomes the Sphinx as an embodiment of frustration. Caught in the “fearful ashy light that falls on the end of the world,” the narrator’s attempt to go beyond pilgrimage brings her not to transcendence but to a failure of the mind that echoes the father’s madness. When Carson writes, “You take hold of my paws and cross them on my breast” (187), the daughter as dead Sphinx makes a ceremony of what Phillips calls Carson’s “weird rationality of Eros that love is a ridiculous disfiguring” (115). The disfiguring Sphinx returns the mourner to abjection at the hands of Western mythology.

However, in this text, the daughter/narrator can sustain neither her Sphinx disguise nor her performance of self-sacrifice. She survives in the text to live Derrida’s “unbearable paradox of fidelity” as an insoluble riddle about father-daughter kinship that

“remains to be read” in Butler’s terms. Like the Sphinx’s havoc-wreaking question, the paradox of fidelity remains, in this text, “a riddle too deep for common wits” (Sophocles 36). The narrator’s attempt to go beyond the consolation of pilgrimage brings her not to transcendence but to a melancholic turn at the end of her thwarted journey to consolation, a turn that would suggest, according to Butler, that melancholia makes mourning possible (*Psychic* 170). The search for the fruition of *logos* and *eros* is ultimately thwarted in “The Anthropology of Water” as each section of the text repeats the journey that ends in frustration, whether the man fragments (as the father does in “Kinds of Water”), or withholds intimacy (as the lover does in the subsequent section, “Just For the Thrill”), or disappears (as the narrator’s brother does in the final section of the prose poem, “Water Margins”). Though she is alive at the end of “Water Margins,” and “does her best” on the advice of her father (258, 260), the daughter-elegist becomes a paradox: a surviving Antigonal figure, who is subject, as Carson suggests in “TV Men: Antigone” from *Men in the Off Hours*, to “too much memory,” like her father before her (101). This is an Antigone who is so disconnected from her mourning practice that she claims, “I do not lament. / God’s will is not some sort of physics, is it” (*Men* 100). Here is the unbearable paradox of fidelity acted out on the body of a woman; she becomes dissociated from self, from family, from God, and from her grief.

As an elegy, “The Anthropology of Water” remains problematically obedient to the Antigonal imperative; the narrator’s quest to “change all the meanings” results in a reiteration of the historical idea of female filial piety as self-sacrifice. If works by Page and Macpherson situate the need for a commitment to a productive melancholia in order to question female subjectivity with the paternal elegy, Carson’s text commits the

mourning daughter to a riddle about father-daughter kinship that seems to challenge elegiac convention without the rigorous energy of anagnorisis. Discovery, in this text, is painful rather than invigorating. By maintaining relentless loyalty to her father, the narrator, like the forty-nine daughters of Danaos, sacrifices everything. Carson prophesies at the text's beginning that the "The Anthropology of Water" will tell the story of the fiftieth daughter of Danaos, she who did not kill her husband and whose story "remains to be discovered" ("Water" 188). However, the daughter of "The Anthropology of Water" is not this fiftieth daughter but, rather, one of the forty-nine who demonstrated their desperate loyalty to their father. The narrator, instead of being condemned to "spend eternity gathering water in a sieve" (118), is condemned to articulate the anthropology of water – the ways in which men are water and women carry them, drown in them, or witness them slipping away.

When Carson writes that "a question can travel into an answer as water into thirst" (122), she intimates a performable penance and a drastic cure for dutiful daughterhood, both of which depend on a pilgrimage towards knowledge. Accepting her claim that "pilgrims love a good riddle" (125), this text proposes riddles that it refuses to answer, appearing to offer only the consolation of self-sacrifice, which is no consolation at all. But, curiously, a lack of consolation does not stop Carson from ending the daughter's pilgrimage with a declaration of faith, the kind of declaration that presupposes in good elegiac tradition that death presents no obstacle to devotion: "I am one who has been to the holy city and tasted its waters, its kinds. // Pilgrims were people who carried little. They carried it balanced on the heart" (187). What happens to that which is carried off-balance: the unasked question, the untranslatable speech, the deteriorating body?

“The Anthropology of Water” carries forward an insoluble riddle about father-daughter kinship that refuses strategies of comprehension: “where is the woman?” The mourning daughter as a woman who cannot be located, on a pilgrim’s map or in the father’s eyes, remains a riddle she cannot, or will not, answer. The “strong soul” who wished to “change all meanings” has been swallowed by her devotion to “choosing her duty.” Her melancholic turn grants her subjectivity, but it does not console her. The waters of the holy city remain, for this pilgrim, untasted.

Chapter Five

Elegy of Refusal: Erin Mouré's *Furious*

Poetry, I think, is the *structuration* (the action or condition of structuring, the rendering visible, audible) of *memory* that can undo the Law of the City, because it both precedes and transgresses the Law. *Transgresses*, for even poetry can't avoid the Law. Even memory can't.

Erin Mouré, "Poetry, Memory and the Polis"

my knees pulled up and feet splayed outward,
in whose garden,
refusing a few years to abandon my despair.

Mouré, "Whose," *Furious*

Erin Mouré's 1988 Governor-General's Award-winning *Furious* may seem an unlikely choice to examine as a daughter's paternal elegy, but I hope to show that the text's recurring challenges to the male body as an elegiac object and an object of desire display a definite concern for the power of elegiac convention as a social structure in literature and language. Mouré's conviction that the people who occupy the social memory of any community are the people with power suggests, audaciously, that the structures of language hold a paternalized power over women and the valuation of women's memory. I contend not only that *Furious* is a text that is haunted by elegiac convention, but, also, that Mouré consciously appropriates elegiac convention in order to emphasize its power, and to demonstrate how it might be dismantled, even on a provisional basis. Though Gillian Rose's notions of the "difficulties and injustices" of asserting mourning are firmly entrenched in "inaugurated" social mourning, I propose that Mouré uses the anxiety of language to produce an elegiac text that honours women's memories, and refutes the convention that values the male body over the female body. By

filtering the fragmented and righteous daughter-as-Fury through Rose's "perennial anxiety," I assert that Mouré's idea of "getting out of the ending" promotes a politically disobedient melancholia that can, in fact, reinvigorate the political life of a community, or in this case, a genre.

Mouré begins her text with a poem that references the rustic swain as the elegiac protagonist, but immediately begins to cast doubt upon how the image, and its attendant conventions, may be read. Without denying the historical and literary power of elegiac convention, Mouré shakes the foundations of the elegy to see its debt to, and support of, a patriarchal social system. "Whose," the opening poem of *Furious*, shows the poet-speaker asleep in a neglected garden, "sleeping perfectly" but at the same time "refusing a few years to abandon [her] despair." The conventional elegiac setting of the garden contrasts with the resistance of the sleeping speaker who is "bothering no one" even as she refuses not only consolation but also the abandonment of a politically conscious despair (*Furious* 15).¹ The poem raises the question of *whose* despair is legitimized, honoured, and remembered, and whose despair is elided. The historical dismissal of women's grief outside social parameters of approved mourning practice is a very good political reason for a woman to refuse to abandon her despair.

Further traces of elegiac convention and resistance mark the text. "Whose" features the speaking persona in an ironic take on the rustic swain in a choked pastoral setting, and "Betty" and "Surface" re-examine the dangerous but potentially transformative properties of water, which operates in Milton's "Lycidas" as both the drowned youth's "wat'ry bier" and the elegist's "melodious tear" ("Lycidas" 12, 14). Anne Carson invokes the daughter's self-sacrifice by asserting that men are the substance

in which women drown, but Mouré prefers to reconfigure the trope of watery death with an emergence into a politicized consciousness. Using water as a metaphor for language, Mouré regards both the surface and depth of language as a substance in which subjects are socially immersed. Like Adrienne Rich's woman who "div[es] into the wreck" in order to retrieve "the thing itself and not the myth" (Rich 23), Mouré enters the pool of language through an engagement with, but resistance to, the elegiac convention of drowning in sorrow while lamenting the drowned beloved. In *Furious*, the drowned body of the lost object becomes the intentionally submerged and then surfacing body of the elegiac subject, "break[ing] the surface" to emerge into a feminist consciousness (*F* 79). Ramazani notes that Rich "[r]efus[es] the elegiac metahistory in which much poetry by her male counterparts is embedded" in an effort to "distance herself from male modernist nostalgia" (311). Mouré's poetry takes this refusal a step further by using elegiac convention to show the limitations of the rhetoric of mourning, and ultimately how such conventions restrict women's access to what Mouré calls "the civic house of memory" (*F* 91). By adopting a melancholic but adamantly political position throughout the text of *Furious*, Mouré's strategy is one of resistance to the cultural prescription of organizing women's grief around the trope of the "dutiful daughter." Her *anagnorisis* reveals ways to write about women's sorrow and women's desire that do not reference filial piety, and she begins her project by revealing the enormous social influence of elegiac convention as the accepted literary rhetoric of mourning.

Mouré's reconfiguration of the convention of the drowned beloved is characteristic of how she uses *Furious* to problematize the elegy by challenging its discourse of privilege, and by proposing a feminist elegiac mode that may be written in

the fissures of an authoritative language system. Mouré comments that the risk of writing from a feminist perspective is often usurped by the way social hierarchies absorb and nullify the language of rebellion: "The word 'risk' only protects the hierarchy in us from its own loss, *because it is made of 'loss,'* the loss of women" ("To Speak" 135). By defining a "loss of women" that includes women's social, sexual, and political desires as elegiac objects, Mouré risks writing these losses in a social system that traditionally exalts the transcendent male subject.

Although Mouré refuses to abandon despair in order to claim the city as a place of "collective memory," as she states in "Poetry, Memory and the Polis" (201), her notions of the polis are dichotomous. The city houses collective memory, yet it privileges male discourse in "the civic house of memory." Calling the modern city "one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality" (242), Elizabeth Grosz reminds us that civic space is the site "where the body is representationally re-explored, transformed, contested, reinscribed" (249). But the city's potential as a site of subversion of social norms is also powerful. Dianne Chisholm suggests that for lesbians and gay men, an urban metropolis represents "the most promising site of emancipation from capitalist mass deception that still has us catastrophically spellbound," and thus, potentially, a space in which subversions of the patriarchal mainstream could surface (198). Lesbians in particular, who "see themselves arising and enduring within urban culture without the traditional means of social reproduction afforded by family, ethnicity, nationality, and religion" may be the first to question the social parameters and limits on civic speech imposed by the modern urban metropolis, and eventually write a "genealogy of their own telling" (Chisholm 195). Though in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce

Irigaray warns a woman must “give up the specificity of her gender if she is to take part in public life” (308n), the specificity of the female gender in civic space is exactly that for which Mouré argues. Identifying the Law as the structure of “Western social organization” that “underlies the Polis, the city” (“Poetry” 201), Mouré’s version of the polis is a structured social organization that claims democratic ideals while making democratic action impossible, not unlike John Ralston Saul’s idea of “unconscious civilization,” a “corporatist society with soft pretensions to democracy” (34-35).

In “The Anti-Anaesthetic,” Mouré warns “the Polis absorbs into itself as marginal something it calls poetry, which invariably supports the dominant order” (“Anti” 14-15). Because I plan to read *Furious* as a criticism of the social structure supported by elegiac convention, I want to begin with Mouré’s conception that “the entry into the symbolic order is the entry into sign, syntax, *La Loi du Père* (the Social Order, the Republic, the Polis)” (“Anti” 15). Questions of meaning rely on a set of conventions that act as a literary “anaesthesia” to painful experience and strive to “inject us with the comfortable” (*F* 89). To suggest that language can resonate both within and outside of literary convention, Mouré uses sound, syntax, and intertext to disturb the anaesthetic effect and draw the reader’s attention to the structures of power within language. Working with the play among memory, desire, and language, Mouré debates the relations between speaker and subject, men and women, absence and privilege, and logic and reason, reminding readers that “[t]he discourse of privilege is infinitely absorptive” (“Anti” 13). Writing poetry, for Mouré, is a political project designed to awaken readers to the limitations and possibilities of language, or, as she phrases it, to “mak[e] people feel prickly heat in the bomb shelter” of poetic convention (“Acknowledging” 129).

But no one will feel that “prickly heat” unless poetic conventions are emphasized as conventions and not unmediated reflections of social reality, and this is the place from which Mouré’s project of dismantling convention begins. Each section of *Furious* seeks to re-explore the female body’s experience of loss while advancing Mouré’s argument for the value of women’s speech in Western social organization, first by refusing elegiac convention, and eventually by proposing a feminist syntax of mourning. In the first section, “Pure Reason,” Mouré contrasts the “logic” of social sacrifice with a reason that exists “beyond all logic, and beyond the signs,” advocating that reason “must have to do with love, at its root” (*F* 87). The next section, “Visible Affection,” concentrates upon making female love visible outside of the sexual economy of male desire, opposing what Teresa de Lauretis calls “sexual indifference” to “lesbian representation” (de Lauretis 17). In the eponymous third section, Mouré focuses upon “breaking the surface” (*F* 79) of language in order to live “furiously,” with the elegist’s equivalent right to mourn losses and celebrate love in civic space. In the text’s final section, “The Acts,” a series of numbered prose poems masked as footnotes (or vice versa) elaborate upon the refusal to abandon despair in “Pure Reason.” In “The Acts,” Mouré proposes ways to “get out of the ending,” which includes refusing the consolation that elegiac convention proposes and defying the self-sacrifice that a daughter’s patriarchal duty demands.

When Gillian Rose declares that “all meaning and all mourning belong to the city” (103), it is hard to know whether she intends this as a caveat against or a prescription for participation in the polis. I interpret Rose’s “all meaning and all mourning belong to the city” as a confirmation that the authority of patriarchal social organization decrees all meaning, and that the language law of Western social

organization subsequently regulates all mourning practices. Mouré's "Wearing the Map of Africa" presents a case in point. The poem asserts that a government, as the active representatives of the citizenry, justifies shooting citizens at a funeral because they "have gone beyond mourning the dead" (*F* 70). On the strength of this evidence, Mouré can only emphasize, as she does in "Poetry, Memory and the Polis," that "[m]emory creates the City, collective memory, and women are still kept out of this memory" ("Poetry" 201). The problem, then, becomes one of practice; how can the practice of making meaning and the practice of mourning create a space for women's memory in that "civic house of memory"? Warning that all attempts to undo the knot of patriarchy are necessarily limited by the Lacanian conception of paternal authority, Mouré conflates the Christian God with the figure of the father, and again with the Father as the representative of the law. Knowing that "even poetry can't avoid the Law," Mouré advocates attempting to recognize patriarchal power as a conscious construction, rather than as a "natural" cultural and linguistic arbitrator ("Poetry" 201).

Furious traces the influence of a paternal imperative implicit in the production of language and in elegiac convention, and does so by asking the gendered opposite of Carson's question in "The Anthropology of Water": where is the man? Mouré's concern with the elided bodies of women manifests itself in a reversal on the elegiac tradition; in *Furious*, she elides the male body only to have it reappear in spectacular elegiac style, a submerged body whose symbolic power will not be denied.

By refusing the male body as an elegiac subject and revealing the paternal body as a patriarchal authority, Mouré draws attention to the commanding father and the mournful young man as figures of epistemological and social power. The father of "Pure

Reason: Having” is so distant that the poem reveals only the back of his head in his car, heading “[w]herever we are going. / Wherever parents drive” (*F* 18). Though Mouré treats the family as a social microcosm for the larger world, *Furious* should not be construed as a confessional family elegy. The psychologically distant father is usurped early in the text by social patriarchs like the colleagues of “Snow Door” and the “friend of the family” of “Fifteen Years.” A more overtly political paternal force is figured as a restrictive social authority (in “Patron”), or a public figure that exerts an overt political authority (in “Breakneck Speed”), or, lastly, as a manifestation of Western social organization in Mouré’s multiple figurations of law and language. The “good fathers” imagined by other female elegists do not appear in *Furious*, and the death of the authoritative father is less mourned than anticipated. Gail Scott sums up this unsentimental attitude in her 1988 essay, “A Feminist at the Carnival,” when she writes that “where certain male philosophers and writers see death...women imagine, instead, the death of patriarchy” (135).

I realize that it is unusual to regard *Furious* as a text that comments on the power of paternal elegy, yet the text re-imagines female citizenry by first debating the traditions and tensions of father-daughter kinship. Mouré reminds readers that patriarchy involves not only the faceless force of the Law, but also fathers, uncles, and co-workers. In “The Acts 7,” she writes that men “do not have to put themselves at risk, which women have always had to do, to exist, to speak, to have their existence affirmed by others” (*F* 91). Though she does not repudiate kinship with men, Mouré’s inscription of lesbian resistance to heterosexuality – women who “walked away, from the words *cock* &

ravishment” (F 39) – suggests something other than a refusal of male relationship; it suggests that relationships with men are not central to female subjectivity.

Primed by the sleeping figure in “Whose,” the text moves through a series of feminist awakenings that expose the gaps in elegiac tradition. Mouré pinpoints the difference between writing the father and writing *for* the father that produces the characteristic social tension of women’s paternal elegies. The tension of the daughter’s elegy acknowledges the possibility that the energy of her *anagnorisis* could be defused by the poem’s reception as merely affective. If elegy is written to “reduce anxiety” in the elegist, then the elegist’s struggle for subjectivity is as socially necessary as it appears to be socially untenable. The challenge, then, is to speak from daughterly experience and thought, and not necessarily out of daughterly duty.

Questioning convention: despair and the refusing daughter

To read *Furious* as a feminist text demands attention to its politics; to read the text’s elegiac interlocations of love and reason means locating female fury as political and textual necessity. Mouré begins to question power and gender relations of elegiac convention in “Whose,” drawing upon the traditional trope of the rustic swain asleep in a garden. The title questions the garden’s ownership; is it the garden of a Christian God – Eden or Gethsemane – or the realm of a vegetation goddess? Within what tradition is this garden situated? With “slug-dust on the border” and “ragged” zinnias, the garden has an air of anticipation that borders on dread. The single “carrot rooted in the earth” is a “pointed microphone listening for water,” and foreshadows the waiting microphone in “Pure Reason: Science” (21) and “Pure Reason: Femininity” (24), into which animals and

women display “the cut scars” of their commodified bodies. The speaker’s description of her physical position, with “knees pulled up & feet splayed outward” indicates resistance, despite her sleeping posture. When the speaker declares that she “refuses [...] to abandon [her] despair,” this line, borrowed from John Newlove’s “And the Dead Rose Up from the Water,” plays upon Bloomian anxiety of influence without quite legitimizing it:

Coming alive at the age of thirty,
 refusing a few years
 to abandon my despair,
 and the dead rose up from the water,
 their heads buoys in front of my love;
 I tried to kiss them alone
 but the water moved their pale fleshy faces.
“And the Dead Rose Up From the Water”

Newlove’s mourner sees the bodies of the dead emerge from the water but the dead, in typical elegiac fashion, refuse tactile contact. The movement of the water makes their faces inaccessible to the elegist’s devotional (and possibly necrophilic) kiss. In good elegiac tradition, Newlove’s poem offers several drowned bodies and an elegist who longs for consolation. In “Whose,” Mouré resists the pressure to produce a human body other than that of the speaker, situating the poem’s inquiry in melancholia rather than mourning. *Furious* is not a despairing text but rather, a text that consciously regards the furious energy that despair masks. The lost male body does not appear in “Whose,” and though convention frames the sleeper as the mourner, Mouré sets up a despoiled garden as a hostile natural world. Is the sleeper the mourner or the beloved? Who or what is being mourned? “Whose” is an elegy without a beloved, a poem that invokes convention only to flout it, an elegy in which despair masquerades as sleep.

Like Macpherson's more traditionally rendered but equally rebellious texts, *Furious* addresses the conundrum of daughterly subjectivity in the face of authoritative constructions of meaning. Lacan unequivocally characterizes the Law of the Father as inescapable, and it is this discourse against which Mouré pits the "fury" of female subjectivity. The sleeping poet of "Whose" refuses to abandon her despair, for to do so would mean to let go of the comprehension of her oppression. Despair in this context, as in much of the elegiac tradition, becomes the first step towards understanding; the source of grief in *Furious* is the personal and political comprehension that neither the Father's language nor his Law represents female joy or female grief. In working with the tropes and conditions of elegiac convention to serve a larger political purpose, Mouré's refusal to abandon despair defies the Law of the Father that values completed mourning as a form of transcendence and the signification of the male body as meaning. A woman who writes a paternal elegy may already be considered "in excess of the Law" ("Poetry" 204). The anxiety inherent in defying convention, elegiac or social, emphasizes that female memory is rarely honoured in conventional literary and social forms.

Operating out of this anxiety, *Furious* negotiates between anger and elegiac grief, and Mouré's interest in relationality reveals itself through her frequent shifts between the positions of elegist and beloved. In "Speaking of Which," Mouré positions her speaking subject as the lost beloved, the elegiac object that is "thrown up into the scarce air" with her "first-born stars." The speaker becomes the female beloved, initially lost but filling with the heat of fury throughout the poem until she is fully embodied, alive but no longer sacrificial. In "Miss Chatelaine" and "Betty," the speaker returns as the "furious" elegist who actively refuses the social imperative to attend to male bodies with either grief or

desire, and focuses upon the need for female community. Mouré's shift of subject positions, with a corresponding shift in speaker positions, functions to "unmake" the paternal world (as Elaine Scarry would term it), and to suggest that relations between elegist and lost beloved cannot always be defined by socially-proscribed conventions. Part of the intrigue of "unmaking" the elegy exists in the possibilities implied by relationality, primarily lesbian desire, but also including friendship between women, and relations with men that are run neither by heterosexual desire nor by a commitment to Western social structures. The text's positive references to brother figures suggest hope for male-female relations, and suggest that Mouré's target is not the male sex, but the belief in exclusive structures of power.

"terribly, terrifyingly alive": locating the fury in *Furious*

Judith Butler warns that Lacanian readings of the Oedipus/Antigone legend insist on "freezing the social arrangements of kinship as something intact and intractable," indicating a "crisis in kinship" that has yet to be resolved (14). Any question of legitimating women's loss has been, in Butler's view, systematically "suppressed by those who seek to make normative versions of kinship essential to the working of culture" (25). In *Furious*, Mouré proposes a figure that speaks back to these normative versions of kinship, a "terribly alive" narrator that manifests her own brand of reason that challenges the limits of Western logic. If the sacrificial daughter pays for the sins of the father, then the defiant daughter must perform a corresponding task: to point out the crisis in kinship and suggest a new relationality.

How can female resistance to consolation (recalling the violence of Peter Sacks's substitutive consoling artifact) be recuperated as a constructive force? Surprisingly, no critical work about *Furious* has yet focused on Mouré's use of "fury" as a figure of female recuperation. The text offers the central image of a female figure who is "terribly, terrifyingly alive" in desire and language, using a "rapport with rage" to advance her argument ("my existence" 216-17). In *Furious*, Mouré positions the resistant woman as a Fury figure that ultimately reconfigures the daughter as elegist, while maintaining her right to perform a work of melancholia, to refuse to abandon her despair in the face of the convention of consolation.

Certainly the idea of the Furies as a feminine force within families is ancient. In her 2002 study *Beyond Fate*, Margaret Visser reminds readers that since the Furies were inevitably called up by crimes of extreme social transgression, "typically [...] incest and kin murder," it should be no surprise that "the family was the special province of the Furies" (52-53). The Furies were unregenerate and unforgiving, and the punishment they inflicted included insanity and exile -- social deaths perhaps worse than physical death:

The Furies might [...] drive the transgressor mad, chasing him away from sheltering city walls, away from the map of streets and all the city's other structures, and out across a featureless plain. Madness was confusion, a loss of all points of reference. The punishments of the Furies were claustrophobia and agoraphobia. (Visser 95)

Visser warns that the Furies rule the realm of *moira*, where "laws are [...] shorn of transcendent dimension" and obey "pattern pure and simple, the imprisoning outline of the universe, policed in our nightmares, by the Furies" (53). However, Mouré uses the figure of the Fury to expand the possibilities for legitimate love outside of that "imprisoning outline" of patriarchy. In "A Feminist at the Carnival," Gail Scott seeks to

position the mythical Fury in feminist discourse as a figure of discerning political strength. Suggesting that history could “come full circle” if myth were read from a feminist perspective, Scott reconfigures the death of Oedipus and, with it, the imperative of daughterly duty:

In the myth, Erinyes (the Furies) hounded Oedipus to death at Colonus in Attica. His crime? Perhaps society was punishing him for unconsciously trying to substitute the matrilineal for the patrilineal line. I like to think that the Furies were furious at his failure, [and were] ready to upset the power on which the whole Oedipal drama is based. (122-23)

Scott’s revisionist Furies, with their politics of matrilineal descent, find a counterpart in a younger figure of a girl as a potentially heroic figure whose “bittersweet mixture of eroticism and foreboding” could introduce “a new heroine who is not merely the feminine of hero,” a heroine who would “uncover the matrilineal traces buried in the folds of classical drama” (Scott 123). This heroine, Scott proposes, would be “both grandiose and humble, miserable and angry,” embodying binary contradictions “without shame” (124). Scott warns of the difficulties that may befall the Fury as heroine, situating her, as does Mouré, in a struggle with language and Western social structure: “the heroine cannot close that gap between word (usage), body and the father’s law, unless she becomes a parody of herself (a little man). Or a fragment (the cliché of mother, lover, prostitute)” (Scott 132). This parody or situation of being a “fragment” creates a nearly untenable subject position, or rather a non-subject position, for women. Scott calls the struggle towards subjectivity a heroine’s “tragic journey” that recalls the entrapment of the *Trauerspiel*, a rhetorical standoff between love and reason (Scott 132). But Mouré uses her Fury to revive the possibility of female discourse in civic space. The daughter-as-Fury becomes a figure that is driven by perspicacity rather than by rage, the kind of

figure Mouré introduces by warning that “not reproducing [...] hierarchies” within a community of women is “not easy. And it’s anxious. And it takes attentiveness” (“Poetry” 203).

In “Pure Reason,” Mouré challenges the contrast between love and reason by blurring the Kantian distinction between the empirical individual and the critical agent and, in doing so, reveals the insidious sacrificial economy that governs dutiful daughterly mourning. Poems like “Snow Door,” “Pure Reason: Femininity,” and “Fifteen Years” reveal the terms of daughter’s sacrifice to the “paternal” authority of logic, that “same old interrelated logic of signs” that “makes [Mouré’s speaker] furious” (86). Proposing that “pure reason” must reach beyond an “imposed” logic (*F* 87), Mouré counters theories of the *pharmakon* proposed by René Girard and Jacques Derrida, among others. Working with recurring images of animals being sacrificed for human consumption in “Goodbye to Beef” and “Cure,” Mouré suggests a parallel medical and linguistic sacrifice of women’s bodies in the paired poems “Pure Reason: Science” and “Pure Reason: Femininity.” These two poems, identical in structure, feature both animals and women launching a radio protest against their treatment by science and patriarchy, respectively. Mouré’s use of animal experimentation as a metaphor for gender oppression captures the despair that the narrator has refused to abandon. Playing up the Kantian irony that “reason only perceives that which it produces after its own design” (Kant 10), Mouré lets her analogy dramatize the horror by comparing women to the laboratory animals. By demonstrating that a being’s critical agency cannot be separated from its empirical circumstances, Mouré lampoons “pure reason” with the poems’ twin structure. Locating a political consciousness in mutilated animal bodies and disempowered female human

bodies, Mouré shows us resistance in midst of victimhood: “As if you could dream like we dream and be cured” both groups say, as they “push back the announcer” to gain better access to the microphone (21, 24).

Like the preceding set of paired poems, “Fifteen Years” and “Thirteen Years” work by echoing each other, but this time Mouré works with a woman’s contrasting memories of a single event. The sacrificial daughter narrates both poems, which begin with “a daydream of my uncle / his shirt out at his daughter’s wedding,” but where “Fifteen Years” remembers a series of disjointed images, “Thirteen Years” coalesces the dread of those images into the memory of a thirteen-year-old girl who is sacrificed to a lecherous “*friend of the family* touching [her] new chest” (26). The two poems are echoes rather than juxtapositions; the sacrificial narrative of “Thirteen Years” is veiled behind the disjointed images of “Fifteen Years.”

By revealing the terms of female sacrifice to male authority and discourse in “Pure Reason,” Mouré notes the valuation of the female body as an adjunct to female memory. Asserting the right to women’s memory as manifested in bodily experience and rendered, however problematically, in women’s language, the next section of *Furious*, “Visible Affection,” concentrates upon making female love visible outside of the sexual economy of male desire. Lesbian sexuality is one way to embody female desire, but while the affection referred to in this section is visible, Mouré suggests the importance of acknowledging female friendship, mentorship and supportive community as much as the importance of lesbian textual representation. Mouré suggests that love *is* solidarity, or solidarity in the making, and that otherness, instead of calling up abjection, implies the strength of a heterogeneous community.

The strength of Mouré's rebellious women reflects Kristeva's concept of the powerful role played by the semiotic *chora*, as a pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic state. Mouré's designation of the maternal semiotic as a precursor of the paternal symbolic originates in Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, and it is no surprise that Mouré endeavors to write what Kristeva herself suggests: "poetry that is a not a form of murder" (*Revolution* 72). Mouré echoes the sound of the word *chora* to link the maternal daughter to the Fury, particularly in "Speaking of Which" (38-39), the key poem in the "Visible Affection" section of *Furious*. Establishing a resurrective anger in the *chora* as pre-linguistic experience, Mouré suggests a homonymic echo of the word as the personification of fury: "this fury is our hardest core" (39). Mouré layers the text with such homonyms, claiming in "The Acts 7" that "[t]he resurrection of the woman's body is of Kore, not of the phallic king-dom" (*F* 91). Mouré chooses Kore the maiden as her semiotic daughter figure, much as Gail Scott re-imagines a Fury figure as a girl, not yet a woman.

If the Fury of "Speaking of Which" represents the "hardest core" of the female psyche, like the diamonds and stars that appear throughout the poem, the Fury also lives as a "rivulet / of anger" in the women's lungs, a source that they can "touch & keep warm" (38). Mouré combines these images, resonant of the apparently contradictory notions of a maiden's innocence and a supernatural Fury, to locate lesbian desire, unwritten or underrepresented in language. The fiery "rivulet / of anger" is kept alive by "clear globes of oxygen," implying that breath keeps anger alive as air keeps fire alive.

Mouré returns to the resurrected daughter figure with the phrase "by these signs you shall know us," echoing Biblical phraseology in a way that is reminiscent of

Macpherson's work with surviving daughter figures. The "resurrected" daughter is configured as Kore, Persephone's state before Zeus sacrificed her to be the bride of Hades.²

To "speak of which" indicates a demand for a place in the symbolic order for women who "walked away from" the male body as desirable object and from the male affirmation of female existence, as "The Acts 7" asserts. The impulse to walk away, though such an action is rebellious in a heterosexist culture, is glossed in the poem as sustenance, as the air that sustains those globes of oxygen in the women's lungs. Mouré's poetry works within the symbolic order to call attention to the violence of that order, particularly the sacrifice of daughter figures by their fathers. Fury seeks articulation in the air, and finds community by refusing paternal patterns of desire, rejecting with them the reign of the Underworld, the worship of death, and the conventions of elegy. "Speaking of Which" both speaks and does not speak its subject; it refuses to speak the subject in symbolic terms that do not affirm the existence of the "which" under consideration. As in Page's "Father," the unnamed referent acquires significance through its absence. The melancholic turn of the poem, pivoting upon the undesignated "which," suggests that the resurrection asserted by these poems is not of language but, rather of female presence in the gaps between language. The poem enacts an apprehension of naming that desire which may be diminished through naming. At the risk of doing so, I will name some possibilities for that effulgent "which": women's loss, love, fear, pain, relief, existence, voice, subjectivity. These words are familiar as terms integral to feminist discourse, words that have sought inclusion in "the civic house of memory," but have struggled to maintain their promise and integrity in a social system that remains hostile towards

women who refuse normative heterosexual desire and its potential violence: women who want to “name what our own tongues will call *something*” (F 39). That “something” signifies the space for love in the civic order, an overarching concern in Mouré’s text that plays out as the struggle for lesbian representation of “Visible Affection” and the reconfiguration of fury as passion in the “Furious” section.

Mouré ends “Visible Affection” by locating a female homosocial desire for community that operates outside of the heterosexual economy of desire. In “Miss Chatelaine,” Mouré creates a community where “[f]inally there are no men between us” (F 54). But even in this originary moment of female community, the patriarchy hovers at the edge of the women’s consciousness. The elegiac convention that values the vanished male body as transcendent and beautiful haunts this poem. By invoking a girl-and-her-horse film as an image of pre-adolescent female sexual desire, Mouré suggests a poignant look at the development of a female sexuality that is not necessarily lesbian, but does not include heterosexual power dynamics. The poem situates women at the moment of discovering their subjectivity through the relationship between the girl and the horse:

we are fifteen years older, serious
about women, these images:
the girl running at night between the house & the barn,
& the noise of the horse’s fear mixed in with the rain
 (“Miss Chatelaine”54)

The space between the house and the barn, between the “feminine” domestic space and “masculine” agricultural space, is also featured in “Hooked” and “Pure Writing is a Notion Beyond the Pen,” and “Miss Chatelaine” suggests that passing through such a space is the work of a heroine, the young Fury as rebellious daughter. The girl’s challenge to the horse’s fear and her need to act beyond logic (but not beyond reason)

locates her as a heroine; she saves the horse (significantly gendered male) from “some parasite” by making an incision in his side, draining the poison from his body and calming him.

The girl’s task of cutting open a loved (and living) body to expel a deadly invasive toxicity suggests the operation that Mouré performs on language – creating a gap to allow new resonance. The girl’s risk in passing through the space between genders is heroic; she acts out of her love for the horse and, in the morning, “the space between the house & barn is just a space again” (*F* 55). The girl, ironically a protagonist in a movie considered “a classic for children,” offers a model for the women who “are all feminist” fifteen years after graduating from high school. The speaker acknowledges the social conditions that create the moment of community among the women:

Finally there are no men between us.
 Finally none of us are passing or failing according to
Miss Chatelaine.
 I wish I could tell you how much I love you,
 my friends with your odd looks, our odd looks,
 our nervousness with each other,
 the girl crying out as she runs into the darkness,
 our decoration we wore, so many years ago, high school
 boys watching from another table.

Mouré parallels the boys’ “watching” attitude with the women’s “odd looks,” referring to their physical appearance and their “nervousness with each other.” Earlier in the section, the women in “Hooked” exchange “furious glances” in an erotically charged situation, while the “odd looks” in “Miss Chatelaine” gloss the idea of queerness as well as suggesting that the looks exchanged by these women are unusual: women looking at women while not being observed by men.

But the gaze of the high school boys is a manifestation not only of compulsory heterosexuality, but also of a patriarchal culture that doubts the seriousness of the girl-heroine. Mouré's invocation of "our true tenderness" makes "Miss Chatelaine" a poem of community as well as a poem of erotic potential. Her penchant for punning titles suggests that "Miss Chatelaine" may refer not only to the Canadian fashion magazine, but alternatively to a "chatelaine" as the mistress of the house, implying that a woman could be unmarried ("miss") and a woman of property ("chatelaine"), making the title ironically suggestive of independence rather than decoration.³ "Finally I can love you," writes Mouré in the final stanza but, though tenderness emerges between the women, the language of love remains in possession of the boys at the other table. The speaker is left with her ability to "meet [...] and talk this over" without the ultimately desirable language of love ("I wish I could tell you how much I love you"). In the eponymous "Furious" section, Mouré suggests that tenderness must be buoyed up by the energy of fury. Implying that to be tender with other women in a heterosexist culture requires great courage, Mouré conflates the tender woman with the rebellious heroine.

In the text's third section, "Furious," Mouré concentrates upon the overt refusal of the male body as a compulsory love object for women. Mouré synthesizes the anger needed to sustain her project of "breaking the surface" (79) of language and law, while continuously referring to love between women as the force that saves women from despair. It may seem ironic that in a society so greatly reliant on (and presumptive of) men's heterosexual desire for women and homosocial desire for other men, that Mouré would pinpoint women's "compulsory heterosexuality" (to use Adrienne Rich's term) as the idea upon which Western society predicates power inequities. The male body is

honoured, admired, presumed to be important, valiant, redeemable, clean, and consequently grieved as a loss in Western social organization. If this valuation relies upon women's sexual desire for men, or the cultural presumption of the masochism of female desire, Mouré's ambiguous but resonant insistence of the "loss of women" as the touchstone for grief has currency for both lesbian and heterosexual women. Part of what lurks in this ambiguity is the uncomfortable suggestion that when women concentrate on the value of the male body as powerful, erotic, or of particular social significance, they "lose women" as social support and political allies, making female heterosexuality a permanently politically compromised position.

With several poems that take feminist refusal of patriarchal power structures as their objective, Mouré suggests the pervasiveness of patriarchal power, in overt and covert political relations. "Patron," "Breakneck Speed," and "Wearing the Map of Africa," may be analyzed for their syntax of feminist resistance. The tightly repetitive diction of "Patron" suggests an atmosphere of sexual harassment, all innuendo and presumption in an "office tower" that remains "airless," devoid of life for the speaker. The syntax, too, displaying the man's "hands / up on his face push the slow skin dissolve frame over sunlight," suggests a surreal dissolve into non-contextual reference. The "patron" of the title is both individual and social authority, a patron of the patriarchal social organization, and a participant in the inherent social presumptions of male power. By titling the poem with a word that has different connotations in English and in French, Mouré conveys the systemic use of power and the culture of male authority, combining the English resonance of "patron" as a consumer of services with the French connotation of the "patron" as the proprietor of a business. The woman in the poem is trapped

between service and expectation. In turn, the man in the poem is patronizing in the sense that he assumes authority over the woman, relying upon a gendered power differential to support his right to comment on the quality of her work, her emotional state and her future with the company.

But if the loss of all points of reference seems indicative of the Furies' presence in the poem, it is the Fury who speaks at the poem's end to free the woman from her social/professional confinement and confusion: "I will not, she said / I will/not." Mouré's play upon the force of will presents a variety of possibilities. The slash in "I will/not" functions as punctuation and pause, a formal resistance to the man's will and a determination of the woman's will. She refuses his rhetoric of power along with his assumption that she will "learn the hierarchy" and "do this work so calmly." But the slash in the second statement of "I will/not" implies difficulties in resistance in the form of a stutter, implying that refusal is not always a matter of exerting one's personal will, and that what a woman wills to happen, or what she does not will, is not the only factor at work in power. The law may be refused, but this refusal is not an instantaneous solution to oppression.

"Breakneck Speed" (65), with its image of the "disgraced American president Nixon / in our history books," draws a distinction between "what we think we know, & / what happened. / Nothing happened." The photo of Nixon with the sheet-music hymns on his piano depicts a bland innocence that contrasts sharply with his political disgrace. In the "history book" of "Breakneck Speed," Nixon sings for the rock of ages to stand by him in his moment of crisis, to support him in his unearned righteousness. So when Mouré's narrator says "Nothing happened. / Take my word for it," she is pointing to the

lack of change in governmental ideology that neither “hides” corruption nor exposes it, but rather stands by it in implicit approval. Corruption is uncovered, but nothing changes. The poem lists other public figures who would support the claim of “nothing” happening: “Krushchev, Eisenhower [...] Roosevelt, Stalin. Or ask General Patton,” moving backwards through twentieth-century history to name other men who performed acts of public disgrace while maintaining righteous reputations within their own ideologies. With “General Patton” appearing so soon after “Patron,” the eye could be forgiven for creating a visual echo. The poem ends with a rejection that draws attention to its frustration: “If you ask me, I’m getting / outa here at breakneck speed.” The idea of “getting out of” Western discourse and politics, out of the complicity of being a middle-class white person in North America, recurs in *Furious* with the frequency and ferocity of a Fury who has lost the power to punish, but can see that the boundaries of the civilized polis are transgressed with impunity.

“Wearing the Map of Africa” addresses the political insurgency of public grief, and the complicity or hope in “trying to dream” in a violent world. The riot in South Africa over the funeral processions of “the rioted dead,” those killed in previous protests or police riots, points to a perpetuation of violence, especially when “the ruling party” declares: “These funerals have to stop.../ they’ve gone past mourning the dead” (*F* 69). Once again, the limits of mourning are enforced, this time by a patriarchal government against people of colour. The irony of “the government” that attempts “to restore calm” with “policemen / with peaked caps & rifles who look like the army” and “tear gas bombs” thrown into the crowd of mourners makes the speaker question the importance of diction in news reportage: “Does the word *restore* mean anything? / The word *calm*?”

Positioning her own whiteness as a condition of unavoidable complicity, she comes to the following conclusion:

The word calm means suppressed anger
 The word calm means implode.
 The word restore means suppress anger.
 The word means where does the anger go to when its beak is shut, forcibly
 Where does the anger go to it doesn't go anywhere (70)

The Fury as heroine resituates the anger without attempting to control it, noting that the word has “gone beyond mourning the dead. / It is honouring the living. / It is honouring the mouth, hurt, / trying to dream” (70). This is the same fury that refuses to keep “its beak [...] shut” about loss, the anger that is “still dancing” at the poem’s end. “Wearing the Map of Africa” demonstrates the labour of mourning as a force of solidarity, acted out by the crowd and reiterated in the speaker’s final injunction in “trying to dream” the “indescribable [...] colour of sweetness.” That search for sweetness, in the oranges from South Africa that were part of the Western world’s sanctions on exportation, implies the irony of “honouring the living” through capitalist principles. Once again, as in “Patron,” the oppressors require and admire “calmness” as a condition of victimhood. These poems display individual, social, and political resistance to oppression, beginning by situating the male body as powerful and ending by refusing the ideology proposed by that “body” of thought.

Mouré resists the social valuation of the gendered body, and offers an alternative homosocial, if not always homosexual, affection for women as embodied presences, tracing the struggle for women’s presence in language as a condition of the desiring subject. In “Salt: Condition” (71-72), the speaker struggles with the condition of speech, holding her “still wriggling” tongue in her hands, and retreating to the female space of the

girls' bathroom "which was / huge and white as in high school, where the young women / smoke together & feel their bodies growing." On the heels of "Miss Chatelaine," this nostalgia for the gynotopia of the high school bathroom echoes the tenderness of that poem's end and promise of female friendship. But Mouré suggests that such a world is fragile, for the girls are not only growing into women, but also "growing, / apart from each other, secretly, alone." The secrecy and isolation of these young developing bodies will result in their disappearance, another tragic "loss of women" in this text. The female friends that were so welcomed in "Miss Chatelaine" reappear in "Salt: Condition" in younger guises, only to disappear, trapped early by male sexual desire, and perhaps by the unexpected product of their own desires: "That year, two of my high school friends cried & said they were / pregnant, then vanished, / the washroom left empty" (72). The boys that "watched from another table" in "Miss Chatelaine" exert the influence of their bodies here, and the girls who did not "walk away from the word *cock*, & *ravishment*" vanish from school and from the possibility of female community.

"Salt: Condition," with the title's reference to tears and the domesticity of "salt upon the table in its cellar," as well as that element that "taketh away [...] sins" of the dead, is the female condition; the pillar of salt that is Lot's disobedient wife is a strong unspoken presence in this poem. The placement of the tongue outside the speaker's mouth and in her own hands corporealizes the separation between female speech and power. Mouré writes the disembodied tongue's panicked struggle as "a bird / whose nest was touched by humans, its eggs pecked / ragged in its fright, / the young leaked out and ruined." The words that the tongue might have borne, its "young," are "ruined," an ironic counterpoint to the girls' fecundity. Mouré finishes "Salt: Condition" with a single

phrase, after a stanza break: “Where the mouth is.” The isolation of the line emphasizes the tongue’s distance from the mouth with its inability to speak, even as the tongue’s frantic flutter in her hands implies desperation. The “tongue” as language is literally separate from the girl’s experience.

The opening lines of “Betty” revisit this desperate separation, and show speech encouraged by community. By writing “women / speaking light words into the cups of each other’s fingers,” Mouré locates lips and digits as two halves of a whole system of speaking. Later, women’s hands are “frozen, without fingers” but with “strange sprung words leaking // into our sentences.” The “strange” words “sprung,” like poetic invocations of Hopkins’ “sprung rhythm,” surprise in their suddenness; when holy words at last leave the mouths of the women in *Furious*, they are spoken by a two-year-old girl who, with the infinitely logical play of a new language learner, asserts the pun “A-girls” as a blessing instead of “Amen.” The girl’s declaration is joyous; she “called out at the supper table” like a holy fool, “Let’s not say ‘Grace’ again [...] let’s say ‘Betty’” (78).

But the child’s exuberance only reminds the speaker of the lack of language freedom experienced by adult women, and the gargoyle-like presence of adolescent boys who watch over the memories of the women:

Why are so many women lonely, empty as the insides of bicycles, as
the mouths using all the room,
the boys in their tight jeans &
slimness that will leave them in their 22nd year,
the boys & their hard laugh who is tougher,
boys getting at each other’s love, thru the inside
of women, their intermediary, their confessional.

“Betty” (78)

The appearance of beautiful young men, as an echo of the traditional elegiac lost beloved, “in their tight jeans & / slimness that will leave them in their 22nd year” (78), reminds readers that patriarchy limits the ways a male body is honoured or valued. “Betty” suggests that even homosocial (or homosexual) love must be funneled like a “confession” through women’s bodies as “intermediary” devices of exchange value. The “inside of women” refers to physical penetration but, also, to women’s work as the bearers of grief.

The final stanza of “Betty” declares the sexual ethic of *Furious*: “I want to speak sexually of one thing – not male love / but physical knowing” (79). By distinguishing between the Western tradition of “male love” (implying in this context both love *from* men and love *for* men) as a social convention and the apparent certainty of “physical knowing,” Mouré proposes a philosophical conundrum. “Physical knowing” in “Betty” becomes “the distance / between the breastbone and the palm, the two / important parts of the body,” an epistemological metaphor for the blend of corporeality and speech. Mouré’s use of a female breastbone as a place of love often torn by violence reaches back to the women’s “soft chests / torn open” in “Pure Reason: Femininity” (24). The distance between chest and hand acts out the distance between love and language that becomes increasingly fluid at the end of “Betty,” as “the water runs in the long veins” and the palm becomes a pool “where you can dive in & drink & never come up again.” Women’s language becomes a pool into which women may dive (as Adrienne Rich also suggests) in order to redefine subjectivity. The feminist refusal to abandon despair becomes a way of “breaking the surface” of the water like the surface of the grand elegiac narrative. The apparent contradiction of the diving heroine as someone who “never come[s] up again”

and someone who “break[s] the surface” plays out this journey into the watery body of discourse as an exhortation to live furiously.

When the heroine surfaces from her dive into the pool of consciousness, her “head wet, smelling faintly of milk or oranges,” Mouré’s birth imagery echoes her use of head and hair images of control in “Pure Reason.” The head of the Cixousian “newly born woman” is both out of control, “streaming” water, and perfectly in control, slicked down and smelling of mother’s milk or the fruit of paradise. The narrator no longer needs the ironic device of the “small comb” (*F* 32); the water transforms her head into a place of “physical knowing.”

From this epistemological position, Mouré begins “Gorgeous” on a note of doubt with a phrase that imitates the syntax of a question without its interrogative mark: “what are our chances” (*F* 80). The idea of chance informs the poem’s movement, and Mouré’s coiled self-contained images contrast with the free-flowing liquid imagery that leads the reader through the poem. This body is a place of paradox, featured as coiled and invulnerable while simultaneously as flowing and possessed of a powerful beauty. In the lover’s body, “small coils of the chromosomes” inside “cells [...] inscribed with the secret code given her at birth” create the lover’s genetic code: her female sex, and her “possible range” of longevity. The lover’s body is both vital and infirm: she lies listless upon a bed; she bleeds; she is invaded by cancer. Mouré’s repetition of “I river, I river, I river” is sweetly and ironically elegiac, as the river that has traditionally drowned the beloved and soothed the elegist becomes a verb resonant with the word “lover.”

The elegiac body here is definitely that of a woman, and she is most definitely not dead; she leaves the bed in the poem, despite the fact that her blood “gorges the bed.”

Furious has been directed towards rejecting the male body as the ultimate object of worship and grief, and “Gorgeous” completes this action with its ambiguous and highly resonant iterations of violence and love. When Mouré draws the reader’s attention to “[t]his expiation of the body, not petty, but, *critical*” (80), the expiation to which she refers is the menstruation imagery of the preceding line (“Who touches, every month, her own blood”). But this expiation of the body also refers to the lost or threatened body as an elegiac object, the body as a mortally vulnerable entity in the elegiac mode. The speaker’s declaration of love is followed by a declaration about the text: “I love you. The book is ended” (F 81), as though the declaration of love will make the beloved less vulnerable.

However, one of the lessons of the elegy is that arguments against death are valuable for the revelations they may yield about living, but neither love nor argument has ever been successful at warding off death. Mouré’s declaration, in true (reclaimed) elegiac fashion, does not stop the terrifying final line: “The blood gorges gorges gorges the bed.” The conflation of death and beauty (the homonymic pun on “gorgeous” and “gorges”) suggests the intractability of life and death, the strength of the elegiac contract, and the strength of reason predicated upon love. Is there another homonymic pun on “gorge” as the French word for throat? Mouré demonstrates how the body may “speak” in its own blood, and how “trusting the verb” means maintaining the flow, free of the tight confines of the coiled insides.

Of course, the book has not actually ended, for “The Acts” appear as the last section of *Furious*, Mouré’s end that is not an end. As designated in the Table of Contents, “The Acts” perform as footnotes for each of the poems, explicating but not

explaining the theoretical basis of the poems. But by scattering “the acts” throughout the body of the text, while also placing them in the last part of the book, Mouré implies a tension between the author’s privilege to have the last word while also “get[ting] out of the ending.” Resistance to the ending has been a feminist strategy at least since Rachel Blau Duplessis’s 1985 *Writing Beyond the Ending*, her text on women’s narrative strategies that “express critical dissent from dominant narrative” and create a text that “denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed, hegemonically poised” (5). Though Mouré claims that the function of “The Acts” is to “free memory and desire” (F 98) by supplying a critical context for the poems, the force of the prose poem’s rhythm suggests an impatient exhortation to action. “The Acts” may refer to the Acts of the Apostles; both texts are adjuncts to a previous “text” – the life of Christ and the life of the female heroine – and both celebrate a resurrection of the disallowed body: in *Furious*, the female body as the object of love and elegy.

Mouré exhorts women to “refuse to restrain ourselves” (F 98), and this refusal emerges as a performance in the final pages of “The Acts,” not coincidentally the only “Act” with a title (100-01). The reiteration of refusal in “Surface” describes the formation of a literary aesthetic and of a political consciousness in a narrative that relates the changes in the speaker’s perspective undergone in a single evening. The speaker declares the surface too familiar:

After a while it becomes too easy, that surface you know so well. As if the animals could jump off coins, their antlers burnished. Into the street, where you put *palm trees*. The line suffers from you. You don’t want the ragged edge anymore.

(“Surface” 100)

The speaker's declaration that "the line suffers from you" is reminiscent of the conventional complaint of the Wildean aesthete, who suggests that a lack of talent is an affront to the page. But Mouré's syntax also implies the converse of her statement, that the poet suffers from the line. By the next stanza, dissatisfaction has become desire; as "the surface folds up into its mathematical planes," the speaker discovers her own aesthetic: "You want to write only the gaps, between the eyelids of the letters." The sea returns as the subject of the only picture the speaker has ever painted, and her self-admonition that "[w]e are what we paint" refers back to the transformative qualities of water as a corollary for a woman's body. Because "[t]ranscribing the view has become impossible," the speaker must rely upon locating what she names "the female imaginary." The poem needs a female politics expansive enough to address the quotidian, including the designation of "pierced and unpierced spoons" as "male and female." By the fourth stanza, the speaker has discovered the possibility of a new aesthetic: "The line ends where it wants to. The surface is thirsty."

Refusal returns on the book's final page: "Each note of the page was a refusal, of the end of the line, a refusal of 'title,' & a refusal of the 'middle' of the poem. You will write again & give up your claim to the surface" (101). Giving up the need to remain on the surface, to obey standard rules of form and syntax, has been a tension throughout *Furious*, but also apparent in the speaker's need to give up her claim *unto* the surface, to walk away from the limitations of the surface. Mouré's final lines recall images from the collection like the brightly-lit kitchen of "Hooked," the ocean of "Ocean Poem," and the "small door" of "Snow Door." All these images involve lesbian desire as an unspoken physical energy beneath the surface of a compulsory heterosexual Western culture. In the

final words of the text, the speaker adopts a position familiar to us from Carson's "The Anthropology of Water": "You will get out of ending by falling fully-clothed into the sea." Mouré has commented on how she wants to use the ending of a poem to inspire thought rather than closure: "[t]he poet pushes it [the poem] off the page and into the reader. Real thoughts do reverberate. To add an 'end' is a figment of the head. (Not the imagination)" ("Interview" 1984, 246). "Falling fully-clothed into the sea" echoes the diving action of "Betty," where the dive is inspired by a desire to immerse herself in the new aesthetic, to begin where the Sphinx saw only an end. Does the "furious" narrator throw herself into the water in an attempt to transform herself into an elegiac body rather than an elegist? The "surface" of the poem becomes a new narrative thirsty for revelation, proposing that reading must involve a resonant immersion into possibility, a willingness to dive beneath "meaning."

Reading the fall into the sea as an intentional act of escape, "Surface" traces the creation of a poetic and political consciousness. The female elegist confronts water's potentially transformative power along with the patriarchal ideology of femininity as a "fluid" concept that defies subjectivity. If the "female imaginary exists" (100), it is beneath the surface. Mouré matches the physical vulnerability that haunts the socio-political oppression of women with the elegiac convention of transformative fluidity, and asserts the female self as both elegist and elegized. She chooses who to mourn, and how (or if) to write the self as a lost beloved. If "[e]ach note on the page" is "a refusal," then getting out of the ending is one more refusal to abdicate the force of female melancholia.

Proposing ‘activity beyond activity’: Rose’s meaning and Mouré’s mourning

Mouré asserts the necessity of a politicized “fury,” which is not the same as Rose’s aberrated, toxic anger, but rather, recasts fury as the energy of anxiety, a socially responsible power of assertion and refusal. Mouré is willing to forge an anger that demands a responsible political address, and she offers “The Acts” as that informed inquiry into fury. Part of the responsibility taken on by “The Acts” is that of urgent reconfiguration: “Taking a lot of common locutions & using them over & broken in the piece, the sound of them being important, and the sense not at all. Because everyone knows what they mean & refer to. The poem doesn’t have to defer” (“The Acts 5” 89). The poem need not defer to grand narratives and reliance upon patriarchal social organizations, but it can defer meaning in the Derridean sense.

However, it is the equation of deferral of meaning with the deferral of mourning that worries Rose, for she insists that adopting a melancholic position is fundamentally unreasonable and potentially destructive. Campaigning against melancholia, Rose claims that the anger inherent in unexamined mourning will cripple the mourner as citizen. Mouré might argue that aberrated mourning already limits the discourse of women in Western social organization. Mouré, despite the text’s title, does not create a toxic rant but, rather, a text in which women remain “furiously alive” to the possibilities of love and grief. Rose asserts quite boldly that the law has no other ethical choice but to acknowledge the female mourner’s “just act,” yet Antigone’s fate convinces us otherwise, and Mouré remains less certain than Rose about the inevitability of justice.

For the first three sections of the text, Mouré eschews the use of the question mark, allowing the syntax to suggest both interrogative and pure assertion. This formal choice emphasizes relationality and proximity in language, prompting a syntactical “stutter that replicates[s] surfaces imperfectly” (*F* 98). The stutter is the vehicle that brings language to the edge of what the speaker knows, and Mouré is careful to invoke “a stutter at the edge of” (99) without identifying the edge itself.

Disregarding the elegy’s social efficacy can disempower mourning as a political force, and expunge the possibility of discovery. Mouré’s search for a “new surface as a reflex for emotional depth and power” (“Changes” 44) is the project of *anagnorisis*: the revelation achieved through an examination of “false reference or intended deceit” of which Potts writes (37). By suggesting that Western social organization molds the language of grief and desire, Mouré inquires into the risks of assuming a subjectivity that is not yet included in the civic house of memory: “What is key to this desire: To have one’s existence affirmed by others. Or, put oneself at risk forever (a panic at the cell’s edge). Or is it affirmation, first, that then makes the risk possible?” (“The Acts 7” 91). While the risk in this quotation can be located in a declarative and demonstrative lesbian desire, desire is also undeniably epistemological: a desire to know and be known. Mouré’s “panic at the cell’s edge” is, ironically, enlivened by her refusal to be consoled by a system that perpetuates oppression.

This has been the paradoxical project of all of the female-authored elegies of this study: to mourn loss while criticizing the rhetoric of mourning. If the melancholic turn in *Furious* means using a traditional mode to turn from one form of subjectivity (the consoled male elegist) to another (the resolute and demanding female elegist), then trends

in the female elegy towards speaking the unspeakable cannot be elided as unimportant. Mouré asserts that “[p]oetry is, in its nature, protest, because it opposes, even as it uses, ordinary speech [...]. Its context is a disruption of order” (“Anti” 20). “Poetry” in this context does not mean the state-approved poetry “which invariably supports the dominant order” but, rather, poetry that presents itself as “a knot made out of the world” (“Anti”14). The knot composed of the loss of women demands an exploration of the elegiac convention as a social structure, and takes seriously Butler’s claim that “where there is no public recognition or discourse through which such a loss might be named and mourned, then melancholia takes on cultural dimensions of contemporary consequence” (*Psychic* 139). These “cultural dimensions” include the paradox of female duty and female subjectivity when the cultural duty of mourning meets the social anxiety of female melancholia. The female elegist is also the female hero, by virtue of her anxiety, not despite it. Butler’s “melancholic turn” is generated from an anxious impulse – to recognize, to reply, to remember – in an anxiously gendered body.

This thought itself produces some anxiety. In “The Anti-Anaesthetic,” Mouré is wary about simplifying the discourse of female subjectivity through the “radically unstable” ways by which patriarchy glosses the state of being female: “[i]t’s hard to make identity-discourse out of women’s desire, because its *terms* slip” (18). To speak, to write, or to exert a political presence in the world means to practice a legitimate mourning and an anxiety about language. Mouré’s “stutter inside us” (“To Speak” 132) may be the elegy’s most socially responsible bid for subjectivity, and her anti-anaesthetic poetics demonstrate Rose’s “*activity beyond activity* [...] the relinquishing of and *taking up again* of activity which requires the fullest acknowledgement of active complicity” (122).

Rose assures us that this activity strives towards a worthy outcome: “The work of mourning is difficult but not interminable; beginnings may be made in the middle. This work of mourning is the spiritual-political kingdom – the difficulty sustained, the transcendence of *actual* justice” (Rose 122). Though *Furious* is more a work of furious melancholia than of mourning, describing the text as “difficulty sustained” seems particularly apt. When Mouré writes “Grief, now; the hand prevents me,” the symbol of the hand, which has served throughout *Furious* as the portal to women’s language, embraces the female elegiac mode as melancholic fragmentation. The bodily tension between hand, mouth, and breastbone performs a stutter of the body, an attempt at “physical knowing” outside of speech. W. David Shaw reminds us that the poetic stutter is an “open site of fracture and breakdown” that enacts the modern elegy’s “paradox of veridiction” (147). In her refusal to manufacture a single truth out of an elegiac utterance at the same time as she asserts the value of a politicized subjectivity of furious living, Mouré’s “stutter at the edge of” becomes Rose’s “activity beyond activity” that does the work of mourning.

Conclusion

Towards a Rebellious Rhetoric of Mourning

Furious, the most consciously contentious text included in this study, enacts a leap of faith in the elegy as a rigorously demanding and capaciously expansive genre. Mouré's play between love and anger in this text revitalizes the elegy as an available genre for women to explore the political parameters of their sorrow, even as she criticizes its complicity of elegiac convention in the patriarchal power structure. To a greater or lesser degree, all of the works in this study pursue a politicized subjectivity through the use of elegiac convention, although Mouré takes on what Jane Gallop calls a "poetics of the body" that may be "our best hope" for installing feminist language about loss and love in Mouré's "civic house of memory" (*Thinking* 89). While Mouré's work uses the figure of the Fury to argue for the political urgency of her language project, her argument with patriarchy takes her far beyond Ramazani's "angry and ambivalent" American family elegies. Her project of "breaking the surface" of language convention emphasizes the urgent position that *anagnorisis* occupies in these Canadian women's paternal elegies, and ultimately, confirms the elegy as a genre of revelation.

The project of risking a redefinition of filial piety through the assertion of a female language of creative melancholia makes over these elegists into examples of what Juliana Schiersari imagined in *The Gendering of Melancholia*: women writers who are "disagreeable but justified rebel[s]" (50) against a cultural imperative to mourn fathers through self-sacrifice. But, as far as these female-written elegies progress into querying the patriarchal restrictions on language and elegiac convention, Schiersari's impatient and

socially pertinent question remains to be answered: “why is it when a melancholic woman speaks, her loosened tongue is not granted the same extraordinary virtue and wisdom as a man’s?” (55). What schemes of intelligibility have these female elegists discovered with their melancholic turns and their challenges to the Antigonal imperative?

The limits and conventions of the genre grant the poet a license to frame her grief, and a second license to demand more from the rhetoric of mourning for the father. The focus upon discovery or revelation that I have emphasized in these texts has an energizing affect that is part of the intrigue of a well-written elegy. It energizes and excites even as it mourns; it enlivens as it debates death; it proposes, in the face of death, that the painful task of living is worth the grief. The legitimation and recognition of love and loss between fathers and daughters represents a vital change in the elegiac continuum, a change that is less radical than it is overdue.

Part of the point of this study has been to consider how questions of gender put literary conventions under political and theoretical pressure. The elegy, as a genre, is equally rigorous in its demands and capacious in its theory. More than merely a poem of sorrow and consolation, it assumes a complex series of subject positions that alternately reveal and disguise affect. Twentieth-century elegists cannot, and do not, eschew mythology; in fact, the elegists in the study show every attachment to mythology even as they resist its politics or its psychoanalytical implications. Twentieth-century elegies are no less demanding than their precursors from earlier centuries. It is the demands themselves that have changed. What seems like a freedom from convention is a screen that hides the rigorous social approbation to which the elegy speaks. This is not to say that the elegy does not have fluidity; it can and does attract discussions of politics and

power, accommodating experiments in language and feminist politics while maintaining its integrity as a genre with a legacy of tradition behind it.

While the pursuit of meaning is not part of Freud's definition of the work of mourning, the successfully detached and recathected mourner may be convinced that meaning has been made from her mourning; her soul is safe from annihilation, and that survival may be meaning enough. Gillian Rose reminds us that the quest to legitimate mourning as an act of love and justice is inevitably painful, but this difficult search is the "parent material" for an elegy of social conscience. The female elegist must engage the paradox of fidelity that has defined her relationship with her father in order to make meaning from the rhetoric of mourning, and to be engaged in this kind of debate about authority and love is a profoundly political act. To "mourn beyond meaning," in Rose's sense, implies a rejection of reason in order to favour affect, but to do so would also mean refusing the challenge of the elegy while legitimating Freud's idea of female hysteria. Instead, the establishment of an insistent, demanding, mourning daughter figure that questions the rhetoric of mourning changes not only the definition of female filial piety. If the epistemology of mourning grows from the persistence of despair, then female melancholia as political exigency may be read through the paternal elegy as a literary force for feminist subjectivity.

I cannot offer this study as a defining treatise on the Canadian elegy, due in part to the small slice of Canadian elegies represented, and the gender-specific criteria under which the elegies are examined. However, insofar as it is possible to regard this sample as representative of the genre, the limitations of the project suggest applicability to other explorations, and advance the idea that the elegy, as an artifact of mourning, proposes

that a sustained contemplation of loss takes up poetic and rhetorical space in a national literature. Reading the “the other” takes on importance here, and while I have read “the other” as a figure of gender difference in these paternal elegies, the trope’s prominence may presage a significant figure in Canadian elegies at large. The emphasis on consolation in British elegies, and on anger in American elegies, may influence the Canadian elegy, but it is the isolated, questioning figure of the elegist as irrevocably “other” that appears again and again in these Canadian women’s elegies.

For the purposes of locating the concerns of the paternal female elegiac mode in Canada, the use of Aristotelian *anagnorisis*, more often used as a term in tragedy, maintains its hold on irony. Of course, the technique of using the genre’s convention in order to challenge the limits of the genre is paradoxical, but the historical survival and continuing popularity of the elegy suggests both the genre’s rigor and its expansiveness. Any developing theory of the elegy must take into account the genre’s extraordinary and often unexpected energy to challenge the expectations and limitations of mourning as a social act. The movement towards discovery in the elegies of this study is most often a way to negotiate subjectivity, but it cannot be denied that the female-written paternal elegy is fuelled by the quest for legitimation of daughterly love and anger, a quest that is revelatory by its admission of existence.

But Daphne Marlatt’s question from *How Hug A Stone* is still outstanding: how long do we need “parent material”? Many of the elegists of this study strive to re-make the father, or the mourning daughter, through the artifact of the poem, and, without question, the elegy demands rigorous attention to its convention and to its revelatory potential. To Marlatt’s question, I would add that the need for parent material in these

elegies is perhaps less important than the question of how the material compels the elegists to regard the stuff of mourning, the elegy as an artifact that performs a useful political function. In other words, what can be, and is being done, with this parent material? Both the autobiographical beginnings and the established conventions of the elegy constitute parent material, the ground from which the elegist begins her search for consolation and subjectivity. While these paternal elegies offer no guarantee of either result, they consistently offer a perspective on the father's death that is not satisfied with encomium or evisceration, but presents two figures against the demanding rhetorical ground of mourning.

Nancy K. Miller, in *Bequest and Betrayal*, asserts that a simultaneous epistemological craving and refusal complicate the literary use of parent material: "Why write about the dead? To remind yourself of what you can no longer bear to know" (166). Her invocation of that which cannot be borne, or fully known, underlines the strange position of melancholia in these elegies. Female melancholia, as a chosen artistic position, remains precariously conceived, and vulnerable to pathologization. Concerns that the generic features of elegy may be sacrificed on the altar of melancholia are genuine, but Butler's contention that melancholia makes mourning possible is vital to the understanding of the elegy, particularly a woman's elegy for her father, as a balancing act between love and reason, that is saved from the excesses of either by a drive towards a subjectivity beyond paternal influence or authority.

One of the difficulties of Freud's work of mourning is the way in which Freud closes off the possibilities that mourning may take a long time, or may not proceed in orderly stages, a perspective reflected in Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's "five stages of grief" in

the late twentieth century. But both good doctors presume that charting the steps to healthy mourning will be comforting in its quantified process, and that the desirable goal is, always, a way out of grief. But grief is disorderly, and mourning, as the activity through which grief may be expiated or distributed into the social organization that surrounds the mourner, is less a process than a rhetorical program. The work of melancholia refuses to fit into an easily observable system, but it is a dedicated devotional practice. Like any other devotional practice, melancholia too can descend into pathology, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Whether Freud does not discuss the work of melancholia because he could not imagine it, or because melancholia is a more individuated and less controlled pursuit than the Freudian “work of mourning,” the fact remains that the work of melancholia allows for a sustained regard of the beloved, and allows for the expansion of the elegy into a form that can accommodate multiple forms of legitimation, inheritance, otherness, and consolation.

The elegies of this study distinguish themselves by reappropriating elegiac convention from a circular system of mourning, and promoting the daughter’s power as the mourner in an elegiac discourse that legitimates love and loss. Page’s watching daughters record the father’s liminal masculinity but do not offer comfort, except as his “axeman,” an authoritative (and somewhat military) equal at last. Macpherson’s “bloody-minded” mourner demands a mythology that serves her melancholic practice. Atwood’s “girl without hands” offers another female symbol of despair who touches the narrator with her “absent hands” to move her out of the “dead space” that the narrator longs to “stay inside, / mourning because it is clean.” Carson’s Sphinx keeps her melancholia intact by always asking but never answering riddles. It is with Tostevin’s

frog, as both “the daughter” and “the resurrection” that the leap can be made to Mouré’s Fury who dives beneath the surface of language and emerges with her head streaming. For Mouré, “[p]oetry is a place of infinite capability” (“And Just” 47), and her poetic position of despair searches for some female subjectivity in mourning other than that of sacrificial victim. In these images of melancholia sustained until it “turns” to mourning, both loss and love are legitimated.

There is a diversity to these elegies that speaks of the range of perspectives and styles. Part of the problem with developing a national elegiac theory for Canadian poetry is the multiplicitous ways in which the elegy is regarded and written in this country. Though British elegiac tradition has, in many ways, served as “parent material” in the development of the Canadian elegy, Canadian poets have been judicious about choosing which traditions they find useful: death by water, or the dichotomy of presence in absence. They have been equally selective in choosing which traditions need, and receive, further debate within the literary rhetoric of mourning: the Orphic journey to the Underworld, or the need for consolation.

While the confessional mode in elegiac work blossomed in American poetry under Theodore Roethke’s influence (among others) in the 1950s and 1960s, Canadian poets never quite became interested in confessionality in the same way as their American contemporaries did. Canadian elegies do not entirely refuse the confessional impulse, but the force of “de-facement” on each poet’s autobiographical detail places these elegies in a different category from the confessional mode that has dominated the American elegy from mid-century onwards. That is, it may be easy to find examples of a confessional influence in Canadian poetry, but it would be harder to find writers who have become

“canonically” associated with the confessional elegy in the manner that Roethke, Plath, Anne Sexton or John Berryman are in the United States. Instead, these elegies may begin with autobiography, but quickly move beyond it to debate the larger consequences of questioning the rhetoric of mourning and the daughter’s position within it, and of the subjectivity of the female mourner.

Female elegists in the late twentieth century are not Milton’s accompanying muses – those “sisters of the sacred well” – though the metaphoric volume at which these poets “sweep the string” suggests a necessary audacity that may have appealed to those muses. Establishing the elegy as a “just act” of mourning demands nothing less than a valuation of female melancholia as an artistic perspective rather than as a pathological state. Just as the anxiety of performing a just act predicates subjectivity, so the melancholic turn, that which establishes subjectivity, underscores the demands of the elegy. The desires to have one’s love legitimated, or memory recorded, are deceptively simple aims made complex by the social stricture of paternal authority. Whether or not she achieves consolation or succeeds in redefining her own subjectivity through examining her own rhetoric of mourning, the Canadian female paternal elegist needs the anxious politics of “parent material” to assert the discovery of elegy as both literary artifact and just act.

Notes

Introduction

¹ I thank Candida Rifkind for bringing these elegies to my attention with her paper delivered at the Poetics and Public Culture conference, hosted by the University of Western Ontario in March 2005. In her paper, “Technologies of the Podium: Montreal Massacre Poetry and the Feminist Counterpublic,” Rifkind identifies Anne Simpson’s “Grammar Exercise,” Uma Paramsewaran’s “Remembering the Montreal Massacre,” and Maxine Tynes’s “For the Montreal Fourteen” as elegies that memorialize the dead women while criticizing the media’s treatment of the tragedy.

² The poetic practice of writing an elegy in memory of a more senior poet who has served as a mentor figure is one of the central ideas that Harold Bloom discusses in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom is explicit in asserting that this practice is filiative, and suggests, in distinctly Freudian rhetoric, that the younger poet writes the elegy for the older poet in order to overcome his literary “father,” and claim the older poet’s talent as his rightful cultural legacy. Celeste Schenck condemns this practice as careerist, but problematically claims that women poets do not submit to the practice of elegizing mentor figures. As evidence against Schenck’s claim, consider such female-to-female mentor elegies as Maxine Kumin’s “On Being Asked to Write A Poem in Memory of Anne Sexton,” Bronwen Wallace’s “A Simple Poem for Virginia Woolf,” Gwendolyn MacEwen’s “Fireworks” in memory of Marian Engel, or Dionne Brand’s “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater.”

Chapter One
 “Hid from his daughter”: P.K. Page and the Work of Melancholia

¹ All quotations of Page’s poetry, except when noted otherwise, are from *The Hidden Room*, henceforth abbreviated to *HR*.

² For further discussion of Page’s poetics in the context of female modernism, see Paul’s “Redressing the Balance: Female and Male in the Early Poetry of P.K. Page” in *Essays in Canadian Writing* 58 (1996): 115-135, and Laura Killian’s “Poetry and the Modern Woman: P.K. Page and the Gender of Impersonality” in *Canadian Literature* 150 (1996): 86-105.

³ Both Jane Gallop and Jessica Benjamin suggest that the fervent wish for an impossible homosocial relationship is the primary force of a daughter’s identificatory love for the father. For more discussion of this alternative to the female Oedipus complex, see Gallop’s *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter’s Seduction*. London: Macmillan, 1982, pages 75-81, and Benjamin’s *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Difference*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995, pages 120-131.

Chapter Two
 “Absence, havoc:” Mourning the Alchemist Father in the Works of Jay Macpherson

¹ The texts of *The Boatman and Other Poems* and *Welcoming Disaster* have been collected in a single volume, *Poems Twice Told*, published by Oxford University Press in 1981. Macpherson originally published *Welcoming Disaster* privately under the imprint Saanes Publication in 1974, and copies of that text are rare. Therefore, all references to

the poems from *The Boatman and Other Poems* and *Welcoming Disaster* will refer to their appearance and pagination in *Poems Twice Told*, hereafter abbreviated as *PTT*.

² In an article published in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Macpherson names Milton's "Lycidas" as an early literary fascination that eventually became the subject of her Master's thesis (388).

³ Certainly the limits of autobiographical criticism show themselves here. Macpherson's circumspect nature – she rarely gives interviews and remains reluctant to speak personally about her poetic work – prohibits me from making any argument that these elegiac poems refer specifically to her own father. While Macpherson's cryptic dedication in *The Spirit of Solitude* to "my father, Major James Ewan Macpherson, champion of Ossian," can be read as either a wry joke on Major Macpherson's love for the 18th-century poet who claimed to have discovered a new translation of Ossian, or a sly reference to a larger-than-life persona that the major "championed" for himself, like the Ossian scandal. Since the division of cultural/symbolic Father from individuated father is never easy, Macpherson's creation of an "alchemist" father figure suggests strongly that shady F/fathers may be found both within the boundaries of the family and, significantly, beyond them.

⁴ Bennett takes the title of her article on Canada's apocalyptic poets from Macpherson's "The Fisherman," the final poem of the original 1957 text of *The Boatman*. See Bennett, "'As the Last Morning Breaks in Red': Frye's Apocalypse and the Visionary Tradition in Canadian Writing." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 70.4 (2001): 813-824.

Chapter Three
 Alterity and Inheritance: Margaret Atwood's *Morning the Burned House* and
 Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Cartouches*

¹ This spectre is glossed as the ghost of a commanding father. Holland points out that Derrida takes the ghost of Hamlet's father as his literary exemplar, as well as Marx as a critical "father" in *Specters of Marx*, and identifies the spectre as the biblical Abraham in *The Gift of Death*, as well as examining Moses, Freud, and Derrida's own father in "Archive Fever" (Holland 65).

² The pages of *Cartouches* are unnumbered.

³ Perhaps Derrida's writing style is not so unmistakable. A recent article on *Cartouches* by Thomas M.F. Gerry quotes Tostevin on the "master-name" but is unable to name the "master." See Gerry, "'If Only I Were Isis': Remembrance, Ritual and Writing in Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Cartouches*" in *Response to Death: The Literary Work of Mourning*. Ed. Christian Riegel. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 2003. 179-99.

⁴ Tostevin's interest in Derrida's theory and her frustration with his public behaviour are evident in her 1988 book *sophie*, especially in the prose piece "by the smallest possible margin" (45-48). After attending a series of lectures by Derrida, Tostevin writes: "when asked by one woman why women are so conspicuously absent from his material, he says that perhaps the best way to answer that question is to suppress it. This is of course the perfect answer and the woman never shows up again but another woman claims that he is the greatest mind of the 20th century so most of us hang on" (45). In *Cartouches*, Tostevin may be said to be "suppressing" Derrida while he "hangs on" to his influence until his non-naming at the book's end.

⁵ In an earlier published version of this section, published as “Cartouches: hieroglyphs of a visit” in *Inside the Poem* (ed. W.H. New), Tostevin replaces the word “cartouche” with the word “bullet”: “a bullet / puts into play / the bodies / of my name” (283). The capsule shape of the cartouche suggests a bullet, but, of course, a bullet’s violent connotation would suggest murder rather than any kind of “natural” death.

⁶ Erin Mouré employs the “is is” construction in *Furious* in her poem “The Blind” (40), using stuttering speech to draw resonance from the words. In writing “Is is is us,” Mouré suggests that “Isis is us,” i.e., women have the power of Isis, linking the declaration of existence to a kind of female citizenship.

⁷ In “Cartouches: hieroglyphs of a visit,” Tostevin adds the presence of the speaking persona to this line: “What other parts of me for an abc?” (New 283), suggesting the daughter’s sacrifice. The removal of “of me” from the version of the poem that appears in *Cartouches* suggests that Tostevin rethought the politics of a corporeal replacement.

Chapter Four

The Pilgrim and the Riddle: Antigonal Imperative in Anne Carson’s “The Anthropology of Water”

¹ Schenck’s argument deserves credit for its audacity in 1986, when it was a groundbreaking proposition to offer any kind of reading of contemporary women’s elegies. Schenck’s seminal article, “Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-constructing the Elegy,” and her subsequent book, *Mourning and Panegyric* (1988), influenced both Melissa Zeiger and Jahan Ramazani who devoted large portions of their texts to analysing the position of the female elegist in American literature.

Chapter Five
Elegy of Refusal: Erin Mouré's *Furious*

¹ All subsequent parenthetical citations of *Furious* will be notated as *F* followed by the appropriate page number.

² Daphne Marlatt significantly uses the enlivening power of the Kore myth to explore the theme of lesbian desire in *Touch to My Tongue*. Like Marlatt's text, *Furious* suggests that women may come to life through their relationships, sexual and communal, with other women; unlike *Touch to My Tongue*, Mouré's text engages fury as a significant part of that rebirth.

³ It is tempting to suggest that Mouré's "Miss Chatelaine" was inspired by kd lang's popular song of the same name, particularly since both works were written by Canadian lesbians and both concern the tender eroticism of lesbian relationships. However, lang's song appeared on her 1992 *Ingenue* album, four years after the publication of *Furious*. The question of whether Mouré influenced lang remains unanswered.

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