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CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH IN THE MODERN ELEGY
AND RELATED POEMS
DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Daniel William Minock, A.B., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1975

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FIELDS OF STUDY

Modern American and Modern British literature. Professor
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INTRODUCTION

Do I fear death?
As far as I can make out I
Feel toward death as Rochefoucauld
Must have felt, though I don't recall
He ever mentioned it.

---Kenneth Rexroth

Neither the sun nor death can be
looked at with a steady eye.

---La Rochefoucauld

In this study of conceptions of death in modern poetry,
I have used as focus and primary material twentieth-century
examples of the elegy, which I define as a poem which either
develops a philosophical conception based on a particular
death, or tries to. I have also considered some poems which
are not elegies, including T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets,
Theodore Roethke's "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North
American Sequence," Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning," and
various short works by Robinson Jeffers and Sylvia Plath.
These pieces are included because they help to articulate
the attitudes of a given body of elegies, and also because
they are important works which I would be foolish to ignore.

1 "Our Home Is in the Rocks," The Collected Shorter
Poems of Kenneth Rexroth (New York: New Directions, 1966),
p. 254.

2 La Rochefoucauld: Maximes & Reflexions Diverses,
ed. Henry A. Grubbs (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1929), p. 26. In the original: "Le soleil ni la mort ne se
peuvent regarder fixement."
I concentrate on the elegy for several reasons. I want this study to have clarity and depth of understanding, qualities that frequently belong to discussions of works that are fundamentally alike. I was originally attracted to this genre because the number of significant twentieth-century elegies in English is small enough that each of them can be discussed adequately within the practical limits of this study. This number includes such poems of recognized importance as Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," Robert Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" and "For the Union Dead," W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," and Dylan Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London," as well as poems which seem to me to deserve wider attention than they have received, works such as Kathleen Raine's "The Hollow Hill," Rexroth's elegies to Sacco and Vanzetti ("Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937" and "Fish Peddler and Cobbler"), and Allen Ginsberg's Kaddish.

But the most important reason for concentrating on the elegy is that it makes an excellent focus for attitudes toward death. Besides the obvious fact that elegy is concerned with death, it is also significant that it is rooted in particular death, for in the consideration of the particular life of which that death is the final event, the elegist has a chance to express his thoughts and feelings much more precisely than if he were, say, ruminating among unfamiliar
gravestones. Furthermore, perhaps because the dead person often seems to have been a part of the survivor's own existence, the elegist may be forced to look at his own mortality with an uncommonly steady eye. Finally, because of the dramatic quality implicit in the word develop, the elegist presents more than one conception of death, and indirect or direct comparison to the rejected conception tends to make the one which is accepted clear and detailed. Usually the elegy takes the form of a mind struggling with a problem; in this way the elegist makes authenticity of thought and feeling an issue.

Using the elegy to indicate conceptions of death involves one serious problem, however; occasionally the conception may be distorted by the relationship between the elegist and the dead person. For example, if his poem is occasioned by the death of a public figure, the elegist may accept and express a traditional interpretation of death because of an imagined obligation to speak for a community. On the other hand, if the dead person was intimately associated with the elegist while living, the poem that results from his death may be less an interpretation of death than a working out of complicated conflicts with a ghost. But these difficulties are not insoluble if taken into account beforehand.

The approach that I have chosen entails one serious disadvantage. The modern elegy does not demonstrate--at
least not conclusively—an historical development of attitudes toward death. I suspect that a good argument might be made for such a shift, and the results might be illuminating. Unfortunately such an argument would require the examination of a much larger, more varied group of works than I am dealing with here.

In The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination, Frederick J. Hoffman presents a case for an historical development of conceptions of death in the literature of the twentieth century. Hoffman surveys a wide variety of modern works for those factors which he feels are important to a consideration of death: expressions of "grace" (i.e., a belief in the immortality of the soul), scenes of violence, and concepts of the self. His thesis is that "the violent destruction of the possibilities of grace has forced upon the self the responsibility of adjustment to death."³

Whether Hoffman is correct in emphasizing the role of violence, and whether grace and self are the most precise terms to express the development of the idea of death are not of primary importance here. I am chiefly interested in Hoffman's idea that twentieth-century literature reveals "the decline of a willed vision of eternity."⁴ At one time I hoped that this examination of the modern elegy might

⁴Ibid., p. 346.
demonstrate that decline. The brightest moment of this hope came just before I tested the hypothesis that (1) those elegists born between 1865 and 1900 either accept the traditional view that death is the entrance to a new life for the individual, or are disconsolate because they find this view impossible to maintain; (2) those elegists born after 1914 accept the idea of death as finality, the end of individual consciousness; (3) those elegists born between 1900 and 1914 ignore the question of what happens after death in the interest of ongoing life. Unfortunately, while many modern elegists fit this schematic design, there were a number of exceptions. Wallace Stevens and Robinson Jeffers, born in 1879 and 1887 respectively, clearly belong to the second group, while Kathleen Raine and Robert Lowell, born in 1908 and 1917, express the traditional view which my imposed pattern ascribes to those born before 1900. Besides these exceptions, which are crucial in as small a group as modern elegists make, I could think of a number of exceptions among poets who are not elegists but whose attitude toward death made my hypothesis seem contrived.

I abandoned the plan to write a history of an idea by means of the modern elegy, but I do not disagree with Hoffman's general thesis that the literature of the twentieth century expresses a rejection of faith in individual immortality. I hope eventually to use the following study, or
parts of it, in a more ambitious work which will examine and express the history of the concept of death in the twentieth century.
CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITIONS OF ELEGY AND CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH

This is not a genre study. My central interest in the elegy is not that it is a kind of poem, but rather that it is a poem which works out conceptions of death. I am not interested in such matters as the principles of prosody which the elegy follows, the use of pastoral conventions, the types of pathetic fallacy, or the mythic roots of the imagery of apotheosis. I refer to matters of technique and convention—the heart of a genre study—only when they are the terms by which an attitude toward death is expressed.

Nevertheless the first step to be taken here is identical to that which would be necessary if this were a genre study; the term elegy must be defined. This definition must be rather extensive; the word has been so variously defined, applied to so many different poems, that the more one knows about it, the less it means.

The variety of senses which elegy has been made to bear is suggested by the following entries from representative literary handbooks and encyclopedias:
Elegy: (1) a poem written in classical elegiac metre. . . ; (2) a poem either of lament for a person or persons, or of serious musing.

---Cassell's Encyclopedia of Literature

... a formal and sustained poem lamenting the death of a particular person; . . . Sometimes the term is more broadly used . . . for a poem mourning the passing of all men and of the things they love.

---A Glossary of Literary Terms

The prevailing modern conception of the elegy is that of a 'reflective lyric suggested by the fact or fancy of death. The emotion, personal or public, finds utterance in keen lament, to be allayed, however, by tranquil consideration of the mutability of life, the immutability of Something that justifies life and death.' (Gayley) But 'in some instances classical usage has been followed in applying the term to poems including a wide variety of subjects,' as the elegies of Donne and Goethe.

---Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism

... A lyric, usually formal in tone and diction, suggested either by the death of an actual person, or by the poet's contemplation of the tragic aspects of life. In either case, the emotion, originally expressed as a lament, finds consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle.

---Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics

... A sustained and formal poem setting forth the poet's meditations upon death or upon a

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grave theme. The meditation often is occasioned by the death of a particular person, but it may be a generalized observation or the expression of a solemn mood.

—A Handbook to Literature

Though each of these descriptions refers to a treatment of particular death as a characteristic of one type of elegy, all mention at least one other kind of poem to which the term may also be applied. Only the entries in Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism and Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics mention a stage beyond lamentation. Even in these cases the concept is rather carelessly presented. The authors speak of the "*tranquil consideration of ... the immutability of Something that justifies life and death*" and "the contemplation of some permanent principle." Yet many elegies develop conceptions of death which do not provide for any immutability or permanence. In Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young," for example, the speaker does not offer an immutable or permanent principle. He simply says that the athlete is just as well dead before he grows old. In short these passages reflect an unsystematic accumulation of distinct types of poems under one heading, a lack of consensus about what characterizes any of these types, and a tendency toward imprecision in the individual descriptions. These faults should not be laid at the feet of the authors of the literary handbooks, however.

Their sources fail them; there is no comprehensive generic study of the elegy; and, as we shall see, the variety of ways that it has been used tends to render it nearly meaningless now, at least as the description of a specific type of poem.

The word ἔλεος, by which Euripides and later Greek writers meant lament, is the source of the English word elegy. But the word in Greek became associated with a metrical form consisting of a line of dactylic hexameter followed by one of pentameter, and this elegiac distich was used in poems that are not lamentations. Mimnermus, Solon, Simonides, and Callimachus, among other Greek elegists, and after them the Roman Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid wrote poems—elegi in Latin—which range in subject from love to war, and in tone from the satiric to the didactic. The pastoral eclogues of Virgil and the Idylls of Theocritus were not considered elegies because they were not written in the elegiac distich.6

The Elizabethans used elegy to refer to any poem which resembled the meter, form, tone, or subject matter of any of the classical elegies. Drayton's Elegies Upon

Sundry Occasions, for example, are epistolary in form, following the lead of some Augustan elegists. Drayton's elegies also tend to be didactic, and John Davies' Nosce Teipsum, a versified lecture on the immortality of the soul, is subtitled This Oracle Expounded in Two Elegies. Other elegies, so-called, were concerned with love, both woefully, in the Petrarchan sense, and playfully, as in Donne's Elegies. Donne also wrote an "Elegie Upon Prince Henry," however, and Spenser's Astrophel is subtitled A Pastorall Elegie; but it was not until the seventeenth century that the word began to be associated mainly with the death of a particular person.7

But if precision in the use of elegy is not one of the greater glories of ancient Greece and Rome and England in the sixteenth century, subsequent ages deserve only a little more credit. John W. Draper suggests in The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism that "the word elegy in our language has usually been associated with poetic substance rather than form--especially with death, and most especially the death of some particular individual."8 The index of Draper's study, which lists a great number of titles beginning "Elegy Upon the Death of . . . .", certainly suggests the wide association of the term with particular


8(New York: New York University Press, 1929), p. 7. Further citations to this work are to page numbers in this edition.
death during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But Draper adds that there is a “wide penumbra” (7) to the term. And so there is. As late as 1742, John Hammond was writing Love Elegies in imitation of classical elegiac meter. A few years later, influenced by Hammond, William Shenstone in A Prefatory Essay Upon Elegy defined the genre as the medium of “tender and querulous ideas.” Thus elegy became associated with the effusions of those eighteenth-century poets popularly known as the Graveyard School. Perhaps Coleridge’s comments on the subject should be seen in the light of this association:

Elegy is the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind. It may treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject for itself; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet himself. As he will feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love become the principal themes of elegy. Elegy presents everything as lost and gone, or absent and future. The elegy is the exact opposite of the Homeric epic, in which all is purely external and objective, and the poet is a mere voice.10

One modern critic has made a major effort to disassociate the elegy from death. Abbie Findlay Potts, in The Elegiac Mode, seems to be expanding Coleridge’s conception of the elegy by defining it as the characteristic product of a certain type of mind. Her book is part-


ly a study of Wordsworth's adoption of the ballad stanza for some of his earlier work. But the more substantive purpose of the book is a "study of elegiac form." According to Potts, this form is not characterized by subject matter. She describes it in the following way: "... beyond its minor sorrows, elegy is the poetry of skeptical vision... its most characteristic formal trait is revelation. Originally the elegist, however dismayed, perplexed, or unhappy, wrote toward light rather than darkness; we may most surely recognize elegiac form in its successive anagnorises" (2). Potts takes pains to distinguish the anagnorisis of elegy from that of imagistic and didactic poetry. Instead of discovering correspondences between nature and the self (as she says the imagist does), or discovering a usable truth expressed in the form of a maxim (as the didactic poet does), the elegist's discovery is one of "identity and community" (39). Alluding to the last line of Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," Potts writes,

"Oh the difference to me!" This cry is the index of lyrical elegy. Whether the feeling of the elegist follows an event or accompanies an entreaty or argument, whether it is called forth by a situation or a character, it is above all personal. Nevertheless, elegy does not symbolize itself as feeling alone; it is a procedural

---

form and must get on with its task of thought. Nor does it operate through the abstract propositions and logical enthymemes of gnomic poetry; it is speculative rather than sententious. It is not mere reverie or musing. And although it is akin to autobiography, epistle, and dramatic monologue or dialogue and shares their revelatory nature, its emotions and passions spark and propel thought rather toward vision than toward action. In short, the difference which is "the difference to me," however often it may appear to be an inconclusive regret or a riddling premise, always implies that the poet is sincerely and deeply enough concerned to set his wits to work (39-40).

The problem here is that it is very difficult to think of any good lyric which is not "personal" and more than "feeling alone" or "abstract proposition." To take extreme instances, both Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and Donne's "Valediction:Forbidding Mourning" could justly be described as "speculative rather than sententious" and "not mere reverie or musing." Both clearly "propel thought rather toward vision than toward action." And I cannot imagine a poem worth reading in which the poet is not "sincerely and deeply enough concerned to set his wits to work." In short, Potts—like others who try to see it apart from the subject matter of death—does not satisfactorily distinguish the elegy from other kinds of poems.

On the other hand, those scholars and critics who have viewed the elegy as a response to a particular death have not attempted to use the term definitively. Their focus has been on other matters; they have merely expropriated the term to describe groups of poems which they have wished
to examine. For a "study of social ideals," John W. Draper in *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* focuses on a great number of minor seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elegies which express "the sorrow of immediate loss" (7). Roy Harvey Pearce, in an early chapter of *The Continuity of American Poetry*, demonstrates "an authentically Puritan way with poetry" by means of "lengthy, discursive, and elevated" elegies on the deaths of respected figures. Finally, in a chapter of *Seventeenth-Century Poetic*, Ruth Wallerstein concerns herself with elegies that are "formal literary celebrations" because she wishes to illuminate "the struggle which took place throughout the seventeenth century . . . between formalism and a philosophic view of art."^{13}

In general usage *elegy* refers to a very particular type of poem only when it is preceded by the word *pastoral*. Then it means a "shepherd's" song for a dead comrade in a landscape which is based upon the setting described in the *Idylls of Theocritus*. But this type of poem is all but irrelevant to a consideration of modern poetry, at least in terms of its distinguishing conventions, since the only example of it in the serious poetry of the twentieth century


is Yeats's "Shepherd and Goatherd"--a work which does not manage to revive past traditions.

The inescapable conclusion to this survey of the critical uses of the term *elegy* is that the word may refer to so many different kinds of poems that it is not a useful generic distinction. It might be made so, of course, by one willing to investigate the matter more exhaustively than I have done. But I am not interested in such a task. Like Draper, Pearce, and Wallerstein, I wish to use the word *elegy* to describe certain poems written during a specific period of time. I suspect that my definition has more uses than theirs do, but I do not wish to pursue that point either. My primary intention here is to provide an indicator of modern conceptions of death.

In this study an elegy is a poem which either develops a philosophical conception based on a particular death, or tries to. I have avoided the conventional idea that the elegist seeks "consolation" (see pp. 8-9) because many twentieth-century elegies do not conclude in a consolatory tone. The poet expresses what a certain death means to him, but he is not necessarily comforted by this conception, though there is usually a note of acceptance. I have chosen "philosophical conception" rather than some paler form of consolation because, whatever the case is in life, in the elegy attempts to cope with death are attempts to discover the nature of a particular death. Comfort, consolation,
acceptance, or the adjustment of expectations and values follows from that discovery.

Each elegist begins with a particular death, but most are concerned with other deaths too. In many cases, in fact, the particular death seems to be only the occasion for a meditation on the poet's fears of and hopes for his own mortality or for an expression of the fact of mortality. But many modern elegists do not go beyond a particular death, sometimes because all their energy goes to placate a ghost, but more often because they choose to conceive of death only as the last event of a life. The philosophical concept which these elegists develop has nothing to do with the nature of death for the dead, but only for the living.

Finally, though the elegist seeks a philosophical concept based on a particular death, he does not necessarily find one. The result of such a "failure" is a disconsolate elegy, the expression of an awareness that an expectation of reality is widely separated from a perception of it.

Elegies must be distinguished on the one hand from all obituaries, post-mortem character sketches, tributes, eulogies, and other poems which describe a dead person or his accomplishments; and on the other hand from all laments, dirges, and epitaphs which express immediate sorrow or other unmeditated emotion over a death.

The first of these distinctions can be seen in a comparison of Milton's "Lycidas" and W.H. Auden's "In Memory
of Sigmund Freud." Whatever may be said of the sincerity of Milton's grief for Edward King, it is obvious that the speaker in the poem is struggling with the thoughts which a particular death has aroused in him. Partly he is concerned with what has actually happened to his companion: "But O the heavy change, now thou art gone, / Now thou art gone, and never must return!" But mostly he is troubled by the implications of this tragedy for himself:

Alas! What boots it with unceasing care
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?

Eventuallly the speaker sees the death of Lycidas in a different way:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor,
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of him that walked the waves,

And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the saints above,
In solemn troops and sweet societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;
Henceforth thou art the genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

---

The result of these lines is to allay the fears of death which were expressed earlier. Lycidas is not actually gone. He is "the genius of the shore," a kind of higher lifeguard. In this way the "heavy change" of the earlier passage is nullified, and the threat of accidental death is lessened. More important, Lycidas' death is not annihilation but the entrance to another, better world. In this way the speaker maintains his vocation and presumably does not abandon himself to "the tangles of Neaera's hair." Thus "Lycidas" is the development of a philosophic conception of death which is based upon a particular death—in short, an elegy.

Unlike Milton's sketchy praise of King, Auden's tribute to Freud is explicit and substantial. On the other hand, Auden does not grapple with the fact or any of the implications of death in "In Memory of Sigmund Freud." The last stanza suggests the nature of Auden's involvement with his subject's mortality:

One rational voice is dumb, over a grave
The household of Impulse mourns one dearly loved.
Sad is Eros, builder of cities
And weeping, anarchic Aphrodite. 15

"Sigmund Freud" is a eulogy which explains the psychoanalyst's achievement and rather wittily mourns him. But if Milton minimizes the person who has died in order to concentrate on the death, Auden avoids the reality of death so that he

can concentrate on expressing Freud's greatness. Clearly Auden's poem does not express a philosophical conception of death, and so is not an elegy.

To distinguish elegies from varieties of lament, we must consider whether the work in question is more than a statement—or a piercing cry—of the fact or effect of death. Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems are examples of lament:

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

Henry King's "The Exequy" deals with a similar situation:

Thou scarce hadst seen so many years
As day tells hours. By thy clear sun
My love and fortune first did run;
But thou wilt never more appear.

But "The Exequy" goes on from this lament-like statement to articulate a conception of his wife's death as only a temporary separation of a couple:

But hark! my pulse like a soft drum
Beats my approach, tells thee I come;
And slow howse'er my marches be,
I shall at last sit down by thee.

A more difficult distinction is between the lament and the elegy in which the speaker seems to want to develop a philosophical conception, but cannot do so. An example of this type of poem is Robert Bridges' "On a Dead Child,"


17 Norton Anthology, p. 274. Further quotations from "The Exequy" are from this edition.
which presents the reflections of a physician as he examines a corpse. The first twenty of the twenty-eight lines of the poem concern the lifelike appearance of the corpse. In these lines the speaker expresses his own developing awareness of the child’s death:

Thy hand clasps, as ’twas wont, my fingers, and holds it;
But the grasp is the clasp of Death, heart-breaking and stiff;
Yet feels to my hand as if
’Twas still thy will, thy pleasure and trust that enfolds it. 18

In the penultimate stanza the poet attempts to measure the difference between life and death in a series of questions:

So quiet! doth the change content thee?—Death, whither hath he taken thee?
To a world, do I think, that rights the disaster of this?
The vision of which I miss,
Who weep for the body, and wish but to warm thee and awaken thee?

In the beginning the poet views death from a detached perspective; though aware of the tragic aspect (the father, he says, "must gather his faith together and his strength make stronger"), he is clinical and observant. The illusion that the corpse is alive is a conscious fantasy. His questions, however, signal an effort to find the meaning of this death. But in the final stanza, he abandons this effort:

Ah! little at best can all our hopes avail us
To lift this sorrow, or cheer us, when in the dark,
    Unwilling, alone we embark,
And the things we have seen and have known and
have heard of, fail us.

From viewing the corpse as a physician would—as material
to be analyzed in itself—he has come to see it with the
eyes of a fellow human being who must share the corpse's
fate. But he has no idea what that fate is. Such a poem
as "On a Dead Child" is in effect a permanent lament, but
as it is deeply engaged in the effort to discover a meaning
of death, I consider it a type of elegy.

Besides "Lycidas," "Exequy," and "On a Dead Child,"
pre-twentieth-century poems which fit my definition of
elegy include Donne's "An Anatomy of the World: The First
Anniversary," Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas," Shelley's
Adonais, Tennyson's In Memoriam, Whitman's "When Lilacs
Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Arnold's "Thyrsis," Hopkins'
Wreck of the Deutschland, and Swinburne's "Ave Atque Vale."
Some of these works are pastoral elegies; others seem to
follow no established tradition. The variation in length,
tone, and setting is extreme, as is the relation between
the elegist and his subject. Beneath these differences,
however, all are alike in seeking to develop a philosophical
conception of a particular death, and all but "On a Dead Child"
succeed in doing so."

But the matter does not rest there. Within this basic
similarity, the poems differ again in terms of their
philosophical conceptions of death. The majority of them, including "An Anatomy of the World," "Exequy," "Lycidas," Adonais, In Memoriam, and Wreck of the Deutschland develop a conception of death as an entrance to another world in which the individual is conscious. Except in Adonais, this conception conforms to the Christian view of paradise and the resurrected body.

In "Elegiac Stanzas" the subject is not the meaning of death for the dead, as it is in the above works, but rather the meaning of death for the living. The same is true of "Thyrsis"; even though the poet suggests a pagan apotheosis for his dead friend, that seems to be merely a way of expressing the mourner's renewed joy. In both of these poems, the speaker is concerned with effects of death upon life.

"When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and "Ave Atque Vale" express the idea that death is the end of the individual consciousness. In Whitman's poem this finality is considere a blessing because it marks the end of suffering. But in both cases there are hints of apotheosis that cut against the grain of the idea of absolute annihilation, suggesting a belief in a mysterious spark of self which goes to fulfill a mysterious destiny.

All three of these philosophical conceptions are expressed in the twentieth-century elegy, though there are
differences in the relative proportions of each group, and also in the strategy of those expressing the traditional conception.

Only two significant twentieth-century elegies, Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" and Kathleen Raine's "The Hollow Hill," express belief in a traditional afterlife. And compared to, say, "Lycidas," both poems are quite close to doubt. Lowell stresses our inability to know God, and Raine admits that an afterlife is uncertain.

Another pair of elegies seem to derive from a thwarted desire for a traditional conception of death. In W.B. Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" and Allen Tate's "An Ode to the Confederate Dead," the speakers wish to express a philosophical conception of death appropriate to the memory of soldiers who died in war. But in both cases the speaker is swept up in the feeling that death is irrevocable and inconsolable. Like Bridges' "On a Dead Child," these poems are disconsolate elegies which try to find a mitigating explanation of death, but fail to do so.

A relatively large number of twentieth-century elegies ignore death from the point of view of the dead, and focus instead on a conception of death as an event in the life of the living, or the final event in the life of the dead. W.H. Auden speaks of the way a great poet is remembered in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats." Karl Shapiro says in "Elegy for
a Dead Soldier" that his comrade will not have died in vain if the war in which he fought brings lasting peace. In a somewhat similar, but ultimately more intelligent and sophisticated way, Kenneth Rexroth expresses a concept of death as sacrifice in "For Eli Jacobson," "Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937," and "Fish Peddler and Cobbler." In "For the Union Dead," Robert Lowell assesses the sacrifice of an officer of the Union army in moral and historical terms. Stephen Spender finds a source of strength inside himself during the agony of his sister's fatal illness in "Elegy for Margaret." Hayden Carruth in "My Father's Face" and Robert Penn Warren in "The Return: An Elegy" manage to reconcile themselves with dead parents. In a number of poems, including "Daddy," Sylvia Plath also attempts to deal with a parent's death; but she does not seem to succeed fully in any of them. Relevant here too are Theodore Roethke's "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North American Sequence," poems in which the speaker examines the prospect of his own death, mostly from the point of view of the living.

Finally, many poems and elegies express a viewpoint opposed to the traditional conception of death as an entrance into a conscious afterlife. In "Sunday Morning" Wallace Stevens argues that death, an absolute end of our being, is inseparable from the existence of beauty. Sylvia Plath values life a good deal less, and seems to suggest
a non-conscious continuation of the self. Several writers, including Winfield Townley Scott in "Memento," Dylan Thomas in "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," and Robinson Jeffers in *Hungerfield* and also in other lyrics, suggest a conception of death which is similar to Plath's. And Allen Ginsberg in *Kaddish* also suggests that death is the end of consciousness, but not of existence. *Kaddish* embodies most of the attitudes and concerns of the modern elegy.

The rest of this study will develop these themes. Chapter two deals with those elegies and other poems which express—or try to express—a traditional concept of an afterlife. Chapter three examines death from the point of view of the living. The fourth chapter returns to the perspective of death from the point of view of the dead, as developed by poets who do not seem to believe in any form of conscious afterlife.
CHAPTER TWO

TRADITIONAL CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH
AND TRADITIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Four Quartets

Since Eliot does not focus on particular death in it, *Four Quartets* is not an elegy according to my definition. My reason for treating it in this study and in this particular place, however awkward a beginning it makes, is that it is the most triumphant expression of belief in immortality in serious twentieth-century poetry. It has other levels too, of course, and one should be particularly cautious in treating thematically a poem whose title refers to a formal quality. I have tried not to distort the poem.

Death is seen from two different perspectives in *Four Quartets*. From a strictly temporal point of view, it is the final stage of the existence of the individual and the means by which the true significance of time is expressed. "We cannot think of a time that is oceanless / Or of an ocean not littered with wastage,"¹ Eliot says in "The Dry

¹*Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, 1943), p. 38. Further citations to these poems are to page numbers in this edition.
Salvages."-- This view of death is not developed in the first poem, "Burnt Norton." Here Eliot is interested in distinguishing between time and timelessness, between the "still point of the turning world" (15) and the "waste sad time / Stretching before and after" (20). But he does not show the ultimate implications of these two modes of existing. In "East Coker," however, Eliot makes death his explicit theme.

He begins with the statement "In my beginning is my end" (23), a sentence which in the course of the poem he repeats, echoes, and finally reverses. The idea, at least on one level, is that his life leads inexorably to death. A further implication is that "the time of death is every moment" (42), as he states it in "The Dry Salvages." But Eliot does not pause to explain himself thoroughly at the beginning of "East Coker." Instead he observes the changes in a neighborhood:

In my beginning is my end. In succession Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass. Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires, Old fire to ashes, and ashes to the earth Which is already flesh, fur and faeces, Bone of man, cornstalk and leaf (23).

This passage is elegiac in tone, but some of the images are quite particular. To the implicit "Ubi sunt . . . ?" which lies behind these lines, the poet has a rather shockingly specific response: " . . . to the earth / Which is already
flesh, fur and faeces." Expression of the cycle of generation and decay is repeated in another passage shortly afterward. The poet describes a dance of life and death performed by the long-dead occupants of East Coker during summer nights. It is visible, he says, "if you do not come too close" (24). At first the scene seems charming, almost a celebration of the rhythms of nature; but Eliot's attitude is revulsion:

Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death (24).

For the second time in less than fifty lines, Eliot associates death with fecal matter. This is quite an emphatic denial that there is anything sacred in natural rhythms.

In the second and third parts of "East Coker," Eliot completes his picture of death within time. He speaks of the "quiet-voiced elders" (26) whose apparent wisdom was

only the knowledge of dead secrets
Useless in the darkness into which they peered
Or from which they turned their eyes (26).

The "darkness" which disturbs the peace of old age is explained in detail a few lines later:

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant
into the vacant,
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,
And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha
And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors,
And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.
And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury (27).

Later in this study I will examine the work of other poets who describe death from a point inside time. Wallace Stevens particularly tries to make this perspective bearable. Eliot does not. Instead of focusing on the possibilities of life, the relief of the "darkness," or the ways in which the dead might be remembered (not to mention the solace of being in the cycle of nature), Eliot says that what we bury is not human. The body is dung when the spirit is nothing; death is final—and horrible.

But Eliot expresses another conception of death in "East Coker," one that he perceives in moments "outside of" time. This second conception relates to the first as a solution to a problem. Their common basis is darkness, but the "darkness of God" (27) is like the darkness in a theater while the scene is being changed, or like one's "mental emptiness" (28) under ether or in a stopped subway train. In short this darkness is a temporary phase which will ultimately give way to light and movement. But Eliot does not try to describe precisely what follows. He can only speculate that it will be like other "timeless" moments:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning,
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony of death, and birth (28).

But just as the experience of these moments is brief and their renewal intermittent, so is his sense of this second conception of death inconstant. Eliot cannot perceive death outside of time all the time. Only through discipline, the subordination of his sense of apparent reality to faith, is the idea of death as the continued existence of the individual maintained:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: . . . (28)

The two conclusions that can be drawn from this view of time and faith are (1) that time is an enemy, and (2) that death, the way out of time, is a friend. Eliot does not stress these conclusions, perhaps because he does not want to advocate dying in and of itself, but in the fourth section of "East Coker," death is shown to be our needed cure. Christ the "wounded surgeon" heals us by injuring us fatally, and the "dying nurse," the Christian religion, reminds us that "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse" (29). The poet expresses his conventional religious posture
in still other paradoxical terms:

If to be warmed, then I must freeze
And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is
briars (30).

This picture of the earth as purgatory leads the poet to
a conception of old age which is quite different from
that which he expressed earlier in the poem:

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is
my beginning (32).

The earlier vision of old people stunned by the darkness
facing them gives way here to a sense of energy as they
face the voyage to a new world, a new beginning.

Eliot's two conceptions of death are summarized in the
first and last sentences of "East Coker": "In my beginning
is my end" and "In my end is my beginning." Indeed, al-
most everything that Eliot says about death in Four Quar-
tets is expressed in this poem. Not until the end of "The
Dry Salvages" does he develop his ideas further:

... right action is freedom
from past and future also.
For most of us, this is the aim
Never here to be realized;
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying;
We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil (45).
There is, of course, nothing new about the protestation of humility. But this is its ultimate expression. Eliot and other right-minded persons will be content if their corpses make good fertilizer. This idea is in contrast to the earlier statements linking death and dung. But there is a reason for the difference in attitude: the "temporal" part is not the whole. The fact that there is another dimension to death makes it easier for the poet to accept physical decay.

One other aspect of Eliot's conception of death is added in the final poem of the series, "Little Gidding," at the end of which the poet explains as much as he knows of the experience of the individual after death:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time,
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always--
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one (59).

What Eliot proclaims here is perhaps implicit in "East Coker," though it is not developed thoroughly in that poem.
"The end of all our exploring," the purpose of our medita-
tion on death, is to understand the experience of being out
of time and death, as we are in our memories of what might
have happened, and as Adam and Eve were in Eden. The passage
from "where we started" to "the apple tree" could apply to
either situation. This "condition of complete simplicity"
can only be described in terms of a transmutation of our
experience in which evanescent beauty—the rose—is united
with what destroys it.

Two principles function in this poem. The first is
the poet's need to see the individual consciousness passing
through death without being destroyed. The language in
which Eliot describes death in time suggests extreme horror
at both physical decay and the annihilation of consciousness,
though the second prospect seems to be the more deeply-felt
fear. But along with this need to transcend the physical
aspect of death is the need to acknowledge the vast differ-
ence between living and dead flesh, to admit that mortality
is a mystery. With his strong sense of the necessity of
faith, Eliot manages to contain this mystery so that it be-
comes the question How is it done? instead of Is it done at
all? As we proceed through this chapter, we shall see the
second principle become a more important factor in the ele-
gist's conception of death than it is in Four Quartets.
"The Hollow Hill" and "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket"

More so than any other modern elegy, Kathleen Raine's "The Hollow Hill" attempts to answer the question, What happens to us after death? Yet even while it focuses on the post-mortem human condition, this elegy is cautious.

Raine does not mourn the dead—not even the particular dead person with whom she is ostensibly concerned, the poet Edwin Muir. In the first section of the poem, her language and imagery suggest serenity and assurance, though she admits that she has no special vision into the world of the dead. When she considers the weathering of gravestones, for instance, she is not depressed. Instead she decides that "the dead have left this sign," and thus transforms an emblem of mortality and oblivion into a symbol of the enduring consciousness of the dead. A little further on, when she discusses our ignorance of the fate of the dead, she is optimistic again:

We cannot look from the world into their house,
Or they look from their house into our sky;
For the low door where we crawl from world to world
Into the earth-cave bends and turns away
To close the hidden state of the dead from the light
of day.
The grave is empty, they are gone; . . .

By giving the dead a house and a world, the poet reveals part

of "the hidden state of the dead." The last line alludes to the resurrection of Christ. Finally, at the end of the section, Raine gives the reader hope that the world of the dead can be revealed:

Yet so the great slabs have leaned three thousand years
That a single beam, shaft, arrow, ray
This dark house of the dead can pierce.
From world to world there is a needle's eye;
Light spans the heavens to find the punctum out,
To touch with finger of life a dead man's heart.

All of the poem, especially the first section, is an attempt to prepare the reader for such an illumination of the world of the dead as is talked of in this passage.

In the next sections, Raine seeks to accomplish her end by means of a meditation which suggests some of Emerson's arguments for idealism in Nature, though her conclusion is more specifically described by the title of Emily Dickinson's "The Brain Is Wider than the Sky." Simply stated, Raine argues that death cannot touch thought, for thought has the power to transcend time and space. Her argument resembles Eliot's somewhat, though her terminology is not specifically Christian:

Those fields of childhood, tall
Meadow-grass and flowers small,
The elm whose dusky leaves
Patterned the sky with dreams innumerable

And labyrinthine vein and vine
And wandering tendrils green,
Have grown a seed so small
A single thought contains them all.

The "single thought" which embodies all her experience is
not only her memory, but also the "emblematic branching
tree" inscribed in the tombstone which symbolizes death and,
like both life and death in Raine's view, passes away.

In the penultimate section the poet gives us her gener-
al conclusions about death. As might be expected, they are
a blend of mystery and assurance. She repeats some legends
of occurrences around graves—the appearance of mysterious
lights and white birds—and says that the "dying are the
initiates of mystery." But she herself knows enough to
tell us of their good luck:

Their death is over and done,
Ours still to come,
Grievous and life-long.
Not to be what we are,
Is it to be less, or more?
Waking, or dream, or dreamless
sleep, nirvana
Is to be not this, not this.

Like many elegists before and after her, Raine attempts to
lessen the horror of death by observing the pain of life.
But there is an important difference between Raine's idea
and that of many other modern elegists who have proffered
a similar consolation. They suggest that death is good,
painless oblivion. Raine says that the pain in this life
makes anything death might be—the entrance into a conscious
afterlife, a more mystical "dream" or oblivion—a virtual
paradise.

In the final section of the poem, Raine refers to the
particular death which presumably initiated the poem. She
also returns to many of the images which she had used earlier:

One night in a dream  
The poet who had died a year ago  
Led me up the ancient stair  
Of an ancestral tower of stone,  
Towards us out of the dark blew such  
sweet air  
It was the warm breath of the spirit,  
    I knew,  
Fragrant with wild thyme that grew  
In childhood's fields; he led me on,  
Touched a thin partition, and was gone.  
Beyond the fallen barrier  
Bright over sweet meadows rose the sun.

This personal contact with the dead fulfills her promise of a light which would span the worlds of living and dead. Of course the experience is private, and of uncertain authenticity. But Raine has not said that she is sure that the dead live. She hopes so, and this final scene blends with that hope.

In Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket," an elegy which commemorates the death of the poet's cousin Warren Winslow during World War II, more than half the poem is spent articulating the view that death is finality. Lowell does not seem to believe in this view as much as he prefers it to the sentimental assurances of immortality. The idea that death is final arises from an examination of physical reality, the poet seems to say. In the first section, for example, he provides us with two visual impressions of the drowned sailor:

    . . . the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light  
    Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
He grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs;
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,
Its open staring eyes
Were lustreless dead-lights
Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk
Heavy with sand.

The first four lines suggest that the sailor is alive when he is taken from the sea. He "clutched" and "grappled" and his muscles are "coiled" and "hurdling." But in the last five lines the body is examined more closely, and the deadly pale bloodlessness is noted, and the "open staring eyes."

In an address to Winslow's shipmates, the poet emphasizes that death is final:

Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea
Where dreadnaughts shall confess
Its hell-bent deity,
When you are powerless
To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced
By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste
In his steel scales, ask for no Orphean lute
To pluck life back. The guns of the steeled fleet
Recoil and then repeat
The hoarse salute.

Winslow's death foreshadows the more violent death of other sailors. The "Orphean lute" of wishful thinking will not avail in this case. Life cannot be "plucked back" from the dead; besides, the instruments by which these sailors live are not lutes but guns.

Winslow's body is thrown into the deep "where the heel-headed dogfish barks its nose / On Ahab's void and

\(^3\)Lord Weary's Castle and The Mills of the Kavanaughs (New York: Meridian, 1961), p. 8. Further quotations from this poem are from this text.
The association of twentieth-century war vessels and the New England whalers of an earlier age might seem at first to be a way of simplifying the issues involved, making of "Quaker Graveyard" a modern variety of pastoral elegy. But Lowell is more interested in comparison than allegory. He wants to demonstrate that the Quakers were just as godless as the modern sailors are; and that, as a consequence, the appearance that their death makes is as horrible—more so, actually, for the whalers were hypocritical in their superficial protestations of belief and piety while at the same time they experienced powers stronger than the Christian deity:

I see the Quakers drown and hear their cry:
"If God himself had not been on our side,
If God himself had not been on our side,
When the Atlantic rose against us, why,
Then it had swallowed us up quick."

If "God" were on their side, of course, he would not have allowed the Atlantic to swallow them up at all. In this way the Quakers' faith is made to seem weak, superficial, self-serving. The truth of their lives is seen in the grave, which marks their memory if not their bones:

This is the end of the whaleroad and the whale
Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell
And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools
To send the Pequod packing off to hell.
This is the end of them, three-quarters fools, . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
This is the end of running on the waves;
We are poured out like water.
The repetition of "This is the end" accents the finality of death, and "We are poured out like water" (accents mine) universalizes it.

A consolatory conception of death and violence begins immediately after this passage. It springs from a question:

Who will dance
The mast-lashed master of Leviathans
Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned graves?

The key element here is the ambiguity of "mast-lashed master of Leviathans." The phrase could refer to Christ, or to a great whale tied to a whaler. The identification between these two figures is reinforced in the next section:

\[ \text{the death-lance} \]

... rips the sperm-whale's midriff into rags,
Gobbets of blubber spill to wind and weather,
Sailor, and gulls go round the stoven timbers
Where the morning stars sing out together
And thunder shakes the white surf and dismembers
The red flag hammered in the mast-head. Hide,
Our steel, Jonas Messias, in Thy side.

Before this passage the whale has been associated with violent death; it "tossed" boats "sky-high" and "spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell." But at this point the same monster of destruction wears the loin-cloth of the victim, and is identified with the redemptive power of Christ. This reversal suggests a revision in the poet's view of the Quakers' mistake. It is not that they were excessively optimistic about their deaths, but that they failed to understand the true nature of Christianity. To explain it, Lowell shifts the setting abruptly from the At-
Atlantic ocean to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in England:

Our Lady, too small for her canopy,
Sits near the altar. There's no comeliness
At all or charm in that expressionless
Face with its heavy eyelids. As before,
This face, for centuries a memory,
Non est species, neque decor.
Expressionless, expresses God; it goes
Past castled Sion. She knows what God knows,
Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem
Now, and the world shall come to Walsingham.

The point is that God is unknowable, and so what he appears to be might not seem beautiful. Of course there is always the possibility that God is impersonal, and that "salvation" involves what Hugh Staples calls "the extinction of personal consciousness." Given the distance between God and man in "Quaker Graveyard," that interpretation is very possible. But I tend to believe that Lowell simply does not want to be very specific about the meaning of redemption.

In this section Warren Winslow's death is given a consolatory meaning. Earlier in the poem, this death was seen from the point of view of the Quaker sailors: "All you recovered from Poseidon died / With you, my cousin." But Winslow is redeemed by his visit to Walsingham, even though he "whistled Sion by that stream" (the Virgin's eyes see "past castled Sion").

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In the end Lowell does not adopt an overtly consolatory tone, as earlier Christian elegists tended to do. He is satisfied to observe that "The Lord survives the rainbow of His will." This line has been variously interpreted. Staples believes that it reaffirms the idea that death is the end of consciousness for the individual; he likens it to Shelley's dome of many-colored glass. Jerome Mazzaro, on the other hand, believes that the line suggests a God of wrath, who might not keep his promise to spare the earth another great flood. This is an ominous implication, but not entirely so. For violent death does not preclude redemption. Indeed, in the Christian myth, as Lowell reminds us, violence is the source of redemption.

Laments

Perhaps the foregoing analyses of "The Hollow Hill" and "Quaker Graveyard" give the impression that the modern elegist who expresses a traditional conception of death only pretends to experience doubt for the sake of his audience. But it is not so. The work of Robert Lowell after the publication of Lord Weary's Castle in 1946 attests to the actual fragility of at least one elegist's faith. Life Studies, published in 1959, shows an attitude toward death

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5 Robert Lowell, p. 52.
quite different from that in "Quaker Graveyard." For example, Lowell writes at the end of "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,"

He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin’s disease. . . .
My hands were warm, then cool, on the piles
Of earth and lime,
A black pile and a white pile. . . .
Come winter,
Uncle Devereux would blend to the one color.  

This image of a death to come is similar to the description in "Quaker Graveyard" of Warren Winslow’s corpse dragged out of the ocean. The difference is that in "Quaker Graveyard" the poet goes on to explain that this appearance is misleading, while in "My Last Afternoon" there is no redemption, no hint of transcendence.

The later poem is a lament. As noted in the first chapter, the elegy expresses an idea about death, while the lament merely expresses the immediate fact of and reaction to mortality. The elegy often renders a process of thought over a period of time; the lament is likely to be a spontaneous and abbreviated burst of feeling. The two types of poems differ as a movie differs from a snapshot.

But the relation between them is more complex than mere difference. One form which the elegy often takes is that of a lament rationalized. For example, many of the short lyrics in Tennyson’s In Memoriam could stand on their own as laments. In fact, anthologists often make them do just that.

Conversely, we might say that a lament is to an elegy as a statement of a problem is to the problem with a solution. This analogy does not always work, of course; some elegies do not begin with a lament, and some laments do not clearly state a problem. Nevertheless, because of the particular direction which the elegies of the following section take, certain modern laments can be useful in isolating one of the initial problems of mortality.

John Crowe Ransom's "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" presents a contrast between a young girl's vivid, active life, and her motionless, "prim" death. The poet is speaking for all the mourners in remembering the "speed in her little body" and the "lightness in her footfall." Ransom even manages to incorporate a pathetic fallacy in a memory of the girl chasing geese "who cried! in goose 'Alas!'" In contrast to these precise images of the girl's life, the description of her body in death is vague and illusive; she is in a "brown study"—which "vexes" those who come to see her. By means of this contrasting description, the poet suggests that the mourners do not comprehend death, or apprehend it, actually. They are merely numbed by the sight of the lifelike corpse.

A much more complete realization of death is expressed by the speaker in Wilfred Owen's "Futility." This poem is

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short enough to quote in full:

Move him into the sun--
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown,
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow,
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds--
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved--still warm--too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
--0 what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Through the ninth line, the speaker shows the same disbelief in death which "brown study" suggests. Both "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" and the first part of "Futility" envision life in death; the corpse in both cases is pictured as still alive, sulking or sleeping. After the ninth line of Owen's poem, however, the speaker begins a series of questions which mark an advance in his knowledge of death; he sees by the end of the poem that it is the annihilation of the flesh, the destruction of a world.

Beyond their differences, both of these poems emphasize the distinction between living and dead flesh—the same point which Lowell makes so vividly in "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow." Ransom accomplishes this distinction by means of understatement and dramatic irony, Owen by a more explicit recognition. Each suggests

an immense gap between life and death. Faith, the usual means of spanning this gap, is not available to the speaker in any of these laments. Death remains a fearsome mystery.

Wallace Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" is not a lament. If it must be typed, it may be called directions for a funeral. "Emperor" is, however, the expression of an attitude toward death which relates to the present discussion. Its theme is contained in the single-line refrain at the end of each of the two stanzas: "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream."10 This line contains a resonance which cannot be fully captured by analysis, but basically it suggests two meanings: first, the law of human existence is the search for pleasure. If we "Let be be finale of seem," if we imagine that what appears to be actually is, then we are all loungers in a brothel like the characters of the poem. The second point of the line is that there is no other principle of human existence, nothing beyond life.

As in the three poems considered previously in this section, the speaker is concerned with the fact of dead flesh:

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.

10The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 64. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
But in this case the realization of death precedes the poem. There is no surprise that the corpse is no longer alive. In fact the poet seems to express a knowing scorn for the dead flesh ("how cold she is, and dumb"). This attitude is a logical outgrowth of the perception that there is something inhuman about a corpse. It is so different from what it once was, the poet seems to be suggesting, that it may not be worth our trouble.

This feeling is carried to its extreme form in William Carlos Williams' "Death." From the very beginning of this poem, the speaker attacks the corpse:

he's dead
the old bastard--
He's a bastard because

there's nothing,
legitimate in him any
more
he's dead... 11

It is difficult to think of this poem as a lament. Yet it is a spontaneous response to a death about which the speaker actually feels deeply. He explains the basis of his feeling, and of his curious expression of it, later in the poem:

Love's beaten. He
beat it. That's why
he's insufferable--
because
he's here needing a
shave and making love

---

an inside howl
of anguish and defeat--

In short the speaker attacks the corpse because it has proven the insufficiency of love.

The five poems in this section express strongly the sense that death is an absolute alteration of the flesh. None of them are elegies--they do not reflect on their impressions long enough to be called "philosophical conceptions"--but the attitude they express pervades the elegies which we have considered up to this point in this chapter, and even more so those which will be considered now.

"Ode to the Confederate Dead" and "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory"

Theoretically, some of the poems considered in the previous section might have been expanded into elegies. Perhaps the poet could have asserted that, though the flesh is waste, the spirit which once animated it still exists. I do not mean to suggest that such an addition would improve any of the poems, of course. Nor do I wish to imply that these laments are incomplete as they stand. I merely wish to suggest that these laments might have functioned as part of an elegy.

There is another way in which a lament might be developed. Suppose that Owen's "Futility" had been expanded beyond its present length to include a consideration
of one or more of the possible conceptions of death. And then suppose that each of these conceptions had been rejected, and the poet at the end of the poem had returned to his original despair. In this case we would say that the speaker has attempted to reconcile life and death, failed to do so, and settled for a bleak and cheerless meaning of death. He has written a disconsolate elegy. This form shares the characteristics of elegy and lament. Like the former, it tends toward length, attempts to find a meaning for particular death, and often imitates the mind's activity. Like the lament, it ends without having found an answer. Two modern poems which can be termed disconsolate elegies are Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and W.B. Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory."

Tate's poem can bear a great weight of cultural implication, in part because he has chosen to analyze it in cultural terms in "Narcissus as Narcissus." Here he says that "the nature of the moral conflict upon which the drama of the poem develops" is "the cut-off-ness of the modern 'intellectual man' from the world." The dramatic context of "Ode" fits this general comment. The speaker does not directly reveal his own thoughts in the poem, though he does not specifically deny that they are his. Instead he tries to articulate the impressions and attitudes of an

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unspecified "you" who stands by a cemetery gate. For the sake of simplicity in my analysis, I assume that the speaker habitually addresses himself in the second person. Perhaps he is "cut off" from himself. But "you" might refer to the readers of the poem. Tate might be making assumptions about the beliefs and values of his audience.

At any rate the speaker attempts to show the difficulties that this "you" has in accepting or granting meaning to the death of the Confederate soldiers. The basic problem is that the speaker cannot fail to see the wind in the leaves soughing "the rumor of mortality," or to notice that the stone angels "rot / On the slabs." As a consequence, he cannot raise his vision to a level which would consecrate the death of the soldiers. As one variation of the refrain puts it, "Seeing, seeing only the leaves / Flying, plunge and expire." These lines come as an ironic twist to an attempt by the speaker to share the vision of the soldiers:

You know the unimportant shift of death
And praise the vision
And praise the arrogant circumstance
Of those who fall
Rank upon rank, hurried beyond decision--
Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.

The speaker never explicitly identifies the leaves and the soldiers--a fact which Tate notes in "Narcissus" as a "commentary on our age" and contrasts to the "too-easily and

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13 The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems (New York: Scribner's, 1970, p. 17. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.)
too-beautifully" (338) attained identification of Keats and Shelley with nightingales and winds. That is, the speaker fails to elevate the leaves to the status of soldiers. However, as the final lines of the passage quoted above verify, he does tend to reduce the soldiers to the status of leaves. Earlier in the poem the speaker has tried to counteract the wind's "rumor of mortality" with the assertion that the bodies of the soldiers are "not / Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row." But he is unable to believe in this possible conception of death. Later in "Ode" the poet presents the idea of the soldiers' bodily substance persisting in nature in different terms:

Now that the salt of their blood
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
What shall we say of the bones, unclean,
Whose verdurous anonymity will grow?
The ragged arms, the ragged heads and eyes
Lost in these acres of the insane green.

The life which is attributed to the "undead" soldiers is, as Tate says in "Narcissus," "life only in so far as it is the source of the lowest forms of life, the source perhaps of all life, but life undifferentiated, halfway between life and death." According to "modern biological speculation," the dead soldiers "will not bloom in the hyacinth but will only make saltier the sea" (339).

The conflict of the poem is similar to that which is faced by Tennyson in In Memoriam; the problem of the naturalistic point of view which science fosters. According to
Tate this point of view leads to the "locked-in ego" (337), the "extreme introspection of our time" (335). The opposite of this solipsistic perspective is a sort of blind faith, which Tate ascribes to the Confederate soldiers, who represent "heroism in the grand style, elevating even death from mere physical dissolution into a formal ritual; this heroism is a formal ebullience of the human spirit in an entire society, not private, romantic illusion" (337). The speaker in "Ode" is incapable of this heroism because the entire society is incapable of it. In the end he is left with the quandary of what to do about his own death:

What shall we say who have knowledge
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up
the grave
In the house? The ravenous grave?

Taking the act to the grave seems to mean persisting in one's heritage; that is, even after recognizing the limits of the "locked-in ego," one might accept it as his inevitable way of being in the world. Or one may reject that fate and—presumably—die.

The poem is unresolved. It ends with the speaker bidding "you" to leave; but there is a final reminder of the problem which has not been solved:

Leave now
The shut gate and the decomposing wall;
The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,
Riots with his tongue through the hush—
Sentinel of the grave who counts us all!
Tate's "locked-in ego" can easily be converted to the terms of this discussion. The phrase suggests a state of mind which is unable to see anything of death but physical decay, unwilling to cease trying to see it as transcendence. "Ode to the Confederate Dead" dramatizes the paralysis and uncertainty which can underlie such a conflict.

It is interesting to examine the literary responses of W.B. Yeats to the death of Robert Gregory in World War I. In three of the four pieces which he wrote on the subject, the poet tries to restrict his response to praise. In a prose memorial which appeared shortly after the fatal accident, Yeats praises Gregory and suggests that the airman was completely satisfied to be engaged in an action which brought him into such vivid contact with life and death: "Major Gregory told Mr. Bernard Shaw, who visited him in France, that the months since he joined the army had been the happiest of his life. I think they brought him peace of mind, . . . Leading his squadron in France or in Italy, mind and hand were at one, will and desire." 14

This attitude is also reflected in the short "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," which reads in part:

A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath.

14Little Review (November, 1918), 42.
A waste of breath the years behind.
In balance with this life, this death. 15

The frequent parallel structures, the fact that Gregory himself speaks, and the tone in which he speaks all tend to soften the impact of his death. After all, if the dead man, who knew he would die, had no trouble reconciling life and death, why should those who remember him?

"Shepherd and Goatherd" is Yeats's third response to Gregory's death. This piece also conveys an impression that Gregory sensed his fate. The poem is an eclogue, a singing match between a young shepherd and an elderly goat-herd, but before the songs are sung, the shepherd thinks about their dead comrade:

You cannot but have seen
That he alone had gathered up no gear,
Set carpenters to work on no wide table,
On no long bench or lofty milking-shed
As others will, when first they take possession,
But left the house as in his father's time
As though he knew himself, as it were, a cuckoo,
No settled man.16

In a sense this poem undercuts both the prose memorial and "An Irish Airman": each of these works amounts to a refusal to mourn Gregory's death, but "Shepherd and Goatherd" expresses a good deal of grief. The shepherd's song compares Gregory to a bird who has vanished before coming near:

16 Ibid., p. 141. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
and the singer tells his companion of the dignified sorrow of the dead man's mother:

there is no change
But such as I have seen upon her face
Watching our shepherd's sports at harvest-time
When her son's turn was over.

The poem develops a note of consolation, however, through the words of the goatherd. As an older man, he is wiser through experience. But, as the shepherd says, he has had other sources of wisdom too:

They say that on your barren mountain ridge
You have measured out the road that the soul treads
When it has vanished from our natural eyes;
That you have talked with apparitions.

The goatherd's song is a strange, jubilant consolation:

He unpacks the loaded pern
Of all 'twas joy or pain to learn
Of all that he had made
... ... ... ... ... ...
He dreams himself his mother's pride
All knowledge lost in trance
Of sweeter ignorance.

Basically "Shepherd and Goatherd" is an unsatisfying poem. On the whole the language is not memorable, and the pastoral element is absurd. Even if we could accept the twentieth-century country-life allegory of Gregory, the shepherd's lines "He had thrown the crook away / And died in the great war beyond the sea" are incredibly fatuous—the poetic equivalent of the 1914 British cavalry.

Yeats's fourth effort to memorialize Robert Gregory takes something from each of the other pieces. From the prose memorial comes the list of Gregory's accomplishments;
from "An Irish Airman" the sense of inevitable death; and from "Shepherd and Goatherd" the goatherd's idea of likening Gregory to "certain lost companions of my own." But "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" stands apart. Gone are the complex theories of the prose piece, the serenity of "An Irish Airman," and the pastoral conventions of "Shepherd and Goatherd." Gone is the consolatory note. In "Robert Gregory" there is no acceptance that all is for the best.

To summarize the poem: the poet tells his wife, as they move into a new home, that his mind is on the dead. After confessing that some of these men did not get along, he proceeds to give capsule biographies of three of them: Lionel Johnson, John Synge, and George Pollexfen. Then, toward the middle of the poem, he thinks of the more recent death of Robert Gregory, and the rest of the poem is taken up with praise and lamentation of that young man.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the poem is that it is nearly half over before its subject is mentioned. In making the transition between his long-dead friends and Gregory, Yeats himself relates the two parts; Johnson, Synge and Pollexfen, he says,

were my close companions many a year,  
A portion of my mind and life, as it were,  
And now their breathless faces seem to look  
Out of some old picture-book;  
I am accustomed to their lack of breath,  
But not that my dear friend's dear son,
Our Sidney and our perfect man,
Could share in that discourtesy of death.17

One function of the earlier stanzas, then, is to provide a measure of what Gregory's death means by contrasting Yeats's unquiet disbelief with his acceptance of the less recent deaths. Furthermore, as one critic has noted, each of the men described in the first half of the poem resembles Gregory in a specific way. Johnson's scholarship, Synge's artistry and his attachment to the Aran Islands, and Pollexfen's horsemanship foreshadow Gregory's learning, his artistic promise, his love of Galway, and his own equestrian abilities.18 But Yeats's point in establishing these similarities is not merely to throw Gregory's shadow over the first part of the poem, but rather to suggest that the airman combined the best of the three previously-mentioned men, and thus solved the problem which the speaker mentions--for no good reason, it seems at first--in the second stanza:

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart
In the affections of the heart,
And quarrels are blown up upon that head; . . .

At one point Yeats calls Gregory "our Sidney and our perfect man." But by showing how Gregory is the embodiment

17 Collected Poems, p. 131. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.

of the best features of his older friends, he expresses Gregory's versatility in a much more compelling way.

Another important aspect of the poem is its meditative texture. Yeats is attempting to render a mind deep in thought—that is, a mind open to change. The poem has a deliberate quality of extemporaneity. Gregory's death is not on the poet's mind at all in the beginning. It occurs to him in the sixth stanza with some force; but even there the impact is deliberately muted by Yeats's referring to Gregory as "my dear friend's dear son," and to his loss of life as "that discourtesy of death." Clearly the poet does not yet feel the full impact of the death. In Stanzas VII through X, Gregory is praised from the point of view of one who is more interested in what he might have done for the praiser than for the world. The speaker tells his wife: "He might have been your heartiest welcomer." Three stanzas later he reverts to this egoistic point of view in regard to Gregory's death: "What other could as well have counselled us / In all lovely intricacies of a house. . . ?"

Meanwhile, however, another point of view is taking shape, built up out of the reference to Gregory as "our Sidney and our perfect man," and also from the catalogue of his accomplishments. This point of view emerges finally in a refrain at the end of Stanzas IX through XI:

Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And yet he had the intensity
To have published all to be a world's delight.
... Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And all he did done perfectly
As though he had but that one trade alone.

... Soldier, scholar, statesman, he,
As 'twere all life's epitome.
What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?

That Gregory will not "comb grey hair" is as striking a realization of what has happened as "discourtesy of death" is an evasion. The difference between the two images is a measure of the poet's altered conception of the event. But he has undergone an even more drastic change in his conception of the meaning of that death. From viewing Gregory as one who might have helped him with his house, the poet has come to see him as "all life's epitome."

The point of the meditative texture of the poem, then, is the same as the point of the lengthy introduction to Gregory through the portraits of Johnson, Synge, and Pólllexfen: he wishes to underline the importance of the loss to humanity in Gregory's death. By showing the speaker being waylaid from another purpose to mourn that death anew, the poet embodies the experience of grief.

The mood of "Robert Gregory" is lamentation, but the poem itself is more than a lament. For one thing it certainly expresses more than the sorrow of immediate loss. Yeats's feelings about Gregory's death at the end of the poem might be described as the overflow of powerful feelings
(recollected in tranquillity only at the beginning), but it would be necessary to add that the emotions are pumped by thought: the concept of Gregory representing a rare unity of being provides a real motive for grief.

Another reason for calling "Robert Gregory" more than a lament is that the poet confesses in the final stanza that he has been seeking an understanding of death:

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind
All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved
Or boyish intellect approved,
With some appropriate commentary on each;
Until imagination brought
A fitter welcome; but a thought
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.

Yeats's failure to achieve "a fitter welcome" when thinking of the dead is a reversal of what happens in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." There Whitman's acceptance of one death opens the way to an acceptance of all. Here Yeats's inability to accept a single death leaves others unresolved also.

The failure to achieve consolation is even more significant because the poet is moving toward consolation in the last part of the poem. His recollections of Gregory's life are largely images of suffering, change, and danger:

... all things the delighted eye now sees
Were loved by him: the old storm-broken trees

The ford where drinking cattle make a stir
Nightly, and startled by that sound
The water-hen must change her ground; ...
At Mooneen he had leaped a place
So perilous that half the astonished meet
Had shut their eyes; ...
These images, which suggest that Gregory's life was hedged with danger, seem to work on Yeats as he continues his meditative process until, by the penultimate stanza, he has come to accept the young man's death as inevitable:

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume
The entire combustible world in one small room
As though dried straw, and if we turn about
The bare chimney is gone black out
Because the work had finished in that flare.

The metaphor of Gregory burning the world "black out" is heroic, reminiscent of "An Irish Airman." From this point, we might anticipate Yeats's thought developing into the Platonic idea that not Gregory but the world is "finished in that flare." But the poet does not satisfy these expectations; he rejects this easy consolation. Still, there is no evidence that he is permanently inconsolable. We might interpret the "bitter wind" at the end of the poem as a symbol of a cold, annihilating universe, or perhaps a climate in which a belief in immortality is not possible, whatever the expectations, whatever the preparations. But such meanings seem risky at best. Yeats himself resists generalizing his point; his disconsolate mood is very particular. Clearly, however, if only for one night and one dead friend, the speaker has lost the formula by which previous poets accepted death.

The preceding series of poems marks a decline of faith in traditional conceptions of death, while the desire for
such a faith remains constant, or at least sufficiently strong to nullify the possibility of other conceptions of death. Another, perhaps more precise, way to express this pattern is to say that in all of the poems considered in this chapter—except the laments—there is a need to deny the destruction of the individual in death, and at the same time a need to acknowledge the gulf between life and death. In Eliot's *Four Quartets* the first of these needs prevails over the second, as it does to a lesser degree in Raine's "The Hollow Hill" and Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket." In Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," the second need prevails.
CHAPTER THREE

DEATH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE: PUBLIC AND PERSONAL ELEGIES; AND ROETHKE'S "MEDITATIONS OF AN OLD WOMAN" AND "NORTH AMERICAN SEQUENCE"

The poems considered in the preceding chapter are concerned generally with the nature of death for the dead, and specifically with the question of the existence of the individual consciousness beyond the grave. The poems to be considered in the chapter after this one are also concerned with the fate of human beings after death, though there the specific question is the value of life when death is considered the end of individual consciousness.

But a philosophical conception based on particular death is not necessarily an idea about what happens to human beings beyond the grave. Death is also a part of life, the final event for the person who dies—"shape in one history,"¹ as Dylan Thomas describes it—and also an incident which affects survivors. The philosophical conception, therefore, can be an idea about a person as a completed being—the last task of a biographer—or an idea about the effect of someone's death on survivors. These are the perspectives

from which death is viewed in the elegies to be considered in this chapter.

These elegies are of two types. First are "public" elegies written on the death of important or representative figures, poems which tend toward culturally-approved ways of handling death. Second are poems written on the death of someone with whom the elegist was on intimate terms. These "private" elegies frequently attempt to come to terms with a grief that is at least partly guilt. These two categories could be applied to other poems in this study. Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," for example, is a public elegy, while Robinson Jeffers' *Hungerfield*, which will be considered in the next chapter, is a private elegy. But many poems discussed in the second and fourth chapters could be called both public and private. Examples are Raine's "The Hollow Hill," Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," and Ginsberg's *Kaddish*. For this reason I do not believe that dividing elegies into those that are public and those that are private is a good system for organizing this study as a whole.

Elegies which are only private or only public are frequently flawed poems. Elegies of public figures risk lying, or dealing in platitudes which a community might accept. On the other hand, private elegies, because they have two audiences (the living and a ghost) are often muddied by esoteric references to unexplained facts.
Public Elegies

W.H. Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" has a special significance for those whose business is the selection of important poems. It is an aesthetic statement by a noted poet about the accomplishment of a truly major poet. It is an evaluation of the human situation in a critical year for western civilization, 1939, by one of the most perceptive social critics writing poetry in the twentieth century. Finally, it is an amazing adaptation of the devices of the traditional elegy to the conditions of a more skeptical sensibility.

Auden's account of Yeats's death includes a description of weather and landscape that suggests the pathetic fallacy of the traditional elegy:

He disappeared in the dead of winter;
The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,
And snow disfigured the public statues;
The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.
What instruments we have agree
The day of his death was a dark cold day.2

The language is conventional; "dead of winter" is a cliché, as is "dying day," though there is a pun on "dying" to tell us that a careful voice is speaking. The reference to airports and the modern reliance on instruments to determine conditions undercut the magical, spiritual qualities of the

pastoral landscape. Grief for the dead is similarly undercut. The situation and the language only remind us of the appropriate emotion; they do not express it. Later in the poem this mock grief is allayed by a mock consolation: the poet still lives in his poems: "By mourning tongues / The death of the poet was kept from his poems." Yeats is a vessel "emptied of its poetry."

Obviously Auden is not concerned with what has happened to Yeats's physical self. He abstains from that question, though he speaks in terms of it in order to describe the effect of Yeats's poetry:

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections;
To find his happiness in another kind of wood
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.
The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.

The idea that the dead poet still endures to receive affection, find happiness, and be punished is a fiction by which Auden seems to be parodying Yeats's lifelong tendency toward mysticism. "Another kind of wood" refers to the paper upon which Yeats's poems are printed, and it also alludes to the dead poet's early interest in romantic settings, as in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and "The Stolen Child." The last two lines back away from the notion that the dead poet is alive, suggesting that the true condition of the poet's words is comparable to the condition of food being digested.
Auden's true interest in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" is the world of the living. The only aspect of Yeats which he does not treat ironically is the poetry, which he argues is useful, though it "makes nothing happen." Poetry is a humanizing force in a world which needs to learn to love and share and sympathize. In the poem poetry is portrayed as a flowing liquid in contrast to the frozen brooks, the snow which "disfigures the public statues"--a deft image of the state of the public leadership during the thirties--and the "seas of pity" which are "locked and frozen in each eye."

Poetry has the capacity to melt, wash, and unlock those brooks, statues, and eyes. In addition it can start a "healing fountain" in "the deserts of the heart." This notion of the uses of poetry is the main point of the poem; and it is especially emphasized in the final section. Here Auden finishes with Yeats's death in the first stanza:

Earth, receive an honoured guest;  
William Yeats is laid to rest.  
Let the Irish vessel lie  
Emptied of its poetry.

Then, after stating in general terms the political situation of 1939 in the next two stanzas, he addresses living poets:

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,  
Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;
In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

The sense of these lines is that the poet, through the transforming power of his art, creates the conditions by which human existence might be transformed—or at least relieved. Auden is careful not to promise too much; poetry is not a bulwark against a fascist threat, only the source of the beginning of a "healing fountain."

Auden tries to follow his own advice. In his hard look at Yeats's death and the situation of the world in 1939, he goes "to the bottom of the night." But in declaring the value of Yeats's poetry, without claiming that it will be immortal in an absolute sense, or that it is Yeats himself that survives, Auden "makes a vineyard of the curse" of the Irish poet's death.

A less successful public elegy is Karl Shapiro's "Elegy for a Dead Soldier." Here the "public" figure is a type of the unknown soldier. The poem is spoken by a comrade of the dead man during a hurried battlefield funeral:

We too are ashes as we watch and hear
The psalm, the sorrow, and the simple praise
Of one whose promised thoughts of other days
Were such as ours, but now wholly destroyed,
The service record of his youth wiped out, . . .

The first four lines of this passage express serious grief. The fifth line undercutts it and seems to satirize the}*Selected Poems (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 104. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
victim. Of course Shapiro might simply be attempting to remind us that the soldiers' grief is not principally for their comrade, but rather for themselves:

What can we feel but wonder at a loss
That seems to point at nothing but the doubt
Which flirts our sense of luck into the ditch?
Reader of Paul who prays beside this fosse,
Shall we believe our eyes or legends rich
With glory and rebirth beyond the void?

The first three lines of this passage, the sense of which seems somewhat obscured by the requirements of rime and meter, suggest that the death of the soldier makes others wonder if their own luck will hold out. In the last three lines the poet asks the chaplain if he actually expects the soldiers to believe in the promises of religion under these circumstances. The implication is that the soldiers are skeptical of religious promises, and that they have difficult questions about the meaning of violent death. We might expect the elegist to remember these attitudes and questions.

For a while he does. The third stanza expands the fearful identification of the living soldiers and the dead one:

This worthy flesh,
This boy laid out in a coffin and reviewed—
Who has not wrapped himself in this same flag,
Heard the light fall of dirt, his wound still fresh,
Felt his eyes closed, and heard the distant brag
Of the last volley of humanity?

In the fourth stanza, too, the poet and his fellow soldiers take the part of the dead against the meaningless "brag" of
humanity. He remembers the soldier's death as bad theater, "a foolish play" with an "absurd catastrophe," ending with "all the decisive things still left to say." They leave the scene, not purged of their pity and fear, but "sick with the utter silence of dispraise."

After this stanza, however, the poet begins to look at the death in a new way. Up to this point, he has implied that there is no reason for this death; but now he changes his mind: "More than an accident and less than willed / Is every fall. . . ." He is suggesting the complicity in their own death of those killed. Then he decides that the soldier is at least partly responsible for his own death because he was vulnerable to political manipulation:

Ripe in instinct,
Neither the victim nor the volunteer,
He followed and the leaders could not seek
Beyond the followers.

The dead soldier sensed "the gathering of power by the few," the poet says, but he "laughed at socialism," trusted law, and did not talk about ideals. He was attracted--and deluded--by violence: "He could recall the justice of the Colt, / Take interest in a gang-war like a game."

This portrait of the American soldier of World War II is brilliant, and the suggestion of his ignorant complicity lends a coherence to his death. But when we ask how this analysis of the cause of his death relates to the earlier questions about violent death, we find that it doesn't. The feeling of the soldiers at the funeral is not faced.
The disparity between the beginning of the poem and the section after the fourth stanza is even clearer in the end, when the poet seeks a meaning in the soldier's death:

And could we mark the grave of him who died
We would write this beneath his name and date:

EPITAPH
Underneath this wooden cross there lies
A Christian killed in battle. You who read,
Remember that this stranger died in pain;
And passing here, if you can lift your eyes
Upon a peace kept by a human creed,
Know that one soldier has not died in vain.

The most significant word in the Epitaph is "if," and there is the basis of the poet's acceptance of the death. The test of the value of a sacrifice must be in the future. This feeling must have been particularly haunting in World War II, when sensitive men fought the evil of fascism with weapons and tactics that must have been very difficult for them to accept morally.

For all that, the poem is seriously flawed. The most important word in the lines just before the Epitaph is "we." Shapiro claims to be speaking for the soldiers who memorialize their dead comrade. But would these men worry primarily about the political meaning of their death? Generals behind the lines and zealots at home might want to think so, but the primary concern of the soldiers is more likely to be whether the death of the individual soldier is meaningless for that soldier. This problem the poem does not face, though it promises to implicitly in the beginning. It moves
from a tentative struggle to reconcile life and death in war to the far simpler job of commenting on the relationship between the military dead and the civilized life.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the hope that a particular death will bring about a better life for other men. The problem in "Elegy for a Dead Soldier" is the context in which that consolation is placed. Kenneth Rexroth uses the same theme with much greater understanding and depth. During the 1930s he wrote a number of poems based on the sacrifice necessary to bring about a more humane world. The best of them commemorates the tenth anniversary of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, "Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937." This poem begins with Rexroth speaking of its genesis:

> For a month now, wandering over the Sierras,  
> A poem had been gathering in my mind,  
> Details of significance and rhythm,  
> The way poems do, but still lacking a focus,  
> Last night I remembered the date and it all,  
> Began to grow together and take on purpose.

This passage is not merely the introduction to the poem; it is part of the fabric of Rexroth's vision. He is comparing the creation of a poem to the creation of a new society in that both begin slowly and chaotically until something acts to bring sudden organization and purpose.

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4The Collected Shorter Poems (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 89. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
In the body of the poem, Rexroth juxtaposes descriptions of mountain scenery and some of Vanzetti's last words. For example,

Crossing the brilliant mile-square meadow
Illuminated with asters and cyclamen,
The pollen of the lodgepole pines drifting
With the shifting wind over it and the blue
And sulphur butterflies drifting with the wind,
I saw you in the sour prison light, saying,
"Goodbye comrade."

The two scenes described here differ sharply. The first is bright, beautiful, full of life and the promise of further life. The second is dim, deathly. But Rexroth's purpose is not merely to make us feel the pathos of Vanzetti's position. At the end of the poem, he relates the two executed radicals to the mountain scenery:

These are the things that will last a long time,
Vanzetti,
I am glad that once on your day I have stood among them.
Some day mountains will be named after you and Sacco.
They will be here and your name with them,
"When these days are but a dim remembering of the time
When man was wolf to man."
I think men will be remembering you a long time
Standing on the mountains
Many men, a long time, comrade.

From our perspective—not the final one, to be sure—the poet here seems to be merely another unacknowledged legislator. But of course that is a bit beside the point. What matters is that Rexroth feels that Sacco and Vanzetti's sacrifice can be somewhat compensated by the accomplishment of what they set out to do with their lives: build a better world.
Rexroth is not promising any form of immortality to Sacco and Vanzetti. He does not even suggest that their spirit will inhabit the mountain or mountains which will bear their names. Clearly he is not concerned with the question of their post-mortem existence.

Exactly twenty years after writing "Climbing Milestone Mountain," Rexroth wrote another anniversary elegy to Sacco and Vanzetti, "Fish Peddler and Cobbler." Again he writes from and about the mountains, but the function of the scenery is different here:

We thought that soon all things would
Be changed, not just economic
And social relationships, but
Painting, poetry, music, dance,
Architecture, even the food
We ate and the clothes we wore
Would be ennobled. It will take
Longer than we expected.
These mountains are unchanged since
I was a boy wandering
Over the West, picking up
Odd jobs. If anything they are
Wilder.5

In "Climbing Milestone Mountain," the wilderness seemed about to be transformed in the light of social progress—and in turn that social progress would be ennobled by the mountain light. But in "Fish Peddler and Cobbler," the mountains represent how much has not changed:

No fourteen thousand peaks
Are named Sacco and Vanzetti,
Not yet. The clothes I wear
Are as unchanged as the Decker

5Collected Shorter Poems, p. 319. Further quotations quotations from this poem are from this edition.
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Saddles on the pack horses,
America grows rich on the threat of death,
Nobody bothers anarchists anymore.

In the light of these developments--nor non-developments--
Sacco and Vanzetti become, not revolutionaries, not far-
sighted human beings, but simply what they were under cap-
titalism, degraded like the persons Rexroth mentions in the
conclusion of the poem:

Coming back we lay over
In Ogden for ten hours.
The courthouse square was full
Of miners and lumberjacks and
Harvest hands and gandy dancers
With broken hands and broken
Faces sleeping off cheap wine drunks
In the scorching heat, while tired
Savage eyed whores paraded the streets.

"Fish Peddler and Cobbler" is a variety of disconsolate
elegy. But the source of distress is not the same as it is
in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" or "An Ode to the
Confederate Dead," Rexroth is not lamenting the fact that
Sacco and Vanzetti are dead and do not have immortal souls.
Instead he is grieving the failure of the cause for which
they died.

In another context, however, Rexroth sees the problem
which he expresses in "Fish Peddler and Cobbler" on a dif-
derent level. In "For Eli Jacobson," an address to a dead
radical, he repeats the idea that people in the future will
remember the heroic dead. But he adds a reservation:

We will be remembered, all
Of us, always, by all men,
In the good days now so far away.
If the good days never come,
We will not know. We will not care.
Our lives were the best. We were the
Happiest men alive in our day.

The reason for their happiness is not that they lived under
an illusion of incipient revolution, but rather that they
were brave. The first part of the poem portrays the disil-
usionment of radicals who hoped to see a world where "men
and women / Were all brothers and lovers / Together." But
even if "There are not / Many of us left," "It does not
matter."

It is
Good to be brave—nothing is
Better. Food tastes better. Wine
Is more brilliant. Girls are more
Beautiful. The sky is bluer
For the brave.

In "For Eli Jacobson," Rexroth distinguishes between revolu-
 tionary fervor and revolution itself, but tries to show that
the fervor is its own reward.

These poems by Rexroth are actually elegies for a
society; they have little to do with the literal death of
individuals. The same may be said of Robert Lowell's "For
the Union Dead," a public elegy which is ostensibly for
the long-dead soldiers of the North, and particularly for
a white officer who led a regiment of black soldiers. The
poem may be seen as a companion piece to Allen Tate's "Ode
to the Confederate Dead." As Jerome Mazzaro points out,

6Collected Shorter Poems, p. 245. Further quotations
from this poem are from this edition.
both poems open with a description of ruins, and both speakers seem cut off from the purity and vitality of the past. Furthermore, in each work the speaker's situation is expressed in a contrast to selfless soldiers. In Tate's poem these soldiers fought for the independence of the Confederacy; in Lowell's poem the soldiers fought in the spirit of abolitionism, giving up their lives for the freedom of slaves.

In one important sense, however, "For the Union Dead" differs from "Ode to the Confederate Dead." Lowell is interested in morality, not mortality, while Tate's poem concerns both. Life and death are physical facts in "Ode," but the speaker in "For the Union Dead" plays with the literal meaning of the terms. For example, he says that Colonel Shaw, the figure at the center of the poem, "rejoices in man's lovely, / peculiar power to choose life and die." Here "life" refers to a moral quality and "death" to a physical fact. Physical death does not preclude moral life. The reverse is also true; the two states have nothing to do with one another. Of course moral "life" may have religious overtones, referring to a life after death. But the poet seems interested in death from the point of view of the living only.

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8 For the Union Dead (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964), p. 70. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
"For the Union Dead" is a series of apparently disparate images. The first of these is the "old South Boston Aquarium," closed now, but the poet remembers longingly the days when it was open:

I often sigh still
for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom
of the fish and reptile.

Quite clearly these lines represent not only an effect of nostalgia, but also a death wish, the reason for which we do not know at this point in the poem.

The second image is the excavation for an "underworld garage" in which the poet remembers recently seeing "yellow dinosaur steamshovels." These diggings shake the Statehouse and the Civil War relief of "Colonel Shaw / and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry," the third and main image of the poem. This commemorative monument "sticks like a fish-bone / in the city's throat" because it represents moral idealism in a setting which is depicted as opportunistic and vulgar. In place of the abolitionist spirit of Shaw and his soldiers, the modern world exhibits the "drained faces of Negro school children" on television—clearly a reference to any one of the many crises in school desegregation in the late fifties and early sixties. Another modern counterpart of the Civil War relief is a commercial photograph which "shows Hiroshima boiling / over a Mosler safe, the 'Rock of Ages' / that survived the blast." The vulgarity of this photograph condemns the society which
created it, obviously; but there is also a reference to, and a condemnation of, an act of war that stands in total contrast to Colonel Shaw's idealistic aggression. Finally the photograph shows religious values being corrupted. It should be noted, in contrast to the same poet's "Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket," that in "For the Union Dead" the reference to a safe being the "'Rock of Ages'" is the only allusion to a God.

Just as the aquarium which the poet remembers is now only an empty building, so only the remnants of a purer public past remain in the Civil War monuments, the chief of which is the "shaking" St. Gaudens relief. But there are other hints of better moral times in the "air of sparse, sincere rebellion" held by the "old white churches" of small New England towns; in the "frayed" flags that "quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic"; and in the statues of the "abstract Union soldier" that "grow slimmer and younger each year." These images of the past, though fragile and anomalous, serve to measure the distortions and excesses of the present. Nowhere is this function clearer than in the last stanza of the poem, in which the memory of the Aquarium gives the speaker a way to view modern Boston:

The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease.
This image of the automobiles of the fifties echoes the earlier image of "yellow dinosaur steamshovels." In each case the gentle "kingdom of the fish and reptile" is converted into a nightmare landscape. This landscape, in turn, contrasts with the images of Civil War idealism, particularly in its suggestion of a subtle form of slavery in the phrase "savage servility," but also in the contrast between the sliding on grease of the automobiles and the various images of stiffness and resistance in the images from the past (Colonel Shaw is compared to a compass-needle; "he cannot bend his back"; the old churches "hold" an air of rebellion). So complete is the contrast between modern Boston and the image of Colonel Shaw that the poet imagines the relief as an air bubble separated from the world of the finned cars which surround it:

Colonel Shaw is riding on his bubble, he waits for the blessed break.

"Blesséd break" functions complexly. The phrase might refer to the thoughts of the officer in the scene which is represented in the relief, in this sense referring either to good luck or the officer's death. In this latter sense, the phrase can be related to the realization which the poet ascribes to Shaw of man's power "to choose life and die." But "blesséd break" may also be understood as an event involving the relief in its bleak present environment. It
might be, that is, the result of excavations. A more ominous possibility is that the break will be effected by a cataclysmic event such as the one shown in the commercial photograph.

In either case the fact that the poet calls the break "blessed" suggests his affinity with Shaw's idealism. It also dramatizes his alienation from his present environment, and in this way functions as a gloss upon the death wish expressed earlier in the poem. The poet's point seems to be that death is a way out of modern Boston, a place so evil that the death which allows escape from it cannot be anything but a good. Furthermore, such a death is associated with a return to the purity of the past, of the aquarium and the rigorous idealism of Colonel Shaw.

But death is not the true focus of the poem; therefore, while the attitude of the speaker toward it is positive, his attitude is chiefly significant for what it reveals about his attitude toward life. Death is viewed only as an option to life, or a threat which certain aspirations and actions include. From the point of view of the poets discussed in the preceding chapter (including, presumably, Lowell himself at the time of "Quaker Graveyard"), death is given short shrift here; it is an event to come, one which has an effect on the dead person before it happens, and the living after it happens. It is not a dead end.
The same thing may be said of the other public elegies considered in this section. Death is in each case measured by life. Good life means good death. A good life is usually defined by its effects on the lives which follow it. Yeats's life is good, Auden says, because the poems he wrote are good and have (and will have) a good effect. Judgment of the unnamed soldier's death in Shapiro's elegy is to be deferred until the future, when it can be seen whether peace or war prevails. Rexroth also uses this measure of good death in the anniversary elegies to Sacco and Vanzetti, in the earlier work prophesying the efficacy of their death, in the later expressing uncertainty. In "For Eli Jacobson," however, Rexroth rejects this somewhat utilitarian criterion for the way to judge a death. In this poem, as in the others studied in this section, death is measured by life. The difference is that here the poet says that Jacobson was "one of the happiest men alive in his day," suggesting that the life is in itself cause for joy, overcoming grief at the thought of death.

Personal Elegies

The elegies in the preceding section are largely impersonal. They do not record grief for those whose death they are concerned with. Except in the case of Rexroth's, death in these poems is essentially an opportunity to discuss a social crisis.
In the poems to be discussed here, death is extremely personal. Grief in different forms precipitates the elegist's speech, and his concern rarely goes beyond himself and the person he mourns.

Four of the six parts of Stephen Spender's "Elegy for Margaret" consists of words of love and regret addressed supposedly to the dying sister. I doubt that she could have heard the poem, though, partly because the situation which the poet describes is one of pretense and deception between Margaret and himself. Their eyes "cannot take part in the lies / Of acting these gay parts." In addition, the poet could probably no more have managed to say the following lines to his sister than she could have endured hearing them:

. . . my grief for you is myself, a dream,
Tomorrow's light will sweep away.
It does not wake day after day
To the same facts that are and do not seem:
The changeless changing facts around your bed,
Poverty-stricken hopeless ugliness
Of the fact that you will soon be dead.

This passage occurs at the end of the third section of the poem, following a struggle to face the idea of death, to avoid the wishful thinking which the early stages of cancer encourage. In the first section the poet remembers that "the thick night of ultimate sea / . . . surrounds us all," views Margaret's death in the context of World War

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II, in which "the brave . . . are hurled / Through waters of a flood shot through with fire" and Europe is "dying, like a girl, of a doomed, hidden disease," and concludes by asserting the need to keep the thought of her death close to him:

So, to be honest, I must wear your death
Next to my heart, where others wear their love.
Indeed it is my love, my link with life
My word of life being knowledge of such death.

The second section reveals how the poet is tortured by the thought of his sister's condition. He compares the green shoot of a dying tree to Margaret's smile in an analogy the length and imagery of which suggest the poet's desire to transcend the situation. This desire is also revealed in the poet's dreams about his sister's past. The contrast between past and future, life and death, and illusion and reality is well expressed in the first lines of Section III:

Poor girl, inhabitant of a stark land,
Where death covers your gaze,
As though the full moon might
Cast over the midsummer blaze
Its bright and dead white pall of night.

Such must be the sensation of being afflicted with a disease which is not apparent; which, in its early stages, is as easily overlooked as the moon in full sunlight.

The fourth section narrates the time just before death. Again the poet compares "dead branches and dry bones," and a last sunset throws "shadows from the roots
of trees." On the whole, however, the imagery in this section does not render the delicate emotions of a sensitive observer, but rather the strong feelings of a human being in loss:

You are so quiet; your hand on the sheet seems a mouse
Yet when we turn away, the flails
That pound and beat you down with ceaseless pulse
Shake like steam hammers through the house.

The fifth section of the poem is not addressed to Margaret, but it differs from the parts that precede it in a more surprising way. The speaker describes the "final act of love" of a "deprived, fanatic lover." The point, it seems, is to convey to the reader the depth of the poet's emotion:

The final act of love
Is not of dear and dear
Blue-bird-shell eye pink-sea-shell ear
Dove twining neck with dove;

Oh no, it is the world-storm fruit
Sperm of tangling distress,
Mouth raging in the wilderness,
Fingernail tearing at dry root.

The suggestion of necrophilia in the line "sperm of tangling distress" is strengthened in the next stanzas, a description of a lover in "abandon" who "must cover" the "sexless corpse laid in the sands." In doing so he finds himself among Saints, who slept with hideous sins." I am reminded of Yeats's "Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop" by this section. As it is there, so here passion and suffering are sources of affirmation for bereft lovers:
'Now we assume this coarseness
Of loved and loving bone
Where all are all and all alone
And to love means to bless
Everything and everyone.'

The tone of this incipient consolation is carried on to the last section.

This part of the poem is addressed to J.H.S., who is identified therein as a brother. The words by which the poet seeks to console him, however, seem more appropriately addressed to a husband:

Better in death to know
The happiness we lose
Than die in life in meaningless
Misery of those
Who lie beside chosen
Companions they never chose.

Even more significant than the question of the precise relationship of J.H.S. to Margaret is the fact that the poet addresses him rather than her in the end. By doing this he reveals the nature of his conception of death. It is a test of courage for the living:

I bring no consolation
Of the weeping shower
Whose final dropping jewel deletes
All grief in the sun's power;
You must watch the signs grow worse
Day after day, hour after hour.

Yet to accept the worst
Is finally to revive
When we are equal with the force
Of that with which we strive
And having almost lost, at last
Are glad to be alive.

The poet fails to delete all grief not only because Margaret has not yet died (a curious inconsistency of time exists
between the final section and the fifth, in which post-mortem grief is suggested), but also because the conception which he expresses is an acceptance of the worst, and not a transcendence of it. Death is a measure of life to the living. Like Tennyson in the middle of *In Memoriam*, the poet manages to be "glad to be alive"—a sentiment which does not alter the fact of Margaret's fate.

In the last stanza, however, the poet attempts to deal with Margaret's death from her point of view:

As she will live who, candle-lit
Floats upon her final breath
The ceiling of the frosty night
And her high room beneath,
Wearing not like destruction, but
Like a white dress, her death.

These lines are a subordinate clause of the stanza ending "glad to be alive." The poet seems to mean that at the moment of death Margaret's spirit will rise above her mortality. But such an assertion of her transcendence seems out of place in this poem, or at least unprepared for. The poet seems to have failed to understand the difference between a conception for the dead, and a conception of death for the living. It is difficult to believe that Spender would make such a mistake, but he seems to have done so.

Another poem which raises matters that it does not settle is Robert Penn Warren's "The Return: An Elegy." But here the incompleteness is not a flaw, for the poem is essentially a lament. It does not express a conception of
death, though in many ways it is relevant to the present discussion. The poem renders the thoughts of a son as he returns by train to his mother's funeral. At first the speaker meditates bleakly on the chemical aspects of death. The "blind and nameless bones," he says,

> are conceded to the earth's absolute chemistry
> they burn like faggots in—of damp and dark—the
> monstrous bulging flame.
> calcium phosphate lust speculation faith treachery
> it walked upright with habitation and a name
> tell me its name

The last line functions as a challenge to the allusion to Shakespeare which precedes it, and suggests the nature of the speaker's problem. He is keenly aware of the difference between living and dead flesh, like the poets considered in the preceding chapter. But unlike those poets, this awareness does not lead him to think of his own mortality, or of the meaning of annihilation. Instead he expresses a grotesque attitude toward his mother's corpse:

> give me the nickels off your eyes
> from your hands the violets
> let me bless your obsequies
> if you possessed conveniently enough three eyes
> then I could buy a pack of cigarettes

A number of factors might cause the speaker to say what he does. As in William Carlos Williams' "Death," the poet might be expressing a shocking but natural aspect of the grief experience: anger at the dead person for having

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abandoned him. But this theory does not seem plausible in view of the speaker's later suggestion that he regrets his behavior to his mother in the past: "Honor thy father and thy mother in the days of thy youth," he says, "For time uncoils like the cottonmouth." We are not told what experiences lead the speaker to impart this advice, however. It would seem that the poet wants us to examine the speaker's condition without knowing his precise history.

The setting of the poem offers a clue to the speaker's problem. As he travels through the night in his pullman, he describes himself as "locked in the roaring cubicle." The image can be compared to the sensibility with which modern man is afflicted according to Allen Tate in the essay "Narcissus as Narcissus," not only because of the shared phrase "locked in," but also because the circumstances of the speaker in the railroad car closely resembles the condition of the uncertain modern man whom Tate describes. Each is unable to control his movement, is blind to the world outside, though he has the capacity to see and even to imagine some of the things which he cannot see. But unlike the speaker in Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," the speaker in "The Return" transcends his condition, escapes the limits of the "roaring cubicle" by means of his imagination and memory. Significantly he does not think of the condition of the corpse once this process of transcendence begins, as if the thought of the fate of human flesh after death were
in itself a symptom of a "locked-in ego." The poem ends with the speaker acknowledging his grief and love for the dead person:

If I could pluck  
Out of the dark that whirled  
Over the hoarse pine over the rock  
Out of the mist that furled  
Could I stretch forth like God the hand and gather  
For you my mother  
If I could pluck  
Against the dry essential of tomorrow  
To lay upon the breast that gave me suck  
Out of the dark the dark and swollen orchid of this sorrow.

The discovery of the "orchid of this sorrow" is a victory over the inhuman attitude with which the speaker began. Now he can name his mother; before she was nameless. He can even feel grief and wish to beautify her with his grief; before he could only speculate that if she had three eyes he could buy a pack of cigarettes.

Perhaps the reference to "God" in the last lines signifies a return to a traditional conception of an afterlife. But not much is made of this "God." I would say that the speaker is not interested in a deity, nor in his relationship to the dead woman. Essentially the speaker is interested in the life of his mother, and in his own life, in expressing "normal" temporary grief, and in remembering his mother as she was alive.

As in "The Return," but in a fuller way, Hayden Carruth's "My Father's Face" is an elegy in which the speaker
learns to deny a corpse and to put in its place a living image. Here too the poet works out conflicts with a parent, though in a slightly more specific way than in "The Return." Carruth says that he wanted to go "behind the ancestral impositions of reality." More particularly, while the father was a socialist, the son has become disenchanted with political activity.

The poem begins with the poet's attempt to write a rhyming poem using traditional diction, syntax, and meter. The last of these quatrains explains why:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Awkwardly at his behest} \\
\text{I this queer rhyme try to make} \\
\text{After one that he loved best} \\
\text{Made long since by Willy Blake.}
\end{align*}
\]

But the speaker finds that he cannot go on with this forced verse, so he breaks off and begins anew with a more fluid line:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cannot. In} \\
\text{my own way, half inarticulate,} \\
\text{must sing the blues.}
\end{align*}
\]

The initial subject of his "blues" is his father's appearance as a corpse, wearing a "new smile / fingered on him." He had had a distinctive smile, "with a downturned mouth." But the irony goes beyond physical falsification. Having fought capitalism all his life, having sought "purity deep at the root," he is in death delivered to the commercial

\[11\text{For You (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 112. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.}\]
mortalician who gives him an "official, patented" expression in an effort to produce "marketable death." This irony gives the poet a chance—or perhaps forces him—to explain his own fall from socialist faith:

It was all so blessedly simple.
Hate, hate the monopolists!
Ah, and have I not, sirrah?—

But power of money has bought the power of heart,
monopoly eats the word, eats thought, desire,
your old companions now in the thick of it, eating—

is that betrayal? They fatten, but for my part
old hatred deepens,
deepening as monopoly deepens,

until my socialism has driven me to the sociality
of trees, snow, rocks, the north—solitude.

Unable to carry on his father's work, unable even to write
the elegy which his father had requested, the son might be expected to feel guilty of "killing" the father, like the undertaker who had altered the face.

But as the poet walks in the woods, two memories from youth suddenly become associated. He recalls the pomegranate with which his father had once surprised him, and also a fallen chestnut tree, which lost leaves, fruit and bark, but remained in "serpentine passivity" among "waves of witch hazel and dogwood / that wash along it."
The tree is a tradition, "something everlasting in the woods," and his feeling about it suddenly merges with his feelings about the pomegranate:

Tradition is not convention
Tradition is always the unexpected,
Like the taste of the pomegranate, so sweet.
That is, the chestnut tree unexpectedly became a tradition in the woods, "like Yggdrasill," the tree in Norse mythology that holds together earth, heaven and hell by its roots and branches. But in becoming permanent, the chestnut tree lost some of its authenticity. The pomegranate, which was brought by the father, seems to suggest a different tradition, one which is markedly unlike the old dead trunk, but also like it in being "unexpected."

This allegorical argument justifies the poet to himself for straying from his father's politics and poetics. He suddenly finds himself capable of "snipping / a thread of the net" of his grief and guilt, and discovers that the destruction of any order "is no real destruction," but instead "creates an order," a new one. As a result of his psychic release, he is able to see "rocks and birches" in "the purity of their restoration." The father's face—presumably the made-up countenance of the corpse—"seems torn / downwind like the song of birch leaves," and

in the last light
the god of winter walks, gray and alone,

Odin, Windigo, St. Malachy, someone
with a downturned smile brushing the fir boughs,
shaking the dead reeds and ferns.

In the next chapter I shall discuss the significance of the device of apotheosis in the modern elegy. This particular example seems to symbolize the poet's ability to remember
his father in life, and not to feel responsible for his death. In addition, perhaps, the poet is also trying to show that the father's existence is not totally destroyed. But in no sense is he trying to suggest that his father is alive in a spiritual form. The conception of his father's death that he forms is strictly based on his endurance as an influence on his son.

The most dramatic sign of the release which the poet has attained in the course of the poem is in the conclusion. Here the poet returns to the Blakeian song which his father had requested of him and which he had earlier been forced to leave unfinished:

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O thou quiet northern snow
reaching southward wave on wave,
southward to the land below,
billow gently on his grave.

Snowy owl that glides alone,
softly go, defend his rest;
bunting, whirl around his stone
softly, thou the wintriest.

Gently, softly, o my kind,
snow and wind and driven leaf,
take him, teach my rebel mind
trust at last in this cold grief.
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The snow replaces the "loathsome mass of bleeding flowers" of the funeral. The act of replacing these flowers suggests the poet's release from the feeling that he had had at the funeral, and completes his effort to ignore the corpse in favor of the living image.
The theme of "The Return" and "My Father's Face" is the power of the dead parent to haunt the lives of his offspring. But in each of these poems the haunting is fairly superficial. The speaker comes to terms with his ghost shortly after it becomes a ghost. The ghost which Sylvia Plath had to contend with, however, was present most of her life. This creature is a vivid oppressor who shaped her circumstances and her point of view. She states the situation in general terms in the early poem "All the Dead Dears":

... we go
Each skulled-and-crossboned Gulliver
Riddled with ghosts, to lie
Deadlocked with them, taking root as cradles rock. 12

In a later poem titled "Gulliver," the speaker considers the significance of the scene in Swift's work in which the Lilliputians tie up the hero. The same scene seems relevant to this passage, the point being that our ghosts have the same apparent insignificance but actual strength as Gulliver's adversaries do. The speaker suggests furthermore that these ghosts are involved in our death, and that we inevitably haunt others as we were haunted.

In the title poem of The Colossus, and again in "Daddy" from Ariel, the poet takes a somewhat different approach to the theme of the ghost. Instead of stating the power of ghosts in universal terms, the speaker in each poem is concerned with a particular situation.

12 The Colossus (Faber, 1960), p. 28.
"The Colossus" expresses the magnitude of an obsession. The speaker describes her dead father as a giant in ruins, a creature from whose throat she has "laboured / To dredge the silt" for thirty years. She compares him to the Roman Forum, a metaphor which suggests his importance to her:

Nights, I squat in the cornucopia
Of your left ear, out of the wind,
Counting the red stars and those of plum-colour.
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.
My hours are married to shadow.

Actually the metaphor of the dead father haunting the daughter is not appropriate here. He does not act at all, either to endanger or to charm. If there is a ghost in the poem, it is the daughter.

"The Colossus" tells of an obsession, but "Daddy" shows it. In the earlier poem the speaker puts a "blue sky out of the Oresteia" above herself as an emblem of her relation to her father. In "Daddy" the speaker exemplifies that condition. As the poet herself has said of this work,

The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it.14

13 The Colossus, p. 20. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.

The "awful little allegory" seems to refer to the death of the father and the subsequent attempted suicide by the daughter—an act prompted by guilt over her hatred of her father, and also by self-hatred caused by her internalizing the values of her father. But the immediate cause of the poem is not merely the memory of the father. He has reappeared in the form of a vampire, married the daughter and drunk her blood for seven years. In disposing of him, the speaker has also eliminated the "you," the father-ghost:

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always knew it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.15

The destruction of a vampire by the approved method is an excellent metaphor of psychic liberation. But the final line undercuts the speaker's claim to have broken free, not only because of the continued use of "daddy," but also because of the ambiguity of "through," suggesting on the one hand that she is done with her father, and on the other that she is simply "done," with no more energy to resist. We are back to the prophecy of "All the Dead Dears" that we all "lie / Deadlocked" with our ghosts eventually. Certainly that seems to be a possibility for the speaker of "Daddy."

"Daddy" is the most private of the personal elegies discussed in this section in the sense that it reveals the

most about the speaker. But the poem has another dimension. In relating the ghost to a Nazi, and identifying herself with the Jews, the speaker achieves a wider implication than is usual in the personal elegy. That is not to say that "Daddy" is a public elegy in any real sense, however; the dead person certainly has not been made into a public figure. In fact we cannot identify him at all except as a fantasy of his daughter.

Dylan Thomas's "After the Funeral: In Memory of Ann Jones" is almost the precise opposite of Plath's "Daddy." Instead of wanting to rid himself of a ghost, Thomas is stirred to try to keep the memory of a dead person alive. What stirs him to this effort is the hypocrisy of the people at her funeral. Old, of no special distinction ("... her death was a still drop"16), and humble, her end does not demand the deep lamentation of other, more tragic deaths. Consequently there is little more than faked grief in the "feast of tear-stuffed time and thistles" which passes as her funeral: "... blinds down the lids, the teeth in black, / The spittled eyes, the salt ponds in the sleeves." In a parody of the conventional pathetic fallacy, the poet makes a mule reflect the insincere emotions of the "mourners": "After the funeral, mule praises, brays, / Windshake of sailshaped ears, ..."

16 The Collected Poems, p. 96. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
The poet responds to the casual discarding of Ann by turning from these people to nature. In an adaptation of the pathetic fallacy, he writes,

But I, Ann's bard on a raised hearth, call all
The seas to service that her wood-tongued virtue
Babble like a bell buoy over the hymning heads,
Bow down the walls of the ferned and foxy woods
That her love sing and swing through a brown chapel,
Bless her bent spirit with four, crossing birds.

The implied wish of the second and third lines is for all the seas to drown the "hymning heads"—those of the hypocritical mourners—and leave Ann's virtue afloat. The "walls" of the woods, which the poet wants removed, seem to be trees that by their height keep Ann's "love" from "singing and swinging" through the "brown chapel" of nature. The religious note of that last phrase is intensified in the final line, in which the movement of four birds in flight imitates the four motions which the hand makes in giving a blessing. Essentially what the poet wants in this passage is a reversal of what happened at Ann's funeral. Instead of humans pretending small grief, he wishes nature to give large praise.

The poet realizes the possible incongruity of commemorating "dead, humped Ann" whose "flesh was meek as milk with images "magnified out of praise." Yet he insists that the "skyward statue" which his words build is "carved from her." That is, what he is attempting to make of Ann after death is based on his memory of her in life. But the "statue"
is not something which can be finished and forgotten; rather it involves a continual apprehension of Ann Jones:

These cloud-sopped marble hands, this monumental
Argument of the hewn voice, gesture and psalm,
Storm me forever over her grave until
The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love
And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill.

What Thomas seems to be wishing for is that the passionate vision which he has generated stay with him forever.

But actually the focus of the poem is more on the responses to her death than on Ann Jones herself. The underlying purpose of "After the Funeral" is to dramatize the importance of keeping the memory of the dead within the community for the sake of the living. The consequence of not doing so, of simply allowing the memory of those who have died to die with them after a meaningless ritual, is skillfully presented by Thomas in the response of the "desolate boy who slits his throat / In the dark of the coffin and sheds dry leaves." Especially noteworthy here is the fine image of the leaves; the poet is fusing his imagination with the boy's morbid fantasy to create a surreal image which emphasizes the horror and sterility of death. The boy seems to see what death is through the uncaring attitude of the mourners. Significantly he does not perceive death as a final state, but only as an isolation which leads him to kill himself. Death is for him what others make of it; isolation is the quality which he attributes to death because of the behavior of the mourners.
Presumably his desolation can be alleviated if the behavior of those at the funeral is altered.

From this perspective the final lines of "After the Funeral" take on added meaning:

Storm me forever over her grave until
The stuffed lung of the fox twitch and cry Love
And the strutting fern lay seeds on the black sill.

We have already seen that one effect of these lines is to emphasize the idea of "forever." But they also suggest the purpose of the poet's intense memory: it is a way of keeping the dead from becoming fully dead, of investing the "black sill" of death with the seed of apparent life.

Finally, in C. Day Lewis's "Elegy Before Death: At Settignano," a poet reaches the logical extension of the poems considered in this chapter by writing an elegy which precedes actual death, or even dying. The aging speaker addresses his wife in the fading twilight: "The colours are fading already, the lines collapsing / Fainting into the dream they will soon be." He senses that his solution is "to tap the potency of farewell"—a phrase which seems to mean exactly what Shakespeare says in the last line of the famous Sonnet 73. The speaker in Lewis's poem accomplishes this solution by comparing himself to Noah seeking firm land, and sending his wife "my dove into the future, to your death."

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Thinking her dead helps him to see how alive she is now --as he hoped it would. By freeing his mind of the present moment, by being compelled to see his beloved only in the perspective of the past, he appreciates her more deeply, and perceives her more distinctly than he did before:

Undiminished she moves here, shines, and will not fade.
Death, what had she to do with your futile purity,
The dogma of bone that on rare and common you would impose?

Returning from his fantasy, he finds new comfort in the "solid trance" of the hills. "Each day's a lovelier / Paradise," he says toward the end, "when each dawn is a reprieve."

Roethke's "Elegy for Jane," "Meditations of an Old Woman," and "North American Sequence"

Other poems besides elegies can be said to view death from the perspective of the living. Notable among these are some of the works of Theodore Roethke, including "Elegy for Jane," "Meditations of an Old Woman," and "North American Sequence."

In spite of its title, "Elegy for Jane" is a lament, not an elegy--that is, an immediate response to a particular death rather than a thoroughly developed consideration which leads to a philosophical conception of death. As such it makes an interesting contrast to the laments considered in Part three of Chapter two (Ransom's "Bells for
John Whiteside's Daughter," Owen's "Futility," Williams' "Death," and Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-Cream.") In these poems, it will be remembered, the speaker is concerned with the fate of the dead, a concern which is embodied by the image of a corpse and the emotion of horror as the speaker comes to see the difference between living and dead flesh. In "Elegy for Jane," however, the images of the dead person are memories of her alive. The speaker recalls her "neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils," her "sidelong pickerel smile," her "spiny shadow" and other features and actions which link Jane to the living world. And when he considers the present, he focuses on himself rather than the dead person:

Over this damp grave I speak the words of my love:  
I, with no rights in this matter,  
Neither father nor lover.

Karl Malkoff claims that the speaker is expressing the finality of death in this passage. He points to the use of "damp" in the first line, and contrasts it with its use in the third line from the end. This contrast, he says, marks a "recognition of the finality of nature's cycle." But I believe that this reading hangs on too slender a thread. The clearer implication of the last

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18 The Collected Poems (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 102. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.

three lines is that the dead person still occupies her living position. She remains the speaker's student; he does not sever her from humanity. Her death is a part of her life. This perspective does not preclude another, of course. We can imagine "Elegy for Jane" as the first part of a poem which proceeds to the discovery that death is absolute. As a matter of fact, it is possible to envision the opposite development also: "Elegy for Jane" as the final section of a poem which begins with a concept of death as an absolute, and develops from that point to the perspective of the dead from the point of view of the living.

It is not an easy task to show that "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North American Sequence" view death from the perspective of the living. For these two works, unlike any of the other poems treated in this chapter, concern the speaker's own death chiefly. In all other cases we can easily see that the elegist is concerned with what happens in the world after another's death, and not at all concerned with what happens to the dead person himself. But in a poem in which the person talking and the person to die are identical, it is difficult to be sure that the focus is only on the world of the living, and that there is no interest in the fate of the dead person himself. The "perspective of the living" and the "perspective of the dead" are not so easily divided in this case.
Nevertheless it seems to me that what one critic has written of "Meditations" is substantially true of that poem and even more so of "North American Sequence": "These meditations begin with the protagonist's vision of death, which provides a kind of frame of reference for the consideration of life."\textsuperscript{20} Ultimately Roethke's subject is not what happens after death, but what happens when we confront the mystery of death. It is also true, however, that the speaker in "Meditations" does not completely ignore the question of what happens to the self in death. But the question itself is not put in the manner of the poets discussed in the preceding chapter. For Eliot in \textit{Four Quartets}, Raine in "The Hollow Hill," and Lowell in "Quaker Graveyard" the options were simple: either the consciousness of the individual survives his death, or he is annihilated. The speaker in "Meditations" is occasionally swept into this either/or limitation of the meaning of death, but more often she views the question of surviving death as one with an infinite number of possibilities which can neither be proved or disproved. These possibilities defy the judgment of the rational intellect; they pass understanding. All visions of a life after death do so, of course, but those which the speaker in "Meditations" formulates differ from others in their refusal to be codified or anticipated.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20}Malkoff, p. 59.
Whether these perceptions are the result of mystical experience is a question that I will not entertain, though it seems clear that certain passages in "Meditations" are at least imitations of what passes as mystical experience.

Both "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North American Sequence" are series of lyrical meditations on the situation of an old person. In each case the individual poems making up the larger work interrelate complexly. But the two sequences differ in some important ways. The speaker in "North American Sequence" is not easily separated from the poet himself, while the voice in "Meditations" is clearly not Roethke's, though I do not mean to imply that he is unrelated to that voice. Also the attitude toward death is slightly different in the two poems, though I am not sure whether that difference is merely the result of greater precision in the later work, or represents a development of attitude.

The outlines of the speaker's situation in "Meditations" are presented in "First Meditation": the extremes of suffering and joy to which she is subject; her sense of herself as moving forward and backward, journeying, trying for "another life." 21 She finds solace in thoughts of the past, but from the future she expects little:

21 The Collected Poems, p. 159. Further citations to "Meditations of an Old Woman" are to page numbers in this edition.
What's beyond never crumbles like an embankment,
Explodes like a rose, or thrusts wings over the
Caribbean.
There are no pursuing forms, faces on walls;
Only the motes of dust in the immaculate hallways,
The darkness of falling hair, the warnings from
lint and spiders,
The vines graying to a fine powder.
There is no riven tree, or lamb dropped by an
eagle (159).

In this passage death is viewed apart from life, as in the
preceding chapter. In these bleak images, denying the
supernatural and asserting the blank fact of decay, we are
at the limit of the speaker's sensibility. That she talks
in this way suggests extreme depression; but, characteris-
tically, she rises out of it rapidly:

There are still times, morning and evening;
The cerulean, high in the elm,
Thin and insistent as a cicada,
And the far phoebe, singing,
The long plaintive notes floating down,
Drifting through leaves, oak and maple,
Or the whippoorwill, along the smoky ridges,
A single bird calling and calling;
A fume reminds me, drifting across wet gravel;
A cold wind comes over stones;
A flame, intense, visible,
Plays over the dry pods,
Runs fitfully along the stubble,
Moves over the field,
Without burning.

In such times, lacking a god,
I am still happy (159-60).

"Still" in the first line means "even now" but also refers
to a condition of quiet and windlessness. This second sense
of the word is suggested by the comparatively great dis-
tances from which the bird songs come to the woman, and also
in the way the songs seem to hang in the air. We might say
that time is slowed (if not quite stilled). Such an extension of the primary sense of still is appropriate if we consider that the woman is willing to trade such experiences as she mentions here for a divinity. A passage from Hoffman's The Mortal No is germane at this point: "When the special forms of eternity which govern temporal rhythms cease being useful, the movement from life to death alters noticeably. Experiences are comprehended in depth, independently of the symbolic value a religious imagination may previously have given them." We may conclude that one way in which a person can see his own (future) death from the point of view of the living is to use that death to remind himself to live fully.

In the next poem of the series, "I'm Here," the "still times" are reexamined. "Is it enough?" (161) the woman asks herself in the first line. Are serene moments an adequate substitute for divinity? Her descriptions of sparrows "bickering in the eaves" and other "prattle of the young" (161) suggest that her serenity is not constant enough to bear the load which she has asked of it. Her recourse is to consider the self transformed: "Dare I shrink to a hag?" she asks, and realizes that "some fates are worse" (161). Then, moving outside her present situation, she recalls her life as a young girl, when she was able to give and share

\(^{23}\text{The Mortal No, p. 351.}\)
life with other things: "The body, delighting in thresh-
holds, / Rocks in and out of itself." She also compares
her girlhood to a state which her advanced age makes her
consider:

So much of adolescence is an ill-defined dying,
An intolerable waiting,
A longing for another place and time,
Another condition (162).

This figure works in one way to illuminate adolescence.
In another way we see that the speaker's longing for change
is at bottom a desire for death. And finally we are given
a hint about her conception of death: it is "another con-
dition." She is unable to be more specific about it, hav-
ing no more certainty about the state of death than the
adolescent has about adulthood (probably a good deal less).

In the strictest logical sense the speaker is creating
a false analogy in comparing a state within life to a state
beyond life. By doing this, she makes her dying seem fol-
lowed necessarily by another life. But the next poem sug-
gests that the woman is no so much arguing the point as
attempting to express what she already feels to be true.
We see something of this attempt in the fourth section of
"I'm Here":

My geranium is dying, for all I can do,
Still leaning toward the last place the sun was.
I've tried I don't know how many times to replant it.
But these roses, I can wear them by looking away.
The eyes rejoice in the act of seeing and the fresh
after-image;
Without staring like a lout, or a moping adolescent;
Without commotion (163).
She seems to objectify her own situation in the flowers. On the one hand she is like the geranium; there is no evidence in the poem that she is actually dying, but she probably feels that old age is in itself a dying. She is like the geranium, too, in having been replanted many times. On the other hand she feels that she is like the roses in having a kind of existence that is not solely dependent on her physical presence. The point here is not that the roses are immortal. The woman merely wants to believe that in some sense which she is not able (or does not wish) to explore, she and the roses transcend the limits of herself and the geraniums.

At the end of the poem, the woman accepts her position without wanting to be transformed out of it. She recognizes her vulnerability to death, but claims serenely that "It's not my first dying" (164), a line which reinforces the idea that she has an intuitive sense that death is not the absolute disintegration of the self that was spoken of toward the end of "First Meditation." In the end the poet beautifully captures the woman's position as a mortal creature:

If the wind means me,
I'm here!
Here (164).

The woman opens herself to death, and at the same time emphasizes her "hereness." Death is no longer as desirable as it was earlier in the poem, but it is accepted calmly.
The woman's elation holds through the first section of "Her Becoming," the next poem in the series. She has a dreamlike experience in which "A spirit plays before me like a child, / A child at play, a wind-excited bird" (165). Significantly this spirit--"a ghost from my own breast" (165)--points away from the future and death. That is, the bird is associated with the birds of the "still times" of peace, while the "child at play" suggests the woman's own past.

In the second section of "Her Becoming," the woman's vision collapses: "Last night I dreamt of a jauntier principle of order; / Today I eat my usual diet of shadows" (165-66). She doubts that there is "wisdom in objects," and confesses to a knowledge of "machines, machines, loveless, temporal," and "mutilated souls in cold morgues of obligation" (166). But this aspect of her experience is illusive and unnatural. In the third section the speaker describes a "death" in life which has a much different connotation:

The moon, a pure Islamic shape, looked down.
The light air slowed; It was not night or day.
All natural shapes became symbolical.
The only thing alive in heaven's eye,
I shed my clothes to slow my daemon down.
And then I ran again.

Where was I going? Where?
What was I running from?
To these I cried my life--
The loved fox, and the wren.
Speech passed between small birds;  
Silence became a thing;  
Echo itself consumed;  
The scene shrank to a pin.

Did my will die? Did I?  
I said farewell to sighs,  
Once to the toad,  
Once to the frog,  
And once to my flowing thighs.

Who can believe the moon?  
I have seen! I have seen!—  
The line! The holy line!  
A small place all in flame (166-67).

The passage reflects a spectrum of certainties about the "mystical" experience it describes. On the one hand the speaker asserts that she was out of time: "It was not night or day." But on the other hand the experience leaves her with many unanswered questions, the central ones being: "Did my will die? Did I?" The most skeptical line is the first of the final stanza. But in the exclamatory phrases of the last three lines, a strong certainty washes doubt away. The overall tone is affirmative, and what is affirmed is that death is a state of being. The speaker is unable to answer the question "Where was I going?" because the precise nature of death is uncertain to her. But that does not trouble her; she does not need a precise delineation of what she has seen.

This experience is not the end of "Her Becoming."

The poem ends on a picture of the woman's joy at living in the world:
By swoops of bird, by leaps of fish, I live.
My shadow steadies in a shifting stream;
I live in air; the long light is my home;
I dare caress the stones, the field my friend;
A light wind rises; I become the wind (167).

At the end of the previous poem, the wind symbolized death, and the woman was prepared for it in a mysteriously peaceful way. Here the woman has advanced in her ease with death. Perhaps because of her experience quoted on the preceding page, she is now able to merge with death in a casual, graceful manner.

In "Her Becoming" the speaker calls herself "a crazy one alone" (167). The next poem in the series, "Fourth Meditation," concerns her relation to other people. Mostly she has been alone without being alienated, as the following simile illustrates:

As a chip or shell, floating lazily with a slow current,
A drop of the night rain still in me,
A bit of water caught in a wrinkled crevice,
A pool riding and shining with the river,
Dipping up and down in the ripples,
Tilting back the sunlight (168).

She is separate from others, yet one with them. This simile can be interpreted in another way also: the woman's life is carried separate from the river of life, yet is part of it too.

Waking to her identity as a human being involves the woman in the thought of the dead, who "make more impossible demands from their silence" (168). Here, perhaps, she speaks as one haunted by particular persons, whose values
and attitudes oppress her even after their death. Her condition seems comparable to that of the speaker in Plath's "Daddy" or Carruth's "My Father's Face." In the course of the poem, she will transmute this painful relationship to the dead. Her means of accomplishing this change are characteristic: facing away from the dead, she considers the living.

The second section of the poem is a critical but sympathetic consideration of the lives of the women around her. She describes them as "self-involved," submerged in trivia, "arrangers of picnics" (169), and answers the question "What do they need?" with a litany of wishes for them: "How I wish them awake! / . . . / May they lean into light and live" (169). According to Malkoff the speaker then contrasts these unsatisfactory lives to the more harmonious ones that will exist in the future. But I believe that the text supports a somewhat different reading:

May they flame into being! --
I see them as figures walking in a greeny garden,
Their gait formal and elaborate, their hair a glory,
The gentle and beautiful still-to-be-born (169-70).

The ironic images of the third line place these women among those whom the speaker already might know. They are "still-to-be-born" metaphorically; that is, they need to grow intellectually and emotionally. Such a judgment flatters the speaker, and she expresses her sense of

23Malkoff, p. 166.
self-esteem in the lines "I breathe what I am: / The first and last of all things" (170). The judgment also suggests a new perspective on the dead. Just as the living can be divided into the "alive" and the "still-to-be-born," so the dead can be divided into those who are really dead (i.e., those whose influence, memory, etc. have not survived), and those who are still "alive" (i.e., those who are remembered, whose achievement remains vital and important). Such a formulation is the basis of all the public elegies discussed earlier in the chapter. Though not made explicitly here, I believe that it is the principle upon which the piece moves. "I'm in love with the dead," the speaker says, and "Near the graves of the great dead, / Even the stones speak"(170). In the first of these quotations, she grants the dead a kind of life based on their influence on her. In the second she expresses that concept in the mystical terms which she uses in "Her Becoming," in this way suggesting the possibility that the survival of the dead has a broader basis than her attention to them merely. In both quotations she expresses a transmuted attitude toward the dead. Earlier in the poem she had felt oppressed by her particular dead. But now she manages to loosen their grip on her without annihilating them. She is not speaking only of her private dead at this point, but of all who have died.
The final poem, "What Can I Tell My Bones?" begins with an awareness of the temporariness of the woman's victories over her fear of death:

Beginner,
Perpetual beginner,
The soul knows not what to believe,
In its small folds, stirring sluggishly,
In the least place of its life,
A pulse beyond nothingness,
A fearful ignorance (171).

In each of the previous poems, the woman has overcome a depression related to the fear of death and dying. But in each case the victory has been temporary. She was forced to admit that the "still times" listening to small birds are not enough. In "I'm Here" she attempted to assert a mysterious permanence for herself, but had to confess in the beginning of "Her Becoming" that this dream of a "jaun-tier principle of order" is itself impermanent. A "mystical" experience rescued her from a "diet of shadows," and seemed to assure her that death was something she could survive in a mysterious way; but she was still open to the "impossible demands" of the dead in the next poem. She overcame that problem too, but is now aware that the alteration of depression and elation is itself a problem. She cannot help "longing for absolutes that never come" (171).

The woman's fundamental strategy for coping with death is expressed in the line "O to be delivered from the rational into the realm of pure song" (172). In terms of death "the rational" seems to be the materialistic, empirical
point of view, the opposite of faith, which poses the problem of an afterlife in an all-or-nothing manner, either the continuation of individual consciousness in some form, or annihilation; and, for want of other evidence, inclines toward the view that when we die, our consciousness ceases absolutely, and our flesh returns to the earth. This "rational" approach seems to be identical to the force which troubles or overwhelms each of the speakers in the poems considered in Chapter two of this study. Those whom it only troubles—the personae of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Raine's "The Hollow Hill," and Lowell's "Quaker Graveyard"—escape from "the rational" into other traditions or convictions in which possibilities are quite clearly defined. But the speaker in "Meditations of an Old Woman" envisions a very different deliverance. "The realm of pure song" suggests artifice, an approach which does not provide an argument but goes beyond argument. In terms of death it suggests an intuitive, imaginative, perhaps a mystical approach. One does not seek an answer from the outside, or try to build an inner assurance in something that one is told; rather one tries to discover what his deepest attitude already is.

The woman has already inhabited the "realm of pure song" sporadically. Now she seeks to inhabit it in a more permanent way. At this point in the poem, however, she feels that she cannot by herself escape "the rational," but needs "to be delivered" from it. She needs help to be
self-reliant—and gets it, though at the end of the poem we are not sure whether this help has come from far outside or from deep within her.

The woman is "lacking a god" in "First Meditation," but she begins to speak of "God" here. She has not begun to believe in a deity in any definite sense, but she has started to suspect some force outside of herself. We first hear of it in its absence: "The cause of God in me--has it gone?"

And she states,

To try to become like God
Is far from becoming God,
O, but I seek and care!

I rock in my own dark,
Thinking, God has need of me,
The dead love the unborn (172).

These intuited thoughts about supernatural matters represent a change in the woman's consciousness, or perhaps her deepening awareness. But we must not let the mere mention of "God" persuade us that she has become a believer. A close examination of the text reveals that becoming "like God," as opposed to "becoming God," suggests being "released from the dreary dance of opposites" (173) rather than being immortal and omnipotent. The thoughts in the last two lines seem to represent an assurance that the speaker's life is valuable. Indeed the penultimate line tends to minimize the distance between God and man in at least one way. Apart from the identity of "God," however, the final line of this passage suggests that life is a
part of a much larger system of death and rebirth, and that this system is governed by love.

At the beginning of "What Can I Tell My Bones?" the woman says, "The soul knows not what to believe." And the wish to be in "the realm of pure song" suggests something other than a desire to know the fate of human beings in death. I have compared this other desire to the efforts of the elegists considered earlier in this chapter, as an attempt to view death from the perspectives of life, or, alternatively, to see death as a part of life. Still it is difficult to brush aside the hints about death from the point of view of the dead in certain passages of this poem. For example while the line "The sun! The sun! And all we can become!" (173) may be interpreted as a description of the possibilities of life only, such a limitation seems questionable. The speaker seems to me to be looking beyond life at the possibilities of death. And what, if anything, does she see? We do not know. She withholds from us the ultimate cause of her joy at the end of the poem:

What came to me vaguely is now clear,
As if released by a spirit,
Or agency outside me,
Unprayed for,
And final (173).

This passage is strikingly cryptic. The speaker does not tell us what the first line refers to (it could simply be a serenity in the face of death, or an insight into death that allows her to be serene). The spirit has only an "as
if" existence, and it is "unprayed for." Moreover the word "final" reverberates in two directions: first as a suggestion of lasting peace, in contrast to the sharp alternation of ecstasy and depression which prevails throughout the poem; and second, as a note of mortality, finality.

In short, while we know how the speaker feels at the end of the poem, we are not allowed to see what she thinks. We see the response but not the stimulus, the subject and predicate but not the object. Something is now clear for her, but she does not make it clear for us. This curious device is another way in which the poet reveals his basic life-centeredness. Ultimately he is attempting to replace a questioning attitude toward death with a confidence about it, a confidence that from the point of view of "the rational" has no basis. But, like Whitman and other poets who express "mystical" experience, Roethke here speaks from a point of view other than the "rational." He does not need to know for certain what death is in order to be at peace with it any more than he needs to know for certain what life is to be at peace with it.

One way to explain the uncertain passages of "Meditations" is to consider it an early articulation of the ideas of "North American Sequence." But such a perspective falsifies "Meditations," and hides its virtues. I shall not examine the poem as a rough draft that might have been better.
Still I believe that "North American Sequence" is better. It is more lucid without being less profound. There is a greater variety in the structure of the individual poems (unlike the parts of "Meditations," each does not begin with an expression of depression and end in exaltation). Moreover the "Sequence" has a wider range of reference than "Meditations," as a comparison of titles will suggest. Death is seen strictly in terms of life in the later poem. There are no passages in which the speaker might be interpreted as peering beyond the world of the living. Here, clearly, serenity in the face of death is the result of discipline grounded in a certain perception of life rather than an uncertain vision of an afterlife.

In the beginning of "The Longing," the first poem in the "Sequence," the speaker describes extreme lassitude, and then identifies with extreme energy as represented by "the blackening salmon, and the mad lemmings." Significantly these creatures are active and purposeful up to the time of their death; and so the speaker would be. He says that he longs for "the imperishable quiet at the heart of form," but, if he were a leaf, he would "love the leaves, delighting in the redolent disorder of this mortal life" (188). These contrary desires embody the conflict of the poem: the poet wants the "imperishable quiet" which belongs to the

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idea of immortality and infinity; but he also wants the suggestiveness of change and renewal which belongs to his mortality.

If the last section of "The Longing" tells some of the ways the spirit could be renewed, "Meditation at Oyster River" shows this renewal taking place. The poem opens with the poet sitting near the mouth of a river at dusk as the tide rises—a setting which suggests death in its larger outlines, and also in some of its details, such as "dead clam shells" (190) and a raven on a branch of a dead tree. In such a serenely melancholy setting, the poet wishes for death: "The self persists like a dying star, / In sleep, afraid. Death's face rises afresh" (190). Like the star, which is extinguished long before we know of it, the poet is removed from the world. But he is brought back by memories of youth and earlier waters, recollections which culminate in another river scene, the ice breaking up on the Tittebawasee, a river near Roethke's childhood home in Saginaw, Michigan:

... the blast of dynamite,
The sudden sucking roar as the culvert loosens its debris of branches and sticks,
Welter of tin cans, pails, old bird nests, a child's shoe riding a log,
As the piled ice breaks away from the battered spiles,
And the whole river begins to move forward, its bridges shaking (191).

In the context of the poem, this image suggests the power of the past as well as that of water. It does not suggest
that death is a renewal which the individual survives, as do many of the images in "Meditations of an Old Woman."
The poet's state at the beginning of "Oyster River" is iced-in depression. Thought of the moving waters of the Tittebawasee helps to crack that ice and get the spirit moving again. In a "waning of light" he "rocks with the motion of morning" (191).

In the last lines of the poem, the poet returns to the tide coming in at Oyster River:

... the spirit runs, intermittently,  
In and out of the small waves,  
Runs with the intrepid shorebirds--  
How graceful the small before danger! (192)

This image embodies the poet's new feelings about death. His spirit is no longer oppressed by it, can even perform a dance with it. But the poet does not try to make death seem totally attractive; it is still a danger, just as the oncoming tide is a danger to the shorebirds.

"Journey to the Interior" introduces an important theme of "North American Sequence," the "long journey out of the self" (193), the struggle against all the limitations of separate existence which is dramatized in the title of the series, and also in the Whitmanesque catalogs. The "journey out of the self" is related to the theme of death in two ways: first of all, the journey out of the self is the desire of which the death wish is the deviant expression; and second, it is the way out of the obsession with self which is at the root of the fear of death.
Roethke's point is that the journey out of the self is not easily accomplished. There are "detours, washed-out interrupted raw places" (193). Hugh Staples compares the long drives described in this poem to the Descent to the Underworld in an epic;\(^\text{25}\) and indeed it is a landscape of the dead through which the poet drives recklessly--yet without actually moving. Of the cemetery and "dead snakes" and the "dry creek bed" which he passes, the speaker says, "I am not moving but they are" (194). The landscape is internalized (". . . the road was part of me, and its ditches, . . ." 193) but the poet does not have a fruitful relation to it. It is not the object of meditation. In his haste he threatens everything he passes, and puts himself in danger besides.

The final section of "Journey to the Interior" has been interpreted in two very different ways. Here the poet presents a vision of his "soul at a still-stand, / At ease after rocking the flesh to sleep" (194). The substance of the vision:

\begin{verbatim}
I rehearse myself for this:
The stand at the stretch in the face of death,
Delighting in surface change, the glitter of light on waves
And I roam elsewhere, my body thinking,
Turning toward the other side of light,
In a tower of wind, a tree idling in air,
Beyond my own echo,
Neither forward nor backward,
Unperplexed, in a place leading nowhere (194-95).
\end{verbatim}

To Ralph J. Mills, Jr., these images suggest the deep peace of mystical elevation. Hugh Staples thinks otherwise; he feels that the vision is the product of exhaustion, an "ominous illusion of eternity" that bears "no relation to normal experience." But that last point may be hasty. The "stand at the stretch in the face of death" embodies the goal of the speaker; it is an image of an active, outward age, a condition which allows for "delighting in surface change" and perceiving "a tree idling in air." It seems to me that the poet's journey out of himself is completed here, if only temporarily; he is beyond his echo, and, "unperplexed," does not need to travel further. "A place leading nowhere" suggests the "imperishable quiet at the heart of form" which the poet wished for in "The Longing."

In "The Long Waters" the poet resumes his journey out of the self under ordinary circumstances, but discovers that there are pitfalls even when there are no detours. He is led, perhaps because the experience of the preceding poem bordered on mysticism, to reject "the world of the dog" --a domesticated, sensuous world--and the world of the "thrush stopped in the middle of his song"--the world of violent, unexpected death. He acknowledges his "foolishness


with God" (196)—his foolish desire for a God. The body of the poem is a meditation on his contradictory desires for change and changelessness:

I remember a stone breaking the eddying current,
Neither white nor red, in the dead middle way,
Where impulse no longer dictates, nor the darkening shadow,
A vulnerable place,
Surrounded by sand, broken shells, the wreckage of water (197).

In the third and fourth lines the image becomes allegorical, representative of the poet's middle age, beyond the "impulse" of youth, not yet in the "darkening shadow" thrown over old age. That he terms the middle age "vulnerable" reveals that the thought of death can become in old age a positive ordering force.

In the fifth section the poet returns to his present state and describes a transformation brought about by—or occurring shortly after—a perception of

The eternal one, the child, the swaying vine branch,
The numinous ring around the opening flower,
The friend that runs before me on the windy headlands,
Neither voice nor vision (198).

This "eternal one" is simply the continuing process of life in all its stages. The poet does not identify himself with it, though he does not say that it is outside of him. Actually he seems to want to give this version of the "God" he longed for the widest possible reference, to be specific and mysterious about it at the same time.
The poet confesses that he "came back from the depths laughing too loudly" (198), referring I believe to an inappropriate response to the experience described in the previous poem. But now he is "become another thing" who sees "beyond the farthest bloom of the waves" (198). He "embraces the world" (198) finally, having learned to find in it the "God" he sought.

The last two poems of "North American Sequence" continue to accept the world. "The Far Field" begins with an account of a dream in which the poet drives through snow and sleet out a long peninsula until the road turns to a "rubble of stone" and the "car stalls, / Churning in a snowdrift" (199). In reaction to the horror of this vision of death, the poet recalls his ability to see beyond death when he was young:

I suffered for birds, for young rabbits caught in the mower,
My grief was not excessive.
For to come upon warblers in early May
Was to forget time and death (199).

Joy counted for more than sorrow, life for more than death. The poet stresses these early thoughts about death because he needs ballast in his present condition. He may feel, too, that he knew as much about death then as he does now:

... to lie naked in sand,
In the silted shallows of a slow river,
Fingering a shell,
Thinking:
Once I was something like this, mindless,
Or perhaps with another mind, less peculiar;
Or to sink down to the hips in a mossy quagmire;
Or, with skinny knees, to sit astride a wet log,
Believing:
I'll return again,
As a snake or a raucous bird,
Or, with luck, as a lion.

I learned not to fear infinity,
The far field, the windy cliffs of forever,
The dying of time in the white light of tomorrow,
The wheel turning away from itself,
The sprawl of the wave,
The on-coming water (200).

The boy's naive intimations of immortality are not to be mistaken for the poet's ideas now. This catalog of the possibilities of death is merely the way in which he learned not to fear it. The boy grown up does not attempt to reach beyond death; though he is "renewed by death, thought of my death" (201), his renewal is not one of hope. He has virtually completed his journey out of himself at this point, and is able to recognize precisely how important he is. He is a "man faced with his own immensity." But that immensity does not necessarily mean that he is immortal: ". . . the why / Of being born fails on his naked ears" (201). The echo of Stevens here is appropriate, because Roethke is very close to that poet's attitude toward death. "All things reveal infinitude," he says, and we should note that he does not say that all things are infinite, only that, seen in the right way, they reveal it. Analogously, he does not promise himself immortality, only insists that he touches it in his "pure serene of memory" (201).
"The Rose," the final poem of the sequence, begins with an allusion to Eliot's "Ash Wednesday":

There are those to whom place is unimportant,
But this place, where sea and fresh water meet,
Is important (202).

By place Roethke seems to mean much more than simply location. He seems to be referring to time and place, to the nature of finitude. The particular "place" which Roethke is talking about appears to be the mouth of Oyster River. As in the earlier meditation, the general outlines of the scene suggest death, but the particular details here suggest continuing life. No raven sits on a dead branch; instead birds that are no so easily symbolized are seen in motion: "the flash of the kingfisher, the wingbeat of the scoter" (202).

As a symbol of life contained in space and time, Roethke chooses the rose, which "stays,"

Stays in its true place,
Flowering out of the dark,
Widening at high noon, face upward,
A single wild rose, struggling out of the white
embrace of the morning-glory,
Out of the briary hedge, the tangle of matted underbrush,
Beyond the clover, the ragged hay,
Beyond the sea-pine, the oak, the wind-tipped madrona,
Moving with the waves, the undulating driftwood,
Where the slow creek winds down to the black sand of the shore
With its thick grassy scum and crabs scuttling back into their glistening craters (203).

The rose rises above everything, even the trees, and takes on the motion of the sea because it embodies "place."
It is not a mystical symbol of a higher world, as it frequently is in literature. It is a symbol of nature, of the world that we are born into and die out of, the life that we participate in for a while, but which goes on beyond us. Earlier the poet said, "the rose exceeds, the rose exceeds us all" (188). He might have added that, in the rose, we exceed ourselves in the most literal sense. The poet remembers his response to his father's roses:

... how those flowerheads seemed to flow toward me, to beckon me, only a child, out of myself.

What need for heaven, then,
With that man, and those roses? (203)

If one interprets "then" as referring to time past, then earth is a sufficient heaven for the young. But "then" also means "therefore," suggesting that earth is sufficient heaven for everyone. As has happened before in "North American Sequence," the poet overcomes his fear of death by reminding himself that he had before found life sufficient. This reminder is not in itself a solution to the fear of death, but it provides a basis for the disciplined rejection of that fear. In "Meditation at Oyster River," the poet learns to see death afresh when he remembers the waters of his youth. Again in "The Far Field" he recalls that in his youth he "learned not to fear infinity." As in those places in the previous poems, so here he recognizes the beauty of the world: "Beautiful my desire, and the place of my desire" (204). Again, toward the end of the poem:
Near this rose, in this grove of sun-parched, wind-warped madronas,
Among the half-dead trees, I came upon the true ease of myself,
As if another man appeared out of the depths of my being,
And I stood outside myself,
Beyond becoming and perishing, . . . (205)

It is important to notice the words "as if." Roethke's subject is not what happens to him after death; it is rather the attempt to learn not to concern himself with these questions. He is seeking the necessary conditions which will allow him to live the end of his life with the same freedom as the beginning. For this to happen, a journey out of the self is necessary, a movement out to a position from which he will not be overwhelmed by the thought of his own death.

Although the question, Why do the poets considered in this chapter turn away from the question of an afterlife? is impossible to answer in general, final terms, it is hard to avoid asking it. For the works discussed in this chapter suggest an attitude far different from that expressed in Chapter two. Perhaps the following passage from an essay by Kenneth Rexroth on Martin Buber will give us an approach to this question:

The pious who believe that if you just want something hard enough and pray for it hard enough you get it are alas, but fortunately, wrong. Voltaire to the contrary, no need is great enough to create an absolute satisfaction. Death, perhaps, certainly nonexistence, is the only absolute man can imagine.
As a poem, *I and Thou* is very beautiful. But it is this metaphysical greed which removes it from the category of the highest art. There is amongst men no absolute need. The realization of this is what makes Homer and the Greek tragedians so much sounder a Bible than the Old or New Testaments. Love does not last forever, friends betray each other, beauty fades, the mighty stumble in blood and their cities burn. The ultimate values are love and friendship and courage and magnanimity and grace, but it is a narrow ultimate, and lasts only a little while, contingent on the instability of men and the whims of "Nature viewed as a Thou." . . . Any art which has a happy ending in reserve in Infinity is, just to that degree, cheating.  

The elegies of Chapter two which express the view that death is not the end of consciousness, or try to, can be viewed as examples of the "metaphysical greed" of which Rexroth speaks. But in different ways the poems considered in this chapter seem to recognize definite limits of desire and satisfaction. Rexroth's "For Eli Jacobson," for example, manages to accept life for its own sake, even without revolutionary change as a compensation for finitude. In their hope for small improvements in the life of mankind on earth rather than after death, Auden in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" and Shapiro in "Elegy for a Dead Soldier" turn away from satisfying absolute needs. Lowell's "For the Union Dead" might be fit into this category too, though it might be argued that this poem does not consider the concept of an afterlife enough to turn away from it. For a

similar reason, it is difficult to assess the personal elegies in terms of their attitudes toward needs and finitude. Spender's "Elegy for Margaret" seems to be an acknowledgement of limits until the last stanza, when the poet rushes forward a sudden consolation for the dead. It is difficult to judge whether Warren's "The Return" and Carruth's "My Father's Face" turn away from considering the dead because of urgent personal needs to settle with a ghost, or because they have no hopes for the dead. Certainly Plath's "Daddy" does not look beyond the personal trouble of a ghost. Because he speaks from a less distracted position, Dylan Thomas seems more clearly attuned to the attitude which Rexroth expresses. C. Day Lewis in "Elegy Before Death" perhaps accepts finitude more openly than any of the elegists discussed in this chapter. As for the two series of poems by Roethke: in "Meditations" the speaker longs for absolute satisfactions but seems to recognize that they are not forthcoming, while the speaker in "North American Sequence" seems more willing to accept a limited world.

The recognition of the finite nature of human needs and satisfactions is more fully expressed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

DEATH AS THE END OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Value of a Finite Existence: Stevens and Plath

In the famous "Wager" of his Pensees, the seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal tries to make Christian faith seem like good sense, even though, as he admits, Christians cannot prove anything of what they believe is true ("C'est en manquant de preuve qu'ils ne manquent pas de sens"1). He says that we must choose whether or not there is an eternal creator waiting for us in an eternal paradise after death, and that if we choose to assent to this belief, faith will follow our practice and we will see that we have wagered for something certain and infinite, and given nothing in exchange: "... vous connaîtrez à la fin que vous avez parié pour une chose certaine, infinie, pour laquelle vous n'avez rien donné."2 At worst we will be risking only finite pleasures, and the wager would be worth


2Ibid., p. 266.
the risk of any amount of pleasure, because it is infinity we are gambling for.

The poetry to be discussed in this chapter rejects the assumptions of Pascal's "Wager," and of Christianity in general: that heaven is a plausible concept, and that life on earth is "nothing."

Most explicitly opposed to Christianity is Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning." This justly famous poem has been frequently analyzed, but it is so important a document in relation to modern conceptions of death that I feel impelled to risk repeating the substance of other commentaries.3

"Sunday Morning" begins with a woman who finds that her pleasure in the morning sun is limited by her capacity for viewing the world from the perspective of a Christian. When she "feels the dark / Encroachment of that old catastrophe" (the death of Christ), her sensuous pleasures suddenly "seem things in some procession of the dead."4 But the narrator edges the troubled woman out of the center of the poem while he meditates on her situation:

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
What is divinity if it can come

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Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
Divinity must live within herself;
Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
Griefings in loneliness, or unsubdued
Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
All pleasures and all pains, remembering
The bough of summer and the winter branch.
These are the measures destined for her soul.

By comparing them to divinity, and calling them the "measures" of the soul, the poet gives earthly pleasures—and pains—a stature beyond that which Christianity grants them. He rescues them from the "processions of the dead." The key to this "salvation" of the things of the earth is in the perception that divinity "lives within herself."

The third stanza develops the idea that humanity contains divinity. The poet presents his theory of the development of religion in which an inhuman Jove gives way to a partly-human Christ, who will be replaced in turn by a completely-human concept of divinity and paradise:

Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be
The blood of paradise? And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?

These questions use Christian terminology, and even seem to be leading to a Christian conclusion until the identification of earth and paradise is made in the last line.5

5 I am indebted to Ronald Sukenik, Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure, p. 64, for the outlines of the interpretation of the third stanza.
The woman whose enjoyment of coffee and oranges was interrupted at the beginning of the second stanza returns in the fourth as the embodiment of the desire of mankind for something beyond earthly life:

She says, "I am content when wakened birds, Before they fly, test the reality Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings; But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"

The woman demonstrates a capacity for sensitive enjoyment of the song of birds at dawn, an enjoyment that seems based on her ability to see a kinship between the birds' situation and her own. But before she can bring this similarity to consciousness and understand its implications, she is distracted by her concern for the future. The poet assures her that no mythology of the dead is older than "April's green," and none shall survive it. It is the same point that Stevens makes frequently in his poetry, perhaps most memorably in "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

Beauty is momentary in the mind--
The fitful tracing of a portal; But in the flesh, it is immortal. 6

In using the word immortal, the poet stretches the truth, since the presence of life in the universe is not a sure thing. But the line makes a lovely paradox for the poet's point that earth is the paradise which people tend to locate elsewhere.

6The Collected Poems, p. 91.
The woman in "Sunday Morning" is not satisfied to learn that the source of her pleasure will outlast her. "She says, 'But in contentment I still feel / The need of some imperishable bliss.'" Here is her "metaphysical greed," as Rexroth would term it. The speaker in "Sunday Morning" responds to her by pointing out the contradictions between her "need" and the nature of the world she lives in:

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her, Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams And our desires.

All that is beautiful, all that we treasure, changes, becomes transformed, ultimately dies. Therefore there is no justification for believing in anything which does not pass away. As Yeats says, "Man is in love, and loves what vanishes, / What more is there to say?" We take no pleasure in the unchanging.

But the idea that "Death is the mother of beauty" also suggests what Shakespeare says at the end of Sonnet 73: we "love that well which we must leave ere long." We value what we know is perishable. Even though we are continually reminded that we must die ("... She strews the leaves / Of sure obliteration on our paths, ..."), passion and love are based upon these reminders. Death

The willow shivering in the sun reminds the indolent maidens of other seasons, the swift passage of time. The ripeness of the fruit likewise forces the boys to realize the importance of the present moment. There is a faint allusion to the temptation of Eve in the garden in the last sentence, along with a hint that the speaker feels that Eve was right to eat the fruit. The leaves, at any rate, become something more than fearful reminders of death when the maidens "stray impassioned" among them.

There is a further contradiction in the desire for an imperishable bliss. Not only is such a desire a misunderstanding of the nature of the earth. It also forces the imagination to create an impossibly changing eternity:

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth,
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?
Why set the pear upon those river-banks
Or spice the shores with odors of the plum?
Alas, that they should wear our colors there,
The silken weavings of our afternoons,
And pick the strings of our insipid lutes!

If there is no "change of death in paradise," the speaker suggests, the boughs would indeed hang heavy. If we transpose earth to heaven (which is what the Christian concept
of the resurrection of the body implies) we create an unrecognizable, impossible parody of earth. By trying to make life eternal, we kill it. What those who long for imperishable bliss actually long for is a self-contradictory consolation.

The speaker suggests "devotion to the sun" instead of faith in an afterlife. But the sun is not a god, only a "savage source" of the only paradise that man shall know:

Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.

Men will not become a part of the sky, but the chant that comes "out of their blood"--out of the recognition of the true nature of their being--will enter the sky along with the whispering of trees in the wind. Of course the wind in the trees outlasts the chant of men. Their blood fails within the only paradise they shall ever know, but the paradise endures. Mortality is the source of all their pleasure, including that of "heavenly fellowship." When the speaker insists that "the dew upon their feet" tells us "whence" man came and "whither" he shall go, he is denying that there should be speculation about the origin of man or his destiny beyond a corporeal state.
At the beginning of the second stanza, the speaker asks "Why should she give her bounty to the dead?" This question is answered in one way by Pascal's "Wager." But Stevens has come to a different conclusion, one that challenges the assumptions of Pascal and all others who project man's consciousness beyond death. He denies the possibility of an "imperishable bliss" and also expresses the genuine value of bliss that is perishable. He reinforces these points in the final stanza, where he accounts for the death of Christ (the specific dead person to whom the woman was tempted to "give her bounty") and restates the position of humanity in the universe:

She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where He lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.

The identity of the voice in the first lines is uncertain to me. It could be that of the speaker—certainly the woman has heard his other words. But I prefer to think that it is the human situation itself speaking to the woman, telling her that Christ was merely another man, whose death possesses no more significance for the living than any other death
does. Death is necessary, and in many poems Stevens insists that it should not be mourned. We are dependent on "day and night," life and death; we are "of that wide water," it is "inescapable." Still, life offers us requital to desire, the sight of deer on mountains, quail whistling, berries ripening. These pleasures can be blocked by our anxiety over the temporariness of earthly life; but if we discipline ourselves to accept the relation between death and beauty, life becomes easier. The last image reminds us of calm death in the natural world. It is also an example of the beauty that perishes.

Stevens' concept of death in "Sunday Morning" is easily inferred. He is obviously concerned to present it clearly and persuasively. In other, later work he is often more cryptic, leaving out the slogans and the careful argument. The extent to which he repeats the ideas of "Sunday Morning" in other poems, however, is remarkable. But one idea developed in the later work qualifies this concept of death.

9For the idea that death is the end of the individual existence, see "Table Talk," "The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain," "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," "Emperor of Ice-Cream," "Waving Adieu, Adieu, Adieu," "Sonatina to Hans Christian," "Dutch Graves in Bucks County," and "Flyer's Fall." For the idea that death is the price of beauty, see "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery (XLIV)," "World Without Peculiarity," "Botanist on Alp (No. 2)," "Esthétique du Mal (V)." For reductio ad absurdem satires of the Christian concept of an afterlife, see "The Worms at Heaven's Gate," "Cortège for Rosembloom," and "To a High-Toned Old Christian Woman."
This idea concerns evil, a concept which the speaker in "Sunday Morning," flushed with his argument, relegates to a few lines in Stanza five. Looked at in terms of its finitude, life is not evil but a positive good. Death is not evil, either, for it keeps the value of life high. Here Stevens dissents implicitly from a frequently-voiced attitude toward death in the elegy and elsewhere, that death is a release from the evil of life. We see this idea in Shelley's Adonais, and again in Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." In this study we have seen it in Raine's "The Hollow Hill," and will see it frequently in coming pages. In his later work Stevens too attempts to fit this conception of death into his basic philosophy. He does not abandon his idea that death is "the mother of beauty," but seems compelled, perhaps by events of the thirties and forties, to consider evil. In "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas," for example, he speaks of "evil death" and "good death," and says, "Be tranquil in your wounds. It is good death / That puts an end to evil death and dies."¹⁰ "Evil death" seems to refer to the evil in life, including, perhaps, the suffering brought about by the death of others. "Good death" is actual death, the end of suffering. Perhaps it may also refer to all kinds of healing, the "death" of

wounds and sorrows. This concept of "evil" and "good" death can be reconciled to the earlier view that death is inseparable from life. Both conceptions hold that death is a form of renewal and cleansing, opening our senses and our imaginations to beauty during life, and washing away the evil we have been exposed to in the end. In this synthesis of ideas about death, Stevens avoids being simplistic.

Yet it is clear that Stevens, at least in terms of death, aspires to a system. The work of Sylvia Plath reveals no such aspiration. It is difficult to generalize her view of death because many of her poems express ambivalence toward it, and the conclusions of one poem differ radically from the conclusions of another. It is also difficult to know precisely what she believes death to be. In some instances she speaks of it as a form of birth; in others it seems to be annihilation. Death for Plath is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Unlike Stevens, who almost always speaks of abstract death rather than an actual event, Plath almost always treats it in particular terms. Moreover, besides being greatly concerned with her own death, she also speaks of it from several other perspectives, and these perspectives relate in several ways to her own death. For example she is concerned with violent murder, and often identifies with helpless victims such as the Jews in Nazi Germany or the occupants of bombed Hiroshima. She is concerned with the idea of sacrifice and redemption. Finally
she is concerned with death as an abandonment which brings about guilt and desolation in the survivors. We have seen in the previous chapter how the death of the other can impinge upon the death of the self in a number of complicated ways. We shall see more of this interconnection below.

Despite the complexities of Plath's responses to death, I believe that we can usefully categorize her as one who sees death as a relief from suffering. She does not express this idea directly, however, as do Whitman, Shelley, and Raine. Nor does she incorporate it into an opposing view, as does Stevens. She varies, distorts, and argues against the theme. Yet an examination of a number of pieces in Ariel will allow us to see that her basic tendency in regard to death is to "seek shelter in the shadow of the grave" from "the world's bitter wind."\(^{11}\) There is no need to go beyond the poetry to establish this point.

"Death and Co." expresses the poet's hesitation to accept fully a view that tempts her, the idea that death is an easy solution to the difficulties of living. She suddenly realizes that death is double. First is a version of the Grim Reaper, a figure with "balled"\(^{12}\) eyes who tries to tempt the poet with the "sweet" purity of dead babies.

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\(^{12}\)Ariel, p. 28. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
He reminds her of a condor. The second figure smiles and "wants to be loved." The poet's ambivalence here is not precisely experienced in the contrast between the two figures, since, as the title suggests, they work together to make death attractive both to those who are unhappy in life and those who, happy or not, dream of death as beauty. The ambivalence is rather in the poet's fear that she is being pressured to accept something which has been arranged to look good. She is attracted to death; but she is repulsed too, because she knows that she is supposed to be attracted.

If "Death and Co." shows the poet being suspicious of the attractions of death, "Tulips" shows this attraction being overcome in a different way. This poem is a reverse "Ode to a Nightingale"; instead of being drawn by beauty from life toward death, as is the speaker in Keats's poem, the woman in "Tulips" is drawn back from a death-like emptiness toward life by flowers that are put in her hospital room. Before they arrived, she had felt the peace that "the dead close on, finally".1

They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations. Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley I watched my tea-set, my bureaus of linen, my books Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head. I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.

She wants to continue to "efface" herself, but the tulips

13 Ariel, p. 11. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
call her back to a sense of herself. She cannot resist them. Her head between the pillow and the sheet is "an eye between two white lids that will not shut," a "stupid pupil" that "has to take everything in." When the tulips come, she notices that they are like her wound, and also like her heart, which "opens and closes / Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love for me." At the end of the poem the speaker is not reconciled to life entirely; but she is turned back from her pursuit of "numbness." The tears she sheds at the end of the poem are a sign of life returning.

On the other side of the ambivalence toward death is an ambivalence toward life. Plath does not often speak of the beauty of the world, but when she does, as in "Tulips," it seems unpleasant, almost a problem. Another example of this curious response is in "Poppies in October," in which the poet compares the flowers to the "red heart" of a woman in an ambulance, and calls them "a love gift / Utterly unasked for." At the end of the poem the poet still has not been able to fit the flowers into either the season or her view of existence:

O my God, what am I
That these late mouths should cry open
In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers.

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14 *Ariel*, p. 19. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
Besides being a neutral expletive, "O my God" hints ironically at the world-view toward which the flowers urge the speaker. Standing against this view, and also against the prettiness of "dawn of cornflowers," is the description of the sky "palely and flamily / Igniting its carbon monoxides." This image of a deadly universe, together with the reference to the "forest of frost," makes both the poppies and the speaker's response to them seem anomalous and very temporary.

In "Poppies in July, presumably a companion piece to the poem considered above, the poet has a different response to beauty, calling the flowers "little hell flames" and asking "Do you do no harm?" In a sense she is questioning the appearance of beauty, as in "Poppies in October," but she is also referring to the use of the flowers in making opiates. Throughout Ariel Plath has a keen eye for the gruesome aspect of ordinary life and its objects. She remembers the killing of Jews in images of soap, candle, and linen, compares the bandage over a cut thumb to a "Ku-Klux Klan babushka." She constantly links violent death to objects which are not ordinarily associated with it; roast lamb reminds her of the crucifixion of

\[^{15} Ariel, p. 81\]

\[^{16} See "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy." See also the imagery of soap, candle, and linen in the funeral scene of "Berck-Plage."\]

\[^{17} Ariel, p. 25.\]
Christ; autumn leaves make her think of Thermopylae. Add to this the references in "Daddy" and "All the Dead Dears" to the mysterious, ghoulish power which the dead wield over the living, and we begin to measure Plath's response to life. Murder is everywhere in history and nature, and is violent, mysterious, and causeless. The world is a dangerous place.

But active violence is largely a metaphor in Plath's poetry. Actuality is rather tedious, as in "Berck-Plage," the only elegy and longest poem in Ariel. This work contrasts with every other elegy examined in this study. Plath is only casually interested in the dead man, who is unidentified, not characterized, and only indirectly mourned. As the title suggests, the focus here is on setting, details of landscape, weather, and objects. But this setting transcends Berck-Plage, which Ted Hughes identifies as a combined resort beach and convalescent home in the north of France. Hughes suggests that the place was one of Plath's "nightmares stepped into the real world." He adds that the death which is described in the poem, and which seems to be set at Berck-Plage, is actually that of a neighbor in England. "In this poem that visit to the

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18"Mary's Song," Ariel, p. 45.

19"Letter in November," Ibid., p. 47.

beach and the death and funeral of our neighbor are combined. 21 We might say, then, that in "Berck-Plage" the setting stands for something larger than itself, just as in many elegies a particular death comes to represent something more than itself.

The details of setting which the poet selects are those which suggest absurdity, isolation, and helplessness. The poet is unable to appreciate others' pleasure, as is clear in this purposely-distorted image: "Electrifyingly-coloured sherbets, scooped from the freeze / By pale girls, travel the air in scorched hands." 22 Reflecting on noisy children, she says that her heart is "too small to bandage their terrible faults." Others fail to accept the world too. A priest walks on the beach, as alienated from the raw pleasure of a commercial resort as the poet, though for different reasons. His black boot "has no mercy for anybody" (21). A surgeon, with only a "facet of knowledge," is unable to save a dying man, who gets no help from his "weeping wife" (22) either.

With the mention of the dying man, the setting of the poem shifts from beach to funeral home, and finally to a cemetery. But the same implacable eye selects the same kinds of detail in all three places. Beginning a pattern


22 Ariel, p. 20. Further citations to this poem are to page numbers in this edition.
of imagery associating death and marriage, the poet says that the dead man is a "wedding-cake face in a paper frill" (22). Against the evasive consolation of the mourners, who say "It is a blessing, it is a blessing," the poet says, "This is what it is to be complete. It is horrible" (23). The speaker stands apart from this scene just as she stood apart on the beach. But unlike the widow, weeping openly but full of "blunt, practical" (23) thoughts, the elegist seems to be cauterizing an unexpressed grief. She sees a "pitiful candle" flickering in a window, and says that it is the dead man's tongue crying "remember, remember" (23).

And she thinks,

How far he is now, his actions
Around him like livingroom furniture, like a décor

They are flying off into nothing: remember us (23-24).

But despite the pathos of these lines, the speaker is unable to commit herself to any mitigation of the fact of death. Her alienation makes her merciless, as the images associating death and marriage suggest. We have already seen the comparison of the made-up face of the corpse and the face of a figure in a wedding cake. There is also a reference to "bride-flowers" at the funeral. But the final touch is even more grisly than these: "... the soul is a bride / In a still place, and the groom is red and forgetful, he is featureless" (25). The groom, death, seems to woo
and court, and then abandon. (He may be related to the ambitious salesman of "Death and Co.") The poet suggests through this image that the same qualities which characterize life—helplessness and isolation—may characterize death also. In the end, as the coffin is being lowered into the earth, "the sky pours into the hole like plasma." But "There is no hope, it is given up" (25). The image of an aborted rescue confirms the hopelessness of the situation.

In "Berck-Plage" Plath rejects both life and death. But the poem does not seem to me to be representative; it lies at the frayed edge of her sensibility. Another picture of death which expresses a rather different point of view is the penultimate poem in Ariel, "Edge," a description of the body of a dead woman and her two dead children. The poem can be contrasted to the short laments considered in Chapter two (e.g., Owen's "Futility," Stevens' "Emperor of Ice-Cream," Williams' "Death") and to Roethke's "Elegy for Jane," a lament considered in Chapter three. But "Edge" is not a lament. Besides the detached voice, the only observer is the moon, which "has nothing to be sad about."23 Moreover the woman's death is not viewed as an interruption or a strange development of her life or living flesh, as all of the above-mentioned laments view their respective death or corpse. Nor is the woman's dead body

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23 Ariel, p. 84. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
"complete" and "horrible," like the corpse in "Berck-Plage."

Instead,

The woman is perfected  
Her dead 

Body wears the smile of accomplishment.

Not only is the woman's suicide viewed as a triumph, or even a work of art; she has taken her children into death too, and this act is viewed in natural terms:

She has folded  
Them back into her body as petals  
Of a rose close when the garden 

Stiffens.

The image of the closing flower draws us back to the poppies of "Poppies in October," existing fragilely in a "forest of frost." Also the pattern of a parent killing a child may be compared to the situation depicted in "Daddy." Perhaps in "Edge" the speaker is accepting not only suicide but also the effect of a parent's death upon children. At any rate it is a grim poem, the "edge" indeed, the limit to which the view of death as relief from pain, a good to be sought, can be taken. But in this respect it is not unique in Plath's work. Two other poems which suggest her feeling that death is a rather awesome but on the whole satisfactory cure for life are "Getting There" and "A Birthday Present."

"Getting There" concerns the absurdity of bearing pain in a life that ends in death: "It is so small / The place
I am getting to, why are there these obstacles." Our sense of the "obstacles" of life is enhanced by the setting of the poem, a nightmarish journey on a train in "some war," threatened by the artillery of Krupp, bogged down in mud, cut off by fire. It is a thoroughly convincing setting. Eliot's sedate ecstasy in "Burnt Norton" seems incredible in this allusion to it:

Is there no still place
Turning and turning in the middle air,
Untouched and untouchable.

Early in the poem she compares the "inexorable" wheels of the train she is riding on to gods:

All the gods know is destinations.
I am a letter in this slot—
I fly to a name, two eyes.
Will there be fire, will there be bread?
Here there is much mud.

No one but the speaker has examined the basic conditions of her existence; no one has determined that her life is going anywhere but to the grave. In the end she imagines taking a shortcut to this destination. She steps

from this skin
Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces

Step to you from the black car of Lethe,
Pure as a baby.

"Bandages, boredoms, old faces" is a curiously mild description of the sufferings of life, particularly in view of the rather hyperbolical metaphor of this life as a

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24 Ariel, p. 37. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
journey through a muddy, confusing war. But "black car of Lethe" picks up the train imagery, besides suggesting that the source of the relief is oblivion. But this view of death is complicated by the image of the dead person becoming "as a baby." I shall have more to say about this shortly.

In "A Birthday Present" the speaker expresses her eagerness for death by asking for it as if it were a gift and she a child. The comparison is striking, not only because it is a strong death wish, but also because it suggests that the speaker wants death whatever it may be, without knowing what it is.

Toward the middle of the poem, the figure who is addressed throughout becomes, temporarily, the focus:

I know why you will not give it to me,
You are terrified

The world will go up in a shriek, and your head with it,
Bossed, brazen, an antique shield,

A marvel to your great-grandchildren.
Do not be afraid, it is not so.  

Here the poet addresses all those whom she knows might be affected by her death. Presumably she cannot have her "gift" because of these people; they will be harmed in mysterious ways if she takes her life, so she pretends that they are withholding her death.

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25Ariel, p. 43. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
The detaining world also takes the form of an adding machine which "must stamp each piece in purple," and will not "let something go and have it go whole." But the poet comes back from this rather strained comparison to state explicitly what she has been talking around up to this point:

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.
If it were death

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes.
I would know you were serious.

There would be nobility then, there would be a birthday,
And the knife not carve, but enter

Pure and clean as the cry of a baby,
And the universe slide from my side.

The speaker's directness occurs within the dramatic situation; it is not a violation of it. She is making a final attempt to persuade the "you" to give up the gift. She pretends to know what the gift is in order to make the withholding meaningless. She says what she hopes it is, reveals how much she would value it, how death would give nobility both to the giver and to the receiver. "There would be a birthday," concludes the speaker in a final attempt to cajole the other into giving her her death. But the line also suggests a "birthday" into death, a celebration marked not by the cutting of a cake, but the cutting of flesh.
The last lines of "A Birthday Present" raise a question about Plath’s view of the meaning of death for the dead. On the one hand, there is the suggestion of another life in reference to the day of death as a "birthday," and again in the image of a baby which is associated with death. On the other hand, the last line seems to suggest that death will be an end. Of course the line may be taken as saying that the self will continue in another mode, outside of the universe. The poet does not seem to feel obliged to choose, as Stevens and Eliot, for example, do, between death as a continuation of consciousness and death as utter oblivion.

We see a similar straddling of categories in the last lines of "Getting There" (see p. 155). Again there is the image of the baby, this time used to describe the dead self. But the nature of this self is not clear. We see it having lost its memory and stepping into death. Will it survive the step? Earlier in the poem death is described as a place "so small," in contrast to the "Russia I have to get across." Does this difference symbolize the loss of consciousness? loss of self?

Taken as a whole, the references to death in Ariel seem to describe a loss of consciousness but a continuation of the self in a purified, invulnerable state. There are large exceptions to this general conception, the largest of which is the description of the jilted soul in "Berck-Plage"
(see p. 152). This image is horrifying not only because of the description of death, but also because it suggests that the dead are conscious in a vacuum. More typical is the "perfected" woman in "Edge," or the various descriptions of "heavens" where the dead exist without knowledge or memory, as in "a heaven, / Starless and fatherless, a dark water"; the black amnesias of heaven; and the vision of the self, its "selves dissolving, old whore petticoats," being transported "To Paradise."

For the most part the self after death exists in isolation. In "Lesbos" the speaker satirizes an enemy's concept of unity after death, saying "Even in your Zen heaven we shan't meet." But the title poem of Ariel describes a glorious transcendence of the self into a higher communion with other things. "Ariel" begins in predawn darkness, shifts in the second stanza to a ride on a horse. The poet declares her unity with the horse, and the horse's unity with the earth. About halfway through the poem the poet leaves the horse, but continues to move swiftly: "Something else / Hauls me through air." Here she experiences

26"Sheep in Fog," Ariel, p. 3.
29Ariel, p. 32.
30Ariel, p. 26. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
death. As in so many other instances, she pictures the act of dying as a release from the problems of her earthly existence:

Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

White
Godiva, I unpeel—
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

But in this dying there is an element that we have not seen before:

And now I
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas, 
The child's cry

Melts in the wall. 
And I 
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies  
Suicidal, at one with the drive
Into the red

Eye, the cauldron of morning.

Her identification with landscape and the natural process of evaporation is a new, mystical element in our picture of her conception of death. That the poem begins in morning darkness and ends in morning light with the speaker flying into the "Eye" (a new "I"?) suggests that, at least in this poem, death is to light as sunlight is to darkness. There is also the hint that this new life in death involves some sort of awareness.
The Functions of Apotheosis in Modern Elegies and Other Poems

At the end of "Ariel," the speaker appears briefly as a part of nature, "at one" with the evaporation of morning dew. The lines are almost posthumous speech, self-apotheosis. At least they are a metaphor of a particular openness to death, based on an intuitive or mystical perception that in death we become one with nature. Other poets have felt this way, obviously, and have expressed the feeling through the device of apotheosis. At this point I will compare the uses of this device by poets with differing attitudes toward death.

Apotheosis is the device, common in the elegy, of revealing a dead person in nature, sometimes as a god or a helpful spirit, sometimes merely as a part of natural processes. The most familiar use of the device is as a part of the triumphant discovery that death is not actually what it appears to be, as in the following passages from Adonais and In Memoriam (see also the apotheosis from "Lycidas," already quoted on p. 18):

He is made one with Nature; there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never wearied love
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.31

31 Poetical Works, p. 441.
Thy voice is on the rolling air;  
I hear thee where the waters run;  
Thou standest in the rising sun,  
And in the setting thou art fair.

What art thou then? I cannot guess;  
But tho' I seem in star and flower  
To feel thee some diffusive power,  
I do not therefore love thee less.

My love involves the love before;  
My love is vaster passion now;  
Tho' mix'd with God and Nature thou,  
I seem to love thee more and more.

Far off thou art, but ever nigh;  
I have thee still, and I rejoice;  
I prosper, circled with thy voice;  
I shall not lose thee tho' I die.  

In each of these passages, the poet not only asserts that
his subject is a part of nature, but also reveals the source
of this post-mortem existence by defining the relationship
between the dead and a divinity. The dead are the re-
deemed in Milton's view; Lycidas "mounted high, / Through
the dear might of Him that walked the waves." A more elab-
orate account is provided by Shelley: Adonais "is a pres-
ence to be felt and known / In darkness and in light, from
herb and stone," because "that Power" which "wields the
world" has taken Adonais' being "to its own." Therefore
the dead shepherd is a part of the spirit evident in nature.
Finally, Arthur Hallam is "mix'd" with both God and Nature
(science had separated the two). In each of these

32 Poems of Tennyson, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Boston: 
instances, the dead person's persistence in nature is but a corollary of his immortality.

But apotheosis may also be used purely metaphorically, to express acceptance of a particular death on the part of the bereaved. We see this at the end of Hayden Carruth's "My Father's Face," when the poet imagines himself in the company of "the god of winter," "someone / with a down-turned smile...," a characteristic of the poet's dead father. Clearly Carruth does not mean to say that his father is actually present, only that the man is no longer missed so keenly. This point is made more explicitly in C. Day Lewis's elegy A Time to Dance:

Each stopping-place
Wears his look of welcome. May even find,
When I come to the snow-line, the bitter end,
His hand-holds cut on death's terrific face.

Distant all that, and heaven a hearsay word—
Truth's fan-vaulting, vision carved in flight
Perhaps, or the last delirium of self-loving.
But now a word in season, a dance in spite
Of death; love, the affirmative in all living,
Blossom, dew, or bird.
For one is dead, but his love has gone before
Us, pointing and paving a way into the future;
Has gone to form its very flesh and feature,
The air we shall breathe, the kindling for our fire.

Nothing is lost.33

In the first four lines, Lewis's exuberance leads him to conjecture. But he qualifies his fantasy with "may" and in the following three lines voices his skepticism. When he

returns to expressing his consolation, he is vaguer. "His love has gone before us" might be an assertion about a post-mortem condition, but it might also be a tribute to what the dead person accomplished while alive. In the end the poet covers himself carefully by the general principle, "Nothing is lost." It seems clear that Lewis is not talking about an afterlife specifically, but rather about his own feeling that his friend's death is not an absolute loss.

Winfield Townley Scott's "Memento" is an even clearer example of the use of apotheosis to express acceptance of death rather than a belief in a life beyond the grave. Here there is no question of an afterlife. At one point the speaker looks down at his dead mother's face and realizes that "memory" and "knowledge" are gone from it. This insight makes him think of his own death, but this thought does not bother greatly:

You remember fright and agony were here
But pain cannot be posthumous for her.
The burial signal is thunder and rain. Say Sleep.
Sleep, lady: no longer remember even me.

In reading the first two lines, "you" and "her" should be stressed in order to express the contrast between the poet's point of view and that which he is ascribing to the dead.

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34 New and Selected Poems, ed. George P. Elliott (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 73. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
At the end of "Memento," however, the poet seems to suggest that his mother is reborn in the landscape. A closer look, however, reveals that he is not actually asserting that she is embodied there, only that he is able to think of her in a setting which suggests consolation:

The moonlight seems to shudder. It is the sea's Intermittent pausing pulse, its flicker Of nerves, that shudder. And even these remote As a sleeping face watched dimly in a mirror; Watched carefully as though it might awaken Although I know it will only disappear And the empty glass swirl to bluish fog Quick to be lost in the moon's nameless color, Although I think that deep within these waters Stares the figurehead of a nameless lady Whose long farewells speak from her lidless eyes. Now this wide glass of sea is voyageless. The lightship blinks for nothing. The bell-buoy Bangs for danger of emptiness and home. At the cliffbase the tide is a caress, Neither impersonal nor aggressive now But in an alien armistice feigning peace. This headland now embodied by the dead Moves in the kinship of the moon which is A memory of light and which is love, And gifted with roses' wild recurrent grace Sets forth toward day on the rugosen sea.

The speaker begins this passage with a personification of the sea; the moon is its pulse, the flicker of its nerves. He compares what he sees to the image of a sleeping face in a mirror. Through this figure the poet defines what he is looking for—not his mother in life, but an image of her in death. He knows that even this perception is an illusion, however, though he continues to perceive it. But the "figurehead" is without a name and with "lidless eyes"; in short it is scarcely human, much less individual. Furthermore
the details which follow in the lines beginning "Now this wide glass . . ." undercut the personification which the poet has made. He still feels, however, that in the headland his mother persists. We are not required to see it that way. His perception of it is a magic light, a part of the scene like the moonlight which makes the headland "set forth toward day on the rugosen sea."

I have said that apotheosis may be used to express either the belief that the dead have been reborn, or the feeling that a survivor has accepted a death. A third use of the convention is to express the belief that the dead are beings without consciousness.

Apotheosis may be used to express the fear of the loss of the conscious self. It seems to me that this use is exemplified in the last stanza of Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal":

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.35

The difference between the dead person as she was, one who seemed beyond time, and what she is, blind, dumb, passive in a continuous natural event which resembles the operation the operation of a mill (the rocks and stones suggest grinding teeth), seems to me to express horror at the fate of

35The Norton Anthology of Poetry, p. 569.
the human being after death. Essentially the same emotion is articulated in "Ode to the Confederate Dead." Here the speaker is haunted by the association of the leaves and the numerous dead soldiers, a relationship which reduces the lives and deaths of the dead to that of mere natural phenomena. The fact that the dead bodies "feed the grass row after rich row," or that the "salt of their blood / Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea"36 horrifies the speaker. In his analysis of his own poem, Tate interprets the life which the corpse participates in after death as "life only in so far as it is the source of the lowest forms of life, . . . undifferentiated, halfway between life and death."37

In strong contrast to this attitude of horror at rejoining the natural cycle are Dylan Thomas and Robinson Jeffers, who express acceptance and even joy at the prospect of becoming part of the natural world.

Robinson Jeffers was concerned with death throughout his career. But he did not often consider particular death, with one significant exception. When his wife died late in the poet’s life, he wrote Hungerfield, a fictional verse narrative which he relates to his wife’s death. The

36 The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems, p. 17.
elegy begins with an attempt to seek easy solace through
a reversal of time:

If time is only another dimension, then all that dies
Remains alive; not annulled, but removed
Out of our sight. Una is still alive.
A few years back we are making love, greedy as hawks,
A boy and a married girl. A few years back
We are still young.38

But this notion does not satisfy the poet. Eventually he
abandons it for the stark realization that "Una has died"
and he has irreversibly lost an organic part of his life.
He compares himself to "a leafless tree" (4), an image
which corrects his earlier wishful thinking.

To "drug" (6) memory Jeffers tells a story about a
strong man, Hungerfield, who fights Death for his mother's
life, and wins, temporarily. The old woman does not ap­
preciate the feat, however; she tells her son that he was
wrong to stop Death: "My beautiful dark angel, my lord and
love, who like a bridegroom had come for me, / You took
him by the throat and killed him" (13). Far from being
killed, however, Death begins to destroy his antagonist's
cattle. And one evening Hungerfield returns from a fun­
eral to find that Death has taken his wife and son. In a
rage he kills his brother; then, seeing his situation, he
fires his house and is immolated in the flames. Jeffers' com­
ment shows that he approves of Hungerfield's suicide:

38 Hungerfield and Other Poems (New York: Random House,
1954), p. 3. Further citations to this poem are to page
numbers in this edition.
It is thus (and will be) that violence
Turns on itself, and builds on the wreck of violence
its violent beauty, the spiring fire-fountain
And final peace, grim in the desert in the lion's
carcass the hive of honey (23).

The mother lacks the courage to stay in the burning
house. "Hating both life and death" (23), she lives two
long years after the holocaust.

The point of the narrative seems to be that there are
great dangers in wishing the dead alive. At the end of the
poem, Jeffers accepts the death of his wife:

Here is the poem, dearest; you will never
read it nor hear it. You were more beautiful
Than a hawk flying; you were faithful and a lion
heart like this rough hero Hungerfield. But
the ashes have fallen
And the flame has gone up; nothing human remains.
You are earth and air; you are in the beauty
of the ocean
And the great streaming triumphs of sundown; you
are alive and well in the tender young grass
rejoicing
When soft rain falls all night, and little rosy-
fleeced clouds float on the dawn.--I shall be
with you presently (23).

Jeffers' concept of death is succinctly defined by the
lines "nothing human remains" and "you are alive and well."
With these statements the poet reveals his belief that
the dead have a non-conscious existence; and for the most
part the language of the apotheosis is faithful to this
concept. But in two places the poet may unwittingly use
terminology that is too closely associated with conscious-
ness. When he says that his wife is "alive and well,"
he risks suggesting a normality by employing a rather stale
phrase of recovery rooms and greeting cards. Also the assertion that "I shall be with you presently" may suggest a reunion other than what the poet seems to be thinking of.

In one other instance it seems to me that Jeffers has distorted his concept of non-conscious post-mortem existence. "Inscription for a Gravestone" is a description of existence within nature spoken by the dead person himself. This voice defines itself as "inhuman," "undressed . . . of laughable prides and infirmities . . . like an athlete stripping for the race." The "ravel of nerves" which provided pain and pleasure is gone, but the voice does not miss it:

. . . all the rest is heightened, widened, set free.
I admired the beauty
While I was human, now I am part of the beauty.
I wander in the air,
Being mostly gas and water, and flow in the ocean;
Touch you and Asia
At the same moment; have a hand in the sunrises
And the glow of this grass.
I left the light precipitate of ashes to earth
For a love-token.39

It seems to me that the poem communicates something that at first glance it seems to be denying. Letting the dead being speak creates a sense of consciousness, so that this particular apotheosis resembles one in which a human being is turned into a god or spirit. Also, as in the last lines of Hungerfield, the language creates an illusion of

consciousness. When the speaker says that "all the rest is heightened, widened, set free," it is difficult to avoid thinking that the dead person himself feels liberated. Similarly the active verbs "wander," "flow," "left," and particularly "have a hand in" lead to the feeling that the dead keep the essential powers of the living.

In other poems Jeffers is much more successful in conveying undistorted his conception of death. For example, in the last section of "Meditation on Saviors," he answers the question, Are not the dead to be pitied?

No: if they lived forever they would be pitiable:
But a huge gift reserved quite overwhelms them at the end; they are able then to be still and not cry
And having touched a little of the beauty and seen a little of the beauty of things, magically grow
Across the funeral fire or the hidden stench of burial themselves into the beauty they admired.

Themselves into the God, themselves into the sacred steep unconsciousness they used to mimic
Asleep between lamp's death and dawn, while the last drunkard stumbled homeward down the dark street,

They are not to be pitied but very fortunate; they need no savior, salvation comes and takes them by force,
It gathers them into the great kingdoms of dust and stone, the blown storms, the stream's-end ocean.

With this advantage over their granite grave-marks, of having realized the petulant human consciousness Before, and then the greatness, the peace; drunk from both pitchers; these to be pitied? These not fortunate?

But while he lives let each man make his health in his mind, to love the coast opposite humanity.  

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40 The Selected Poetry, p. 480.
Jeffers expresses the fate of human beings after death almost as a form of pantheism, in which the individual "magically grows" into the "God" of the natural world. But he is careful to assure us that they do not take their knowledge or their sentience with them. They are fortunate for having been aware, but are also fortunate that they are no longer aware.

In the long verse narrative Cawdor, Jeffers offers a version of the process by which living organisms "grow... into the beauty they admired." Here for example, is an account of an old man's brain after his organs have ceased to function:

Gently with delicate mindless fingers
Decomposition began to pick and caress the unstable chemistry
Of the cells of the brain; Oh very gently, as the first weak breath of wind in a wood; the storm is still far,
The leaves are stirred faintly to a gentle whispering;
the nerve-cells, by what would soon destroy them, were stirred
To a gentle whispering. Or one might say the brain began to glow, with its own light, in the starless Darkness under the dead bone sky; like bits of rotting wood on the floor of the night forest
Warm rains have soaked, you see them beside the path shine like vague eyes. So gently the dead man's brain
Glowing by itself made and enjoyed its dream.41

The natural imagery employed to illustrate the process of declining consciousness also reveals the material basis

41Cawdor and Medea (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 41. Further citations to this poem are to page numbers in this edition.
of the process. The narrator notices a parallel between his concept and that of Christianity, but he carefully distinguishes the two:

The ecstasy in its timelessness
Resembled the eternal heaven of the Christian myth,
but actually the nerve-pulp as organ of pleasure
Was played to pieces in a few hours, before the day's end. Afterwards it entered importance again
Through worms and flesh-dissolving bacteria. The personal show was over, the mountain earnest
continued
In the earth and air (42-43).

But men are not the only creatures whose passage between life and death is significant. The narrator describes the death of a caged eagle as a significantly more "mystical" experience than the death of the man:

What leaped up to death,
The extension of one storm-dark wing filling its world
Was more than the soft garment that fell. Something had flown away. Oh cage-hoarded desire,
Like the blade of a breaking wave reaped by the wind, or flame rising from fire, or cloud coiled lightning
Suddenly unfurled in the cave of heaven (99).

The eagle's "Phantom" (101) rises toward the sun, seeing the earth dwindle below it, moving out of time so that it sees "Growth and decay alternate forever" (101) before it "struck / Peace like a white fawn in a dell of fire" (102).

In some senses this description of the eagle's apotheosis resembles a Platonic conception of the spirit going to a higher world when it is released from the body. But the "spirit" of the dead being bears little relation to the earthly self, and the "higher" world is simply nature.
In Dylan Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, By Fire, of a Child in London," the speaker's basic strategy is to link the death of the child with all death, including his own—in this way coping with the particular violence of the child's death. The association of deaths is made in the first sentence of the poem:

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.42

The sense of this passage—more than half the poem—is that the poet is not going to mourn the child until he has experienced death too. The language is used very carefully to ameliorate death. It is the "humbling" administered to all by the "fathering" darkness. Death is also described with religious imagery without being tied to transcendence; that is, there is no promise of paradise in "Zion of the water bead / And the synagogue of the ear of corn." There is, however, an aura of reverence in a naturalistic process which is the precise opposite of the horror of Allen Tate

42The Collected Poems, p. 112. Further quotations from this poem are from this edition.
in "Narcissus as Narcissus" when he refers to life that is "halfway between life and death."

A more important use of religious imagery occurs later in the third stanza when the poet decides that to create another "elegy of innocence and youth" would be to "blaspheme down the stations of the breath." The figure here is created by substituting "breath" for the expected "cross." It suggests that the dead are lucky to be out of the pain of life. Therefore it is blasphemous (i.e., sentimental) to pretend that living is something finer than it actually is in order to express one's sorrow for the dead.

Having managed to express a conciliatory attitude toward death in the first three, Thomas turns in the final stanza toward the dead child in nature:

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.

The first line of this stanza emphasizes that the child is dead as others are; there is no difference between her and those who died thousands of years ago. This concept is echoed by a secondary implication of the final line: whatever particular shape it takes, all death is like "the first death." All the dead, the poet suggests in the next lines, are clothed, befriended, and mothered by the earth. But should these lines be taken as an invitation to
humanize the state of the dead girl, project upon her an awareness that would appreciate these comforts, the last lines ought to discourage such a reading. The water does not mourn; in this absolute denial of the pathetic fallacy, the source of so much comfort in the elegy, we are brought sharp up against the insentience of nature, of which the girl is now a part. And in the final line, the difference between her state and ours is brought into even sharper focus. There is no death after the first death because death is an idea of our consciousness, and the girl has none.

Kaddish for Naomi Ginsberg 1894-1956

Besides being an elegy, perhaps the most important of the twentieth century, Allen Ginsberg's Kaddish is also a history of the poet's mother, a distillation of the vicissitudes of her life, including nervous breakdowns, a paranoia inflamed by a left political perspective, a broken marriage, and isolation from her family as they learned to defend themselves from her. In terms of its view of death, Kaddish reconciles most of the disparate attitudes and conceptions which we have seen up to this point. Like Eliot in Four Quartets he conceives of life as a part of something larger. But like Stevens he denies consciousness after death, and emphasizes the value and the possibilities of
human existence. In this last respect he also resembles Roethke in "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North American Sequence." Like Raine, Plath, and Thomas, he also considers death a release from suffering. Like Auden in "In Memory of W.B.Yeats" and Lowell in "For the Union Dead," Ginsberg views death from the point of view of the living (though not exclusively), examining his mother's life in its relationship to society and history. But he also views death from an extremely personal point of view; like Carruth's "My Father's Face," Kaddish is the record of a son's struggle against a dead person who haunts him.

Ginsberg's view of death from the perspective of the dead is summarized in the following early poem:

In Death, Cannot Reach What Is Most Near

We know all about death that we will ever know because we have all experienced the state before birth. Life seems a passage between two doors to the darkness. Both are the same and truly eternal, and perhaps it may be said that we meet in darkness. The nature of time is illuminated by this meeting of eternal ends.

It is amazing to think that thought and personality of man is perpetuated in time after his passage to eternity. And one time is all Time if you look at it out of the grave.

In the first four lines the poet explicitly denies post-mortem consciousness. But there is more to his concept of death than simple negation; death is not nothing, but rather an eternal state, identical to "the state before birth," perhaps a merging of separate identities, perhaps a condition of inability and frustration, as the title suggests. But the poet's main concern is not with the precise nature of death. He is chiefly interested in time from the perspective of the "grave." Significantly time and life are viewed exclusively in spatial terms. "Life seems a passage between / two doors to the darkness." Death is "passage to eternity," suggesting movement away from life and time. Finally time can be "looked at" from the grave. The idea of life being a space in the dark is hardly new, but usually the image is employed to suggest the "smallness" of life. Ginsberg uses it instead to expand the individual life. The tone of the poem is not tragic but speculative.

Most of Ginsberg's interpretation of his mother's death from her point of view is contained in the "Proem" to Kaddish. Much of what he says there echoes the preceding poem, though in some ways he goes beyond it. For example, here he tries to express the meaning of his mother's loss of consciousness in death:

To go where? In that Dark--that--in that God? a radiance? A Lord in the Void? Like an eye in the black cloud in a dream? Adonoi at last, with you?
Beyond my remembrance! Incapable to guess! Not merely the yellow skull in the grave, or a box of worm dust, and a stained ribbon--Death's head with Halo? can you believe it?

Is it only the sun that shines once for the mind, only the flash of existence, than / then? / none ever was?

Nothing beyond what we have--what you had--that so pitiful--yet Triumph

to have been here and changed, like a tree, broken, or flower--fed to the ground--but mad, with its petals, colored, thinking Great Universe, shaken, cut in the head, leaf stript, hid in an egg crate hospital, cloth wrapped, sore--freaked in the moon brain, Naughtless.

No flower like that flower, which knew itself in the garden, and fought the knife--lost. . . .

The uncertainty about death which is expressed in the first lines of this passage is basically a curiosity about the meaning of the loss of consciousness. The poet understands that his questions will never be answered; they are beyond his remembrance because he has already been "dead" before birth, and when he is "dead" again, it will be as if "none ever was." This curiosity about the state of death distinguishes Ginsberg from Stevens, but the younger poet resembles the older in his scorn for the traditional conception of an afterlife (combining a skull and a halo is a device which Stevens might have used), and also in his assertion that consciousness is valuable even though temporary. But Ginsberg insists on the value of life in the face of an enormous amount of suffering, while Stevens deals with the question of suffering in abstract terms.

44 (San Francisco: City Lights, 1961), p. 10. Further citations to Kaddish are to page numbers in this edition.
At the end of the "Proem," the poet "prays" to beings who do not hear and will not answer:

Magnificent, mourned no more, marred of heart, mind behind, married dreamed, mortal changed—
Ass and face done with murder.
In the world, given, flower maddened, made no Utopia, shut under pine, almed in Earth, balmed in Lone, Jehovah, accept.
Nameless, One Faced, Forever beyond me, beginningless, endless, Father in death. Tho I am not there for this Prophecy, I am unmarried, I'm hymnless, I'm Heavenless, headless in blisshood I would still adore
Thee, Heaven, after Death, only One blessed in Nothingness, not light or darkness. Dayless Eternity—
Take this, this Psalm, from me, burst from my hand in a day, some of my time, now given to Nothing—to praise Thee—But Death
This is the end, the redemption from Wilderness, way for the Wonderer, House sought for All, black handkerchief washed clean by weeping—page beyond Psalm—Last change of mine and Naomi—to God's perfect Darkness—Death, stay thy phantoms! (11-12)

In charged, sure phrases, the poet honors his mother and entreats a "God" who is forever beyond him to accept her into "dayless eternity." But the final clause suggests that he does not want these figures to become "phantoms." He wants to give his "Psalm" to "Nothing."

In Judaism the praying of the Kaddish helps to redeem the dead from the sufferings of Gehenna.45 But, since the poet obviously does not feel that Naomi needs such redemption, we may look for his purpose in writing in a different direction. After the "Proem," Ginsberg's emphasis is not upon death from the viewpoint of the dead.

45 The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1904, s.v., "Kaddish."
In fact, in the "Narrative" of Kaddish, we see the poet working out some aspects of his relationship to his mother. He is in "Gehenna," he needs to be redeemed. Like the speaker in Carruth's "My Father's Face," the poet in Kaddish is haunted and guilty.

Ginsberg gives us a much more detailed picture of why he should feel this way than Carruth does, however. He remembers wishing his mother "safe in her coffin" (15) when he was twelve years old. Years later, when the poet is in college, his mother becomes careless in her dress:

One time I thought she was trying to make me come lay her--flirting to herself at sink--lay back on huge bed that filled most of the room, dress up round her hips, big slash of hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions, appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like hideous thick zippers--ragged long lips between her legs--What, even, smell of asshole? I was cold--later revolted a little, not much--seemed perhaps a good idea to try--know the Monster of the Beginning Womb--Perhaps--that way. Would she care? She needs a lover (24).

Later her paranoia becomes intolerable and the poet is desperate to make her sane:

I pushed her against the door and shouted "DON'T KICK ELANOR!"--she stared at me--Contempt--die--disbelief her sons are so naive, so dumb--"Elanor is the worst spy! She's taking orders!"

"--No wires in the room!"--I'm yelling at her--last ditch, Eugene listening on the bed--what can he do to escape that fatal Mama--"You've been away from Louis years already--Grandma's too old to walk--" (26-27)

But the poet cannot "escape that fatal Mama" any better than his brother can. He remembers calling the police to have
her taken away when she finally becomes unmanageable. He rides to the station with her. Two years later he visits her in an asylum, where she has had a stroke and become suddenly, shockingly old:

O glorious muse that bore me from the womb, gave suck first mystic life & taught me talk and music, in the Song of the Natural Front--Tortured and beaten in the skull--what mad hallucinations of the damned that drive me out of my own skull to seek Eternity till I find Peace for Thee, O Poetry--and for all human-kind call on the Origin
Death which is the mother of the universe! (29-30)

Without applying the principles of psychoanalysis too rigidly, we can see that the son of a mother like Naomi Ginsberg might have trouble. Kaddish dramatizes the psychic struggle that takes place in the son's mind after the mother's death. In the end the speaker objectifies his mother, sees her in a way that alleviates his inevitable guilt.

That such an objectification is difficult is suggested by the style of the "Proem" and the "Narrative." The short, often incoherent fragments of these sections suggest the process of memories being "snatched up out of the storehouse of the subconscious against the speaker's conscious will,"46 as M.L. Rosenthal says. Perhaps to symbolize a psychic release, the texture of the poem changes radically at the end of the "Narrative." Gone are the

all-purpose dashes and the series of chaotic, fragmentary phrases and clauses. The "Hymmn"--the coda to the "Narrative"--and the last three sections of the poem present a much more orderly verbal texture.

The lengthy immersion in the details of Naomi Ginsberg's life gives weight to the idea that her death is a thing to be wished for. And the picture of paranoia which emerges from those details leads to the conclusion that her son could do nothing to help her. The poet realizes this when he recalls his desperate attempt to reach her:

I banging against her head which saw Radios, Sticks, Hitlers--the gamut of Hallucinations--real--her own universe--no road that goes elsewhere--to my own--No America, not even a world-- (27)

By placing his violence against her in the context of years of frustration and madness, the poet makes his act easier to understand and accept. He also begins to understand how much pain his mother caused others. Her husband, "hurt with 20 years Naomi's mad idealism," is forced to live alone "in dark rooms" (24). He is one of the "spies." Eugene is dumbfounded and helpless in the face of his mother's madness. Naomi's suspicions lead directly to the death of her sister. In expressing these facts, the speaker comes to see that he too is one of Naomi's victims. It is in this context that he learns to view his wishes for her death, thoughts of incest, neglect of her, and violence against her.
But in the process of disentangling himself from his ghost, the poet remembers another side of his mother. In her isolation he perceives a certain magnificence, as is shown in his account of his father trying to take her from a drugstore where she has broken down:

Naomi at the prescription counter defending herself from the enemy--racks of children's books, douche bags, aspirins, pots, blood--"Don't come near me--murderers! Keep away! Promise not to kill me!"

Louis in horror at the soda fountain--with Lakewood girl scouts--coke addicts--nurses--busmen hung on schedule--Police from county precinct, dumbed--and a priest dreaming of pigs on an ancient cliff?

Smelling the air--Louis pointing to emptiness?--Customers vomiting their cokes--or staring--Louis humiliated--Naomi triumphant--the Announcement of the Plot. Bus arrives, the drivers won't have them on trip to New York (17).

Ginsberg exploits the comic possibilities of his mother's behavior here and elsewhere, but he also seems to admire her passion. Like the "coke addicts," "busmen hung on schedule," and the priest whose secret explanation of madness is possession by the devil, Naomi is a monomaniac; but her obsession is grander than the others', and she believes in it more than the others believe in theirs. Though she is frightened, she triumphs over her embarrassed husband.

The actual source of Naomi's private visions is probably hidden within a past to which the poet does not have access. But he attempts to show that she is responding to the situation of the world. In a jangled, surreal
Way she responds to horrors which others cannot sense either because they are imperceptible to the tremors of European fascism, or insensitive to the real conditions of their lives. Her fear of Hitler, and her insistence that she is the object of countless plots, may be seen as mere paranoia; but they also may be prescient projection into the conditions of millions of persons in Europe. Certainly Naomi Ginsberg's response to Nazism is more accurate than that of Time, which named Hitler the "Man of the Year" late in the thirties. Naomi's paranoia may also be seen as the response of a sensitive person to a loveless environment: "I am a great woman—am truly a beautiful soul—and because of that they (Hitler, Grandma, Hearst, The Capitalists, Franco, Daily News, the 20s, Mussolini, the living dead) want to shut me up—Buba's the head of a spider network—" (26) Of course she mixes up real and imaginary threats here; but as M.L. Rosenthal says, "Naomi's story brings out in every possible way the psychopathology of the violence done by modern existence to the most vulnerable among us." Naomi in Kaddish is in this way related to the various characters in the earlier Howl. Ginsberg makes the connection clear (and shows his own sense of kinship with the group) in a prose comment which appears on the back of the volume in which Kaddish appears:

47 The New Poets, p. 110.
In the midst of the broken consciousness of mid-
twentieth century suffering anguish of separation
from my own body and its natural infinity of feel-
ing its own self one with all self, I instinctive-
ly seeking to reconstitute that blissful union
which I experienced so rarely I took it to be
supernatural and gave it Holy Name thus made hymn
laments of longing and litanies of triumphancy of
Self over the mind-illusion mechno-universe of
un-feeling Time in which I saw my self my own
mother and my very nation trapped desolate our
worlds of consciousness homeless and at war ex-
cept for the original trembling of bliss in breast
and belly of every body that nakedness rejected
in suits of fear that familiar defenseless living
hurt self which is myself same as all others
abandoned scared to own our unchanging desire for
each other. . . .

Though she is mostly the victim of "the mind-illusion
mechno-universe of un-feeling Time," Naomi also repre-
sents a certain limited "triumphancy of Self" over these
forces. Two days after her death, her son receives a let-
ter from her:

Strange Prophecies anew! She wrote--'The key
is in the window, the key is in the sunlight at
the window--I have the key--Get married Allen
don't take drugs--the key is in the bars, in the
sunlight in the window' (31).

Again Naomi confuses things, though here the mixture is
of the profound and the trivial rather than the true and
the imagined. Along with the mystical groping for the
meaning of sunlight is the advice of the comic Jewish
mother who does not understand her son at all. But im-
mediately after describing Naomi's "key," the poet sud-
denly sees the "key" too. In the context of the poem, the
mother's vision anticipates and seems to draw out the son's,
though the specific nature of the poet's vision suggests other sources, such as Blake and the Buddhist scriptures. At any rate the "Hymmn" relates to the "Narrative" exactly as the "Footnote to Howl" relates to Howl; both the "Hymmn" and the "Footnote" express a new level of insight which heals an acute awareness of Evil:

In the world which He has created according to his will Blessed Praised Magnified Lauded Exalted the Name of the Holy One Blessed is He! In the house in Newark Blessed is He! In the madhouse Blessed is He! In the house of Death Blessed is He! Blessed be He in homosexuality! Blessed be He in Paranoia! Blessed be He in the city! Blessed be He in the Book! Blessed be He who dwells in the shadow! Blessed be He! Blessed be He! Blessed be you Naomi in tears! Blessed be you Naomi in fears! Blessed Blessed Blessed in sickness! Blessed be you Naomi in Hospitals! Blessed be you Naomi in solitude! Blest be your triumph! Blest be your bars! Blest be your last years' loneliness! Blest be your failure! Blest be your stroke! Blest be the close of your eye! Blest be the gaunt of your cheek! Blest be your withered thighs! Blessed be Thee Naomi in Death! Blessed be Death! Blessed be Death! Blessed be He who leads all sorrow to Heaven! Blessed be He in the end! Blessed be He who builds Heaven in Darkness! Blessed Blessed Blessed be He! Blessed be He! Blessed be Death on us All! (32)

In blessing his mother's life and death, the poet demonstrates that he has overcome his ghost and learned to accept the past. But the "Hymmn" is more than this. The poet speaks of his mother's life and death and of all death apart from time, as if he no longer feared either existence or non-existence, as if, suddenly released from
contingencies, he could see human existence and fate from the outside, see them and bless them. In this context it is interesting to compare the "Hymmn" to a part of the traditional Kaddish:

    Magnified and sanctified be His Great Name in the world that is to be created anew when He will revive the dead and raise them up into life eternal, and when He will rebuild the city of Jerusalem and establish His Temple in the midst thereof, and uproot all false worship from the earth, and restore the worship of the true God. May the Holy One, blessed be He! reign in His sovereignty and glory during your life and in your days, and in the days of the whole household of Israel, speedily and at a near time. 48

A comparison between the two prayers points up the basic qualities of each. We see how the original sidesteps the issue of evil by promising a world "created anew" and a new life for the dead. Ginsberg's version of the prayer, on the other hand, focuses on the very matters which the original avoids. We look at the "Holy One" in the madhouse and the "house of Death" rather than in a promised better world; in homosexuality and paranoia rather than "in His sovereignty and glory." The essential difference is that in the traditional version we are promised a new life in death, while Ginsberg praises "God" not for anything that he will do, but simply because he has created the world "according to his will." Ginsberg's religious impulse is expressed spontaneously and directed toward the present.

48Quoted in The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v., "Kaddish"
In the original version we can see a type of Pascal's "Wager." Religion here is a strategy for the future, a good investment.

In a study of Ginsberg's poetry, Thomas F. Merrill says that Kaddish "voices its protest, not against cruel death, but against . . . life that drives one insane by its encouragement of mad idealisms and visions of something more."* In many ways this is a perceptive statement. Ginsberg disparages his mother's particular kind of political hopes throughout the poem, and in his imitation of the original Kaddish, he undercuts spiritual "visions of something more." But Merrill includes the letter which Naomi sent shortly before death among the visions which the poet protests. This is wrong, I believe. The poet uses that letter as the catalyst for his vision of the blessedness of all things, and in the third section of the poem, he interprets it:

"The key is in the sunlight at the window in the bars the key is in the sunlight,"
only to have come to that dark night on iron bed
by stroke when the sun gone down on Long Island
and the vast Atlantic roars outside the great call
of Being to its own
to come back out of the Nightmare--divided creation
--with her head lain on a pillow of the hospital
to die
--in one last glimpse--all Earth one everlasting
Light in the familiar blackout--no tears for this vision--
But that the key should be left behind--at the wind-
dow--the key in the sunlight--to the living--

that can take
that slice of light in hand—and turn the door—
and look back see
Creation glistening backwards to the same grave,
size of universe,
size of the tick of the hospital's clock on the
archway over the white door-- (33)

The letter functions here as Naomi's last words, her final message to the world as she is released from the "Nightmare" of her life. But she comes out of the craziness of "divided creation" a moment before she passes out of existence to see creation as a whole, and to recognize that everything comes from death and goes back into it. In the terms of "In Death, Cannot Reach What Is Most Near," Naomi looks at "one time" from the "grave" and sees that it is "all Time." The sunlight functions here as it does in "Sunday Morning," as a reminder to the living of the limits and possibilities of life.

The rest of the poem is decrescendo. The "Litany" adds further details to the portrait of Naomi Ginsberg and, in a rather subdued way, embodies the movement of the entire poem up to this point. It is the most carefully crafted part of the entire work; the poet seems to mean the increased attention to language and structure to symbolize his increased control over the past. The final section, the "Fugue," also has a quality of deliberateness and care. Here the speaker arrives at the site of his mother's grave (in the "Proem" was walking somewhere):
Caw caw caw crows shriek in the white sun over
grave stones in Long Island
Lord Lord Lord Naomi underneath this grass my
halflife and my own as hers
caw caw my eye be buried in the same Ground where
I stand in Angel (36)

No longer is the poet ridden with guilt about his mother.
Now her death is simply a sign of his own fate, a means
of reminding himself to look at time from the grave even
while he lives. Here he stands in the wind and listens
to crows, which echo his chant of "Lord" just as the
"wind through ragged leaves" echoes "the roar of memory"
a few lines later. The effect is fuguelike; it externalizes
the poem, minimizes the poet's consciousness. In
the last two lines he looks at his life as if he were,
indeed, dying:

caw caw all years my birth a dream caw caw New
York the bus the broken shoe the vast high-
school caw caw all Visions of the Lord
Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord Lord Lord Lord caw

caw caw Lord (36)
CONCLUSION

A Note on the Views of Death in the Modern Elegy

The points of view represented in the second and fourth chapters of this study are opposite. The poets examined in the second chapter view man as having absolute needs and being capable of receiving absolute satisfactions. Death is the entrance to an infinite world outside of nature, whose cycle of birth and decay is viewed as horrifying. The poets discussed in the last chapter see man as a finite being, limited in his needs and in his ability to satisfy those needs. Death is the end of his existence as a conscious organism, and it signals his re-entry into the "god" of the natural world. Many of the elegists considered do not hold all of the positions of either point of view. Only Eliot in Chapter two and Thomas and Jeffers in Chapter four express all of the attitudes of their respective groups.

These points of view are perennial. In the course of this study, I have referred to the first of them as the "traditional" view, because it has permeated Western thought since Christianity emerged as the dominant source of values.
I do not mean to suggest that the other viewpoint is new. It is not. Rather the view that man is a finite creature whose death is the end of his conscious existence is at least as old as classical and Eastern literature; and even though it has not been dominant in Western literature, it has been indirectly expressed through the influence of Roman and Greek literature especially. It has also been partly expressed in the fearful lamentation in such works as "Lycidas," Adonais and In Memoriam. I probably do not need to add that these works and others like them have expressed the spirit of the concept about as faithfully as J. Edgar Hoover has expressed the spirit of communism. Nevertheless it has survived in Western literature. But, at least until the twentieth century, it has not prevailed.

A close look at the modern elegy, however, suggests that the "traditional" view of death has lost much of its force. We see this enervation most clearly in the phenomenon of the disconsolate elegy, particularly Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead." There the narrator has grown away from the certainty that death does not touch the spirit. He simply cannot see what he wants and feels he needs to see. But even those works which support the traditional view of death show extraordinary caution in doing so. In "The Hollow Hill" and Four Quartets, for example, Raine and Eliot cope with death merely by striving to express the conviction that consciousness is immaterial.
When we think of the vast amount of material that has been written to "prove" the immortality of the soul, the divinity of Christ, the authenticity of the New Testament; when we consider the arguments that have been formulated to prove that man is rooted as deeply in the spirit as in the flesh -- then it seems remarkable that Raine and Eliot conduct their discussions on so narrow a basis, and conclude so tentatively. It is almost as if they were formulating a tradition of thought, not carrying one on.

What we see when we examine the elegies and other death-oriented poems of Stevens, Ginsberg, Thomas, and Jeffers is a full, vigorous expression of the concept of death as the end of conscious existence. Though each poet has his own emphases, each accepts the fact that living provides, at best, finite satisfactions. Each, furthermore, realizes that life is given value by the knowledge that death is final. Finally, each finds consolation in the painlessness of death.

The elegies considered in Chapter three seem to acknowledge finitude generally, even though they do not speak directly of the fate of the dead. By not speaking of the dead as dead, that is, they seem to acknowledge implicitly what the works discussed in the fourth chapter assert explicitly.
A Consideration of Hoffman's *The Mortal No*

This study has traced the same theme in approximately the same period of history as Frederick J. Hoffman's *The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination*. For the most part, Hoffman considers fiction, while I have been solely concerned with poetry. It seems very appropriate that at this point some attempt be made to compare conclusions.

Hoffman says that most western writers at the beginning of the twentieth century expressed and bestowed on their characters a quality which he calls "grace," a "condition of allowance, . . . a way of guaranteeing immortality."\(^1\) Despite the use of the term in the Christian religion, "grace" is not restricted to a single way of looking at the universe. Hoffman writes, "An important fact of modern attitudes is that religious metaphors and lines of thought have become secular; or they have been partially secularized, and religious and secular images are confused with one another" (6). His favorite example of this phenomenon is the use of Christian myth and dogma by social revolutionaries: "Heaven is in a majority of instances visualized as a practical achievement on earth. There are accretions of Eden, Five-Year Plans, and dams" (123). Another example of a non-religious "grace," the result of

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the "sharing of undying patterns" (16) of behavior with other human beings. Other sources of grace which we might add to Hoffman's list would include art, parenthood, and the conception of death as a mysterious destiny for some aspect of the self. Hoffman does not include these examples, but they seem as legitimately source of "grace" as those he does include. In fact it seems plausible to say that anyone who identifies with something outside of himself which has a reasonable chance of existing either in a hypothetical future or in a timeless but meaningful abstraction is in a position to possess "grace."

Hoffman's "grace" suggests very well the general requirements of man in relation to death. Eliot in *Four Quartets*, Auden in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," and Stevens in "Sunday Morning" all seek to show that there is something that death does not destroy. Precisely what this something is varies greatly, of course. But Hoffman deserves credit for articulating the principle which does not vary.

The Mortal No argues that "grace" has been undercut by the violence of modern life, and that this phenomenon is reflected in modern literature. This violence supposedly disrupts the balance between a person's expectations about death and his actual death, in this way causing him to doubt all "immortality." It also causes him to separate from the institutions responsible for violence. Hoffman admits that other factors may be involved in the loss of
"grace" (320), but he does not examine any of them in detail.

Obviously some writers respond to violence in the way that Hoffman describes. Hemingway does, and Hoffman makes a good argument for placing Kafka, Conrad, James, Dostoevsky, and Dreiser at various stages of the tradition of the effects of violence. But the thesis does not fit the poets discussed in this study at all, except for possibly Wilfred Owen in "Futility." In that piece the speaker is separated from a sense of order and reason—at least temporarily—because of the devastating efficiency of a bullet in the body of a friend. But although the poem is set in the first "modern" war, there is nothing peculiarly modern either about the fact of sudden death or the speaker's response to it. Similarly there is no evidence that Yeats in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" is disconsolate specifically because of the violence of his young friend's death. Karl Shapiro's "Elegy for a Dead Soldier" certainly does not demonstrate a loss of "grace," even though the speaker is in the front line during World War II. Finally, the poet most sensitive to the excesses of violence in the twentieth century—Sylvia Plath—shows a fairly firm, if disturbing, sense of "grace."

Hoffman theorizes about the effects of the loss of "grace" on modern man: "When man is disabused of eternity, he is forced back upon a contemplation of existence without
the assurance of a mitigating transcendence" (345). In this condition the self must satisfy the spiritual needs which society or God previously took care of: "One may say that the violent destruction of the possibilities of grace has forced upon the self the responsibility of adjustment to death" (4). In this context "the expectation of dying becomes a major issue" (317). One way in which the issue is often resolved: "As the belief in immortality ... becomes less and less certain, more attention is paid to time, and time achieves a spatial quality" (4). This new attention to time can take many forms (we saw one of them at work in Roethke's "Meditations of an Old Woman"; see pp. 108-109), but all of these forms are basically false coin, since man cannot "long suffer the thought of mortality in and of itself" (346).

The body of literature which I have used here, and the conclusions I have arrived at, do not support Hoffman's view of the function of the self. I would argue, at least in terms of the modern elegy and the related poems which I have considered, that except in very special circumstances, it is not through the self that an acceptable conception of death is developed, but rather through a more complex form of "grace."

Those poets who respond most strongly to Christianity, either positively or negatively, tend to view death basically from the point of view of the dead, and to see it in
terms of two possibilities: the eternal conscious life of
the individual human being, or nothingness. The extreme
limit of the consequences of this view is suggested in these
lines from a work I did not consider, E.A. Robinson's "The
Man Against the Sky":

If there be nothing after Now,
And we be nothing anyhow,
And we know that—why live? 2

Not all of the Christian-oriented poets state the issue
this bluntly; but a somewhat similar version of it may be
traced in Eliot's Four Quartets and Tate's "Ode to the
Confederate Dead."

Those poets for whom Christianity is not an immedi-
ate concern tend to develop more complex responses to "the
thought of mortality in and of itself." One type of re-
sponse is illustrated by the poets discussed in Chapter
three, who choose to examine death from the point of view
of the living, finding a basis for "grace" in this world
rather than some other. It simply does not seem accurate
to say that Auden in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" or Rexroth
in "Climbing Milestone Mountain" has been "forced back upon
a contemplation of existence without the assurance of a
mitigating transcendence." True enough, they have no as-
surance that what they base their conceptions of death on
will succeed or endure, but the hope alone seems sufficient.

"Forced back" suggests other phrases: "back to the wall," "desperate struggle," "fight to the finish." None of these words seem to fit what happens in most of the elegies of Chapter three.

Nor does it seem accurate to describe the adjustment to death in most of the poems of that chapter as improvised by the self. To say, for example, that Auden is relying on "self" to find an acceptable conception of Yeats's death is simply to ignore the tradition out of which Auden is writing. I suspect that the same may be said for most of the other elegies in that chapter. In a sense, however, the personal elegies discussed in Chapter three do seem to rely on self-discovery, particularly those in which the elegist is forced to work out a complicated relationship with a ghost. In Plath's "Daddy," Warren's "The Return," and Carruth's "My Father's Face," the speaker seems, in the words of John Berryman, "obliged to perform in complete darkness / operations of great delicacy" on themselves—though an understanding of Freud might be helping them. We can also include Roethke's "Meditations of an Old Woman" and "North American Sequence" is this category of "self"-imposed "grace." At least the speakers in these poems seem not to be following any method or text.

Another type of response to death by poets for whom Christianity is a relatively dim light is to explore the possibilities of death from the point of view of the dead. This probing into the intangible and uncertain is the course chosen by each of the poets discussed in Chapter four, as well as Raine in "The Hollow Hill" and Roethke in "Meditations of an Old Woman." We have already noted that Hoffman does not recognize the value of such an exploration. Yet, as this study has shown repeatedly, the conception of death as a mysterious continuation of the self can bestow "grace" too.

In short, at least from the point of view of this study, the conceptual structure of The Mortal No is flawed. But the book is replete with passages that seem to transcend its limitations. For example,

Almost all discussions of the problem of belief assume that the strength of a transcending imagination has been attacked by the reason, and all but destroyed by it. But it is perhaps more proper to say that the reason acts to create distrust of one form of imaginative construct, forcing the imagination to create others (345).

In terms of the study I have attempted: reason discredits the Christian conception of death, and certain poets at certain times express pain in finding a discrepancy between reality and expectation. But the imagination of other poets, who have not been led to expect the afterlife which Christianity promises, or who have grown away from the need for it, creates or affirms more mystical,
intuitive insights into death. And these seem as sufficient to these poets as the traditional conception seems to other poets.
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Primary Works


Secondary Works


