

Lamenting Loss: Public and Private Grief in the Elegies of Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and

Crane

by

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I dedicate this research to my grandfather, James William “J.W.” Moss, Sr. I love you
and will miss you daily until I see you in Heaven, Pappaw!

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the elegies of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), and Stephen Crane (1871-1900) by situating them within the literary elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century “Cult of Mourning.” Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and Crane are products of both traditions, and their elegies express the private and public mourning of a loved one, a popular public figure, or a catastrophic loss.

The introduction defines the elegiac conventions and history, placing the nineteenth-century elegy in conversation with previous elegies by revealing shifts in form and treatment of the elegiac conventions. Chapter one contextualizes the elegy within the nineteenth-century customs associated with the “Cult of Mourning.” Chapter two focuses on Poe’s less frequently examined elegies—“The Sleeper” (1831), “The Paean” (1831; revised as “Lenore” [1843]), “To One in Paradise” (1833), and “To Annie” (1849)—as well as his most famous poems—“The Raven” (1845) and “Annabel Lee” (1849)—in order to explore the extent to which Poe’s dark aesthetics influence his formal elegies. Chapter three progresses into the mid-nineteenth century by examining Dickinson’s elegies and discussing her intellectual interest in death and nature, along with her skepticism of institutionalized religion, as influences upon her elegies. Chapter four positions Alcott in this tradition and treats the influence of Gothic and domestic literature in her works. The final chapter establishes the role that Naturalism plays in Crane’s elegies and argues that the cynicism in his elegies anticipates Modernism.

This study reveals these poets to be products of both the elegiac literary tradition and participants in nineteenth-century mourning customs. In particular, this study

underscores the significant contributions of Dickinson and Alcott to a largely male-dominated elegiac tradition. By focusing on the lesser-known works of these authors within their literary and cultural context, this study makes an original contribution to the body of knowledge on Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and Crane as elegists and to our understanding of the interrelationship between literary and cultural expressions of mourning in nineteenth-century American literature.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Elegiac Tradition and Conventions	1
Chapter I: Mournful and Mysterious Postmortem Mementos	11
Chapter II: Mourning, Memory, and Melancholy in Edgar Allan Poe's Elegies	43
Chapter III: Melodies of Mourning: The Elegies of Emily Dickinson	68
Chapter IV: Mournful Melancholy: Louisa May Alcott's Elegies	96
Chapter V: Malicious Mourning: Elegies of Stephen Crane	117
Conclusion	132
Works Cited	136

List of Figures

Figure 1	Antebellum Tombstone (1859)	34
Figure 2	Civil War Tombstone (1863)	35
Figure 3	Child's Tombstone (1881)	36

Introduction: Elegiac Tradition and Conventions

The elegy has its roots in the ancient elegiac tradition that inspired the book of Lamentations, which mourned the demolition of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple in the sixth century B.C., continued with the third-century B.C. Greek elegiac poets, such as Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus, and subsequently endured in the seventeenth century with Milton's *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*. Although poets still write elegies today, the genre's popularity increased during the nineteenth century in America, whose culture was preoccupied with mourning. This study, therefore, will examine the culture of mourning as expressed in the American elegies of three significant poets, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Louisa May Alcott. However, before delving into their elegies, an examination of the elegiac conventions and an exploration of the cultural atmosphere of nineteenth-century America are necessary.

Nineteenth-century American elegies often express the grief arising from the death of family members due to disease outbreaks, the loss of loved ones in the Civil War, and the destruction the war left behind. From the Greek tradition to the early nineteenth-century American tradition, the couplet composed of a hexameter followed by a pentameter form evolved to include other formal meters, eventually including free verse. Moreover, the elegies retained the topics of lament, complaint, consolation, and they focused often on the last day of the beloved. As was characteristic of elegies from the Greek tradition, Nature in nineteenth-century elegies reflects the mourner's angst and merges with these conventions, which results in poems that express both a public and private mourning. Through the authors' interactions with the public and the public's interactions with the elegies, elegies become part of the nineteenth-century customs.

Moreover, because the poems contain the author's personal grief, the elegies allow the authors' private mourning to become public.

Although key elegiac conventions emerged over time, they are not standardized. This study's introduction traces these conventions and scholarship. In *Elegy*, David Kennedy asserts, "Elegy's shifting definitions have their roots in its classical origins. The word derives from the Greek *elegos* which, although it had some distant connotations to mourning, originally described a poem written in elegiac distich, a couplet composed of a hexameter followed by a pentameter" (3). In *Elegy and Iambus*, J. M. Edmonds discusses the development of the elegy since the sixth century and explains that the elegy later becomes used for "shorter and more 'occasional' themes" and form is not the focus (1). In *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism*, John Draper explains, "Since Classical meters hardly apply in English poetic nomenclature, 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" (7).

Nevertheless, key components have remained. In the elegy, lament serves as the essential component because it exposes and reflects the speaker's/author's inward grief, a key stage in the mourning process. Within these poems, as the speaker laments, so does nature. In the introduction to *The Pastoral Elegy: An Anthology*, Thomas Harrison perceives "[t]he role of Nature [as] having its origin in man's grief for the death in Nature, reappear[ing] in the frequent contrast between the cyclic course of the seasons from death to life, on the one hand, and the finality of human death on the other" (3). Lament, then, leads the speaker to seek consolation even while he complains that the loved one should not have been taken away. Additionally, the elegy often focuses upon

the desire to be at the bedside of the deceased to provide comfort as they pass away. The elegy serves both as a speaker's lament for his loved one's losing his or her life and as the speaker's self-lament for having lost a part of himself when the loved one dies. This study incorporates Peter Sack's *The English Elegy*, which traces these conventions. Other key elegy scholars include: John Draper, Dennis Kay, David Kennedy, G. W Pigman, David Shaw, and Clifton Spargo.

Chapter one places the elegy within the nineteenth-century context and customs. This time period became known as the "Cult of Mourning" because the set rituals made the people appear as though they were morbidly fascinated with death. The Civil War (1861-1865) and illness outbreaks during the century led to a high mortality rate, which resulted in a collective cultural preoccupation with mourning from which highly ritualized mourning customs emerged. The rituals included covering the inside and outside of the house with black crepe if an adult died and white crepe if a child died. Furthermore, the mirrors were covered, the clocks were stopped, and the windows were opened. The families also displayed lithographs of graveside scenes that contained symbols of lament, such as a weeping willow, and symbols of consolation, such as a dove. Additionally, the family requested a photographer take a postmortem photograph or artist paint a postmortem portrait. On some occasions, parents held their deceased infant in the photograph. The women also created wreaths out of the deceased's hair and hung them on the wall. As each member passed away, they fashioned another flower made from their loved one's hair. While the clocks were rewound, the windows closed, the crepe removed, and the layers of black clothing shed, the postmortem photographs, paintings, and hair wreaths were still displayed; thus, the atmosphere of mourning was

ever present. These customs were both private and public symbols of mourning. Although others saw the displayed items, each of the keepsake items represented an individualized mourning because it embodied that person's connection to the deceased. The photographs and paintings commemorated the deceased loved one as did the wreath of hair, which holds a memory for each departed loved one. In connecting the elegy to the nineteenth-century culture, this chapter considers key American elegy scholars, including Max Cavitch's *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* and Jeffery Hammond's *The American Puritan Elegy*. Both of these sources continue Sacks' work on the British Elegy. They take up where Sacks leaves off in his epilogue, "The English Elegy after Yeats; a Note on the American Elegy." Moreover, this chapter integrates the scholarship of Philippe Ariès, Lucy Frank, and Mark Schantz who place the effects of death into a cultural context.

In addition to these customs, elegies became part of the mourning ritual. In *Death in Early America*, Margaret Coffin explains, "It was popular to write elegies for deceased friends. Sometimes the local preacher considered it his responsibility to labor over such a tribute. The verses were attached to the bier or to the hearse, handed out as souvenirs to the mourners, read at the funeral, or published in local newspapers" (208). In *Sentimental Collaborations*, Mary Louise Kete describes how "[b]oth the elegy and the sentimental lyric have a more direct connection with a social act, mourning, than with other literary modes such as comedy, tragedy, or romance, whose social connections are either historical or metaphorical" (61). These poems reflected both the individuals' and the public's mourning. The high mortality rate influenced not only the general population but also the literary community.

During the nineteenth-century, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), and Stephen Crane (1871-1900) continue the elegiac tradition, and their poetry of mourning contributes to the “Cult of Mourning.” These authors’ elegies represent both a private and a public mourning of a loved one, a popular public figure, or loss due to the Civil War’s destruction. This study will look chronologically at each of these authors’ elegies. Some work has been done on Poe and the elegiac tradition by scholars, such as Benjamin Franklin Fisher and Philip Edward Phillips in *Approaches to Teaching Poe’s Prose and Poetry*. Additionally, James Stevens Curl and Louis O. Saum place Poe within the Victorian culture. However, more work needs to be done to expand his role in the elegiac tradition and to place Poe’s elegies within Nineteenth-century American culture. This study does so by looking at his lesser explicated poems. Moreover, Dickinson’s, Alcott’s, and Crane’s works should be added into the continuum of elegies. While scholars, such as John Cody and Daniel Hoffman, have looked at their themes of death, their elegies, which deviate from the elegiac meter, need to be analyzed to show the convergence with the elegiac tradition through their use of lament and consolation.

Chapter two focuses on Edgar Allan Poe’s less frequently examined elegies “The Sleeper (1831),” “The Paeon (1831),” which he later revised into “Lenore (1843),” “To One in Paradise (1833),” and “To Annie” (1849) after establishing the background for Poe’s use of the elegy in “The Raven” (1845), and “Annabel Lee” (1849) as a basis. In his biography, *Edgar Allan Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*, Kenneth Silverman explains Edgar Allan Poe’s connection to the nineteenth-century customs and contests, “While this cult [Nineteenth-Century Cult of Mourning] of memory helps

account for the large number of [Poe's] poems on death and the afterlife, it does not explain their special character" (73). He then contends that Poe diverges from the tradition because "[h]e [Poe] neglect[s] principle elements of the consolation literature of the time, especially its doting on the deaths of children, its delineation of Christian ideas of heaven, and its pervasive morals. Moreover, death throughout his poems is an ambiguous presence invariably intermingled with life" (73). While Silverman correctly asserts Poe does not focus on the death of children and does not conform to the generally held ideas of heaven and prevalent moralism, Poe's elegies can nevertheless be analyzed as part of mourning literature because they include lamentation, consolation, complaint, and they focus on the deceased's last day. Furthermore, Poe sets the precedent for Emily Dickinson and Louisa May Alcott, who also deviate from focusing solely on the death of children and on the traditional views of heaven. In his poems, Poe struggles with loss and desires to connect with a deceased loved one. Through his elegies, he describes the grave scenes of his dearly departed. Besides expressing a public lament, he voices a private lament of his mother, Eliza; the mother of a childhood friend, Jane Stanard; and his wife Virginia, which makes his focus on the death of the beautiful woman versus the typical nineteenth-century focus on the death of children seem logical. Specifically, Poe depicts death as sleep and expresses a desire to reunite with a deceased love one. He blends those elements with his aesthetic values of the death of a beautiful woman as the most beautiful topic in poetry, the repeated refrain, the speaker's frustration with living without the loved one, and the terror of the soul to craft his elegies.

After examining Poe's elegies, this study shows the progression of the elegy into the mid-nineteenth century through the poems of Emily Dickinson in the third chapter.

Although most of Emily Dickinson's poems were published posthumously, she wrote them during the time Poe wrote his or the decades following (mostly during the mid-1850s and early 1860s). Additionally, her elegies include lament and consolation, which places her in the elegiac tradition. Before addressing elegiac elements in Dickinson's poetry, we can see that although she was reclusive, she was not cut off from society. Furthermore, while her poems were published posthumously, they reveal her inward thoughts during the time she wrote them. She was affected personally by the deaths of her cousin, Sophia; Leonard Humphrey, Amherst School Principal; her only pet, Carlo; her parents, Edward Dickinson and Emily Norcross Dickinson; her friends Charles Wadsworth and Otis Phillips Lord; and her favorite nephew, Gilbert. Dickinson acknowledges and addresses death customs in "THE BUSTLE in a house," which reveals both the melancholy of death and her connection to the general public. In the poem, she describes the scene of a household after a death in the family as the "solemnest of industries / Enacted upon earth" and the soul as having to "sweep[...] up the heart" as they put "love away" that they cannot use "Until eternity" (3-8). Dickinson describes the bustle in the house after death and exposes her knowledge of how items put out for mourning, such as the black crepe and the uncovering of the mirrors, within the home were put away after the funeral to show how the ritual was to be completed. Moreover, when she parallels the house work to the inner "sweeping up the heart," it shows her awareness not only of the external mourning but also of the internal grief that results from loss (3). Again, in "There's been a death in the opposite house," she addresses death customs. The male speaker explains the numb atmosphere of the home after a death as a procession of neighbors "rustle in and out" as the "doctor drives away" (5-6). The

opening of the window the speaker recounts was done to air out the smell of death and to release the soul of the dead so it would not be entrapped. The mattress that “Somebody flings out,” which causes the children to wonder if someone died, represents the ritual of taking out the mattress the deceased passed away on (9). The speaker exposes the minister’s control of “own[ing] all the mourners” and reveals how religion governed the ritual for many (15). Dickinson calls the procession of mourners a “dark parade / Of tassels and of coaches,” which suggests how ritualized the mourning process was during the nineteenth century (20-21).

However, Dickinson’s explanation of death customs and death’s melancholy goes beyond mere knowledge as she writes poems that reflect a personal mourning.

Dickinson’s elegies include: “I meant to find her when I came,” “Her final summer was it, And yet we guessed it not,” “I cannot live with you,” “Her “Last Poems,” “I Measure every grief I meet,” and “I did not reach thee.” While Dickinson foregoes the traditional elegiac meter, her poems express the lament, consolation, procession of mourners, nature mourning alongside the mourner, and reflection on the deceased’s last day. In order to place Dickinson with the nineteenth-century culture, this chapter examines Richard B. Sewall’s biography of Dickinson. This study also employs Cynthia Griffin Wolff who provides key critical analysis of Dickinson’s work.

Chapter four explores Louisa May Alcott’s elegies. Although readers recognize Alcott for *Little Women* and *Little Men*, her poetry remains neglected. Fortunately, many current scholars, such as Madeline Stern, Joel Myerson, and Daniel Shealy look at her thrillers, including “Pauline’s Passion and Punishment,” “Behind the Mask,” and “The Abbot’s Ghost,” and other lesser known prose. Still, more scholarship is needed on her

poetry. Specifically, Alcott deserves attention as an elegist. Moreover, Alcott's work as a Civil War nurse where she saw devastation- and her inevitable personal grief of losing her sisters Elizabeth and May, her mother Abigail May Alcott, her nephew Gilbert, and her close friend Henry David Thoreau- play a role in these elegies. She includes elegies within both her novels and letters in addition to the elegy she writes for Thoreau. Many people think of Alcott as a woman who conformed to her prim and proper milieu as Meg and Amy do in *Little Women*; however, once they read her thrillers and examine her letters and poetry they can see the influence the Gothic has on her elegies and how she transforms the pastoral elements in some of them. Furthermore, although Alcott includes domestic images within her poetry, she repurposes them to create a melancholy effect.

As the study moves in to the later part of the century, chapter five explores Stephen Crane's elegies *The Black Riders* (1895) and *War is Kind* (1899). Although critics recognize Stephen Crane, one of the most well-known end-of-the-nineteenth century writers, for his war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, his bowery novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Street*, and his naturalism in "The Open Boat," scholars need to consider his poetry. Specifically, this study analyzes Crane's skepticism and its influence on his elegies. Through Crane's skepticism, he reveals a shift in the elegiac tradition. Out of Poe, Dickinson, and Alcott, Crane presents the least hope of a consolation or reunion. He takes Poe's melancholy to a new level. Crane is much bleaker and focuses on the devastation rather than loneliness.

Ultimately, this study seeks to examine the nineteenth century elegies of Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and Crane within the elegiac tradition. In addition, it positions their elegies within the nineteenth-century mourning customs and culture. By beginning with

Poe and progressing to Dickinson and then to Alcott, this study explores the development of the elegy within the nineteenth-century. By ending with Crane, the study comes full circle and reveals the skepticism of the upcoming modernist. With Dickinson and Alcott, their repurposing of domestic elements is significant. While those critics mentioned discuss the elegiac elements of Poe's poems and the theme of death in Dickinson's poetry, this study adds to the critical conversation by analyzing Poe's lesser discussed poems, placing Dickinson as an elegiac poet in her own right, furthering the critical study on Alcott's lesser known elegies, and including Crane as an elegist. Through placing the poems within the elegiac tradition and cultural context, this study reveals the rich tradition American poets play in the elegiac tradition. Much critical work has been done with English elegies, but more scholarship is needed on American elegies, which is what this study aims to do.

Chapter I: Mournful and Mysterious Postmortem Mementos

Beautiful folded flower, not to open here, but to bloom and expand in the Paradise of God. The Lord gave, and I bless Him for His gift. Her feeble, suffering life, only for a moment, had a mission [...]. And her precious, beautiful death, with all the household band around her, was made a blessed call to one of the number. (Platt)

On January 6, 1867, Jeannette Hulme Platt penned these lines to Samuel C. Damon. Her comment echoes the melancholy tone of the nineteenth-century middle- to upper- class American society. During the nineteenth century, the high mortality rate—due to illness, the Mexican-American Wars of the late 1840s, and the 1861-65 Civil War casualties—manifested itself in a prevalent culture of mourning. Whether there were approximately 620,000 Civil War casualties as previously held to be true by most historians or approximately 750,000 as recently estimated by Dr. David Hacker, Civil War scholar, the gargantuan amount of lost lives perpetuated a constant state of mourning (Gugliotta). Across the ocean, Queen Victoria’s mourning of Prince Albert sparked the tradition in England. In *Western Attitudes Towards Death*, Philippe Ariès explains that the beautiful death became the norm in the nineteenth century because “it [death] was admirable in its beauty” (58). Ariès further explains, “This is what would be called the romantic death, found in Lamartine in France, the Brontë family in England, and Mark Twain in America” (58). Ariès’s comment connects culture and literature, which is what this study will do. In order to analyze the literature, scholars must first understand the culture and people. The people grieved with a “passionate sorrow which is unique among sorrows” (59). Part of that passion occurred because such loss and devastation engrained the grief into the nineteenth-century culture. The people’s preoccupation with mourning

and mourning customs led to the Victorians' practices being defined as "The Cult of Mourning," by scholars such as Ariès, especially for the middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class. The middle class became part of the elite mourning customs as a result of the Industrial Age and cheaper labor. Consequently, the middle class had more time to hobnob with the upper class and emulated their customs. In "Forget-me-nots: Victorian Women, Mourning, and the Construction of a Feminine Historical Memory," Melissa Zielke contends, "The bar of the elite kept mov(ing) higher, particularly in regards to mourning. So much so that the new profession of funeral direction was born to assist the bereaved in moving through the labyrinth of proper and righteous grieving" ("Forget Me Not" 3). The extravagance of mourning increased, and the middle class felt the pressure to keep up with the upper-class.

In the nineteenth century, social custom and religion blended. Americans shifted from "view[ing] death largely from a religious perspective," which was "grounded in theology and interpretation of scripture," to "fus[ing] together that religious perspective with the democratic ethos which grew out of new patterns of political and social thought" (Steiner 31). The shift echoed the movement from Enlightenment to Romanticism, which focused on the individual. Enlightenment focused on the rational; thus, many of the Enlightenment era viewed death as a logical part of the life cycle while the Victorians—during the time of Romanticism—focused on the sublime, including the "beautiful death." While Poe did idealize the beautiful death, especially the "death of the beautiful woman," he did not champion the light Romantics, such as Williams Wordsworth and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Instead, he invoked the darker supernatural. As Brian Prestwood, author of "Poe's Breach with Romanticism in *Introduction*," maintains, "Previous

scholarship reveals Poe's consistent disdain for Wordsworth, but does not recognize the early satire of Wordsworth's poetry" (19). Even if Poe satirized Wordsworth's works, he was influenced by them. Moreover, Emerson conveys a cyclical and benevolent relationship with man and nature. However, Poe's skepticism would not allow him to follow Emerson's ideas. Rather than looking at how man and nature worked in harmony, Poe accepted that nature was not always benevolent, such as the worms eating on the decaying body of the beloved and the harsh tides of the waves in *Annabel Lee*. Poe presents nature not only as sometimes malevolent but also connects it to the psychological forces as seen in the Madeline's control over the moon in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Unlike Emerson's portrayal of nature as a harmonious relationship between man and nature, Poe suggests that man may have control over nature. G. R. Thompson, editor of *Selected Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, asserts, "rather than try to picture the actualities of a worldly landscape, he employed an 'indefinitive' ... Poe was more oriented toward the dark melancholy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge than toward the harmonious simplicity of the nature poetry of William Wordsworth" (3). Consequently, he was influenced by the Romantics and utilized some of the Romantic conventions even if he did not champion all of the British Romantics.

Likewise, Emily Dickinson was not a conventional Romantic poet; yet, she did not ignore the Romantic focus on Nature. Cynthia Griffin Wolff, key Emily Dickinson biographer, argues, "Emily Dickinson became a new kind of 'nature poet,' one who could articulate the ambiguity and latent violence that mankind must constantly confront in the course of ordinary existence" (282). This view parallels Dickinson's complex approach to other topics, such as religion. Dickinson recognizes both how Wordsworth's skepticism

and Emerson's optimism of nature's interaction with humans could be accurate. We see this in her poem "A Bird came down the Walk" where the bird moves aside for the speaker as a gentleman yet eats a worm in half. In addition to Dickinson's complex view of nature, she presents complicated approach to faith. While Dickinson despises institutionalized religion, as seen in her "Some keep the Sabbath going to church" where she explains how some keep the Lord's day at church while she keeps it at home, she still presents a hope in the afterlife and of a creator as she discusses even in the aforementioned poem how she worships God, even if it is in her own way where she sees God's work in Nature and prefers worshipping through nature's song—i.e. the bird's song— rather than the organ in the church.

Although Alcott does not hold as complex a view of nature as Dickinson, Alcott did not completely adhere to the Romantic ideals but rather was influenced by them. Particularly, she was influenced by Transcendentalism but was still skeptical of the Emersonian idealism. Even Bronson Alcott "left his readings in Wordsworth for readings in Mrs. Glover's *Science and Health*" (257). We see her skepticism of Transcendentalism in "Transcendental Wild Oats," her parody of the Utopia her father sought to build at Fruitlands. In that text, Alcott acknowledges nature's harshness as her father's project was not as fruitful as he had hoped.

Although there was a shift from Romanticism, Poe, Dickinson, and Alcott all focus on the individual's grief and have remnants of Romanticism throughout their elegies. However, Crane does not provide a typical hope for a reunion or consolation as the others do. Instead of being mostly influenced by Romanticism, he is responding to it by participating in Naturalism. In his elegies, Crane presents nature as undiscerning

toward mankind. Thus, in his elegies, nature is destroyed by bloodshed; however, Crane presents more of the environmental determinism of death and destruction.

When applied to mourning, the shift from the Enlightenment to Romanticism paralleled a shift from a logical acceptance of death to a more emotional response, where consolation literature and customs focused either on the departed in heaven or the bereaved who seeks consolation. Because the working and lower class could not afford the detailed and elaborate materials, they were not included. Likewise, slaves had no rights at the beginning of the century, so they did not fall into this category of mourners. For the middle and upper classes, the transformation resulted from seeking “a beautification and domestication” that “allowed the living to conduct a perpetual communion with the deceased” (Steiner 31). The perpetual communion evidenced itself in various ways in the material culture of nineteenth-century Americans. As “they began to sentimentalize death and to domesticate Heaven,” the domestic sphere itself began to embody death (Pike 16). Specifically, the American Victorians reminisced about the deceased’s departing moments at the bedside, captured a permanent likeness in postmortem paintings and photography that hung in the main room of the home, and created wreaths of hair that adorned the home’s wall. Moreover, they etched a memorial in words through gravestones, epitaphs, and elegies.

The death rituals began prior to an individual’s death, in which loved ones would gather at his or her bedside. Before exploring bedside scenes within elegies, scholars must see how this particular cultural ritual serves as a catalyst for bedside scenes in elegies. Michael J. Steiner, author of *A Study of the Intellectual and Material Culture of Death in Nineteenth-Century America*, contends,

While the religious implication of this gathering ‘among friends’ at the deathbed were central, it is essential also to view the deathbed ritual as a gathering which helped to insure the cultural immortality of the dying. To pass unattended failed to seal one’s cultural immortality by omitting the highly charged, emotional ritual of deathbed attendance. (35)

The deathbed attendance blurred the boundaries between mortality and immortality. The deceased lived on through the memories of the living, who hoped to see their loved one in eternity. The specific room established a setting for these lines to blur. Steiner explains, “Nothing seemed to bear a person’s imprint, and maintain close proximity between the living and the dead, like the room in which someone died” (Steiner 35). Being at the bedside not only gave the mourners solace that they were there to comfort the dying but also provided closure for the grieving. The enclosed space where the loved one died captures the last connection between the living and the dead.

Poe centers many of his works, such as *The Tell Tale Heart*, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and *The Black Cat* within the enclosed space, so it is unsurprising he would do so in his elegies. Specifically, Poe uses an enclosed space in *The Raven* to set the melancholy tone as the speaker laments the loss of his love, Lenore. In *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe writes, “[I]t has always appeared to me that a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident- it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.” The “incident” that Poe refers to is that Victorians focused on and were preoccupied with death, and the

bedroom or room where the loved one died frames the image and memory of the departed in the mind of the bereaved.

Because death was not a taboo subject during the nineteenth century, families were more actively involved in the preparation of the deceased's body for burial, especially during the early and middle part of the century. Family members would wash the body, bind the jaw, dress the deceased, and close the deceased's eyes. In *Western Attitudes Towards Death*, Philippe Ariès contends, "At the beginning of the century, family members and servants took care of the deceased in shifts. Certainly the expression of sorrow by survivors is owing to a new intolerance of separation. But people were troubled not only at the bedside of the dying or by the memory of the deceased. The very idea of death moved them" (59-60). After preparing the body, they would sit with it and keep watch and make sure it was not disturbed. Moreover, because the body was not embalmed early on in the century, some who were considered dead may have been only in a coma, so keeping watch allowed the family to know if the person were truly dead. In putting this in connection with the Victorian idea of the "beautiful death" and death as sleep, the Victorian's watching the body makes sense. In *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1883*, Gary Laderman hones in on how the American Victorians viewed death as "sleep" to help the bereaved family members and friends come to terms with their loved one's death. Thus, they had hope that death was not a permanent separation. They hoped the person would wake up. However, some were fearful of what they saw as a thin boundary between life and death.

Remnants of the Victorians fear of the blurring of boundaries between life and death appear in popular Gothic works where a family member comes back from the dead

or becomes a vengeful ghost, such as Madeline Usher in Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, in which the narrator first describes Madeline as a beautiful, sleeping corpse who comes back as a murderous ghost. While Poe deemed the death of the beautiful woman the most melancholy of all subjects, he also exposed the fear of the unknown in death. Later in the century, morticians took the place of family. They cared for and embalmed the body. This marked the gradual distancing of the family's role in the death process. Now, most people pass away at the hospital, and the body is passed on to someone to be prepared for the funeral and burial, which makes it hard for us to comprehend the Victorians' preoccupation with death.

After the passing of a loved one, the perpetual mourning and melancholy entered the home décor and clothing. Thus, mourning pervaded both the private and public sphere. Prior to the post-mortem photograph, families commissioned an artist to paint a portrait of the deceased. The focus was on either capturing the deceased as he or she was in life or on the graveside scene. In "*In Memory Of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth Century America*," Martha Pike explains that the picture was typically "[p]ainted or embroidered, usually on silk, or painted with watercolors on paper" (48). As with most mourning customs, the paintings were only available to the upper-middle to upper class. Specifically, the paintings were part of the domestic realm, considered the woman's realm at the beginning of the century. Pike continues, "Such embroidered and/or painted memorial pictures were done primarily by an educated elite, young women whose families could afford to send them to select seminaries where such genteel arts as painting and needlework were taught" (48). The fact that young, upper-class women did the "domestic" paintings echoes the nineteenth-century Cult of True

Womanhood of Piety, Purity, Submissiveness, and Domesticity, which applied to upper-middle to upper class women. Barbara Welter, key historian, notes, “In the home women were not only the highest adornment of civilization, but they were supposed to keep busy at morally uplifting tasks” (164). The women were the ones who were supposed to be the moral compass, so death, which addresses issues of religion and the family, were topics which their society expected them to engage with.

Like most folk art, the paintings/prints became commercialized. Pike contends, “Nathaniel Currier and other print-makers began to publish low-priced prints of similar subjects” (“In Memory Of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth Century America” 50). However, in the paintings, artists painted the deceased as they were preceding their death or incorporated graveside scenes. Pike raises an interesting question concerning the audience and the painter’s depiction of churchyard burial versus rural cemeteries. In the 1840s and 1850s, most were buried in rural cemeteries rather than churchyards, so the discrepancy is intriguing. Pike suggests that either the discrepancy comes from either the audience being rural and more used to churchyard burials, being more sophisticated urbanites, or coming from the people’s nostalgia for the past and closeness with nature (Mayo 50). Unfortunately, Pike does not attempt to answer this question. However, if we note that 1847 Rural Cemetery Act and other ordinances around that time, it appears that the audience desired to hold on to past tradition when the government took over control concerning the deceased’s burial. Bernadette Atkins, author of “Widow’s Weeds and Weeping Veils,” explains, “Churchyards and family plots were overcrowded and unsanitary. Many felt that the unsightly, foul-smelling burial grounds were a danger to the health of the public,” which is why the cemeteries were

developed “on the outskirts of towns and cities” (4). The rural cemeteries began in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York and then spread westward. In “Where All Our Steps are Tending: Death in the American Context,” David Stannard explains, “Mount Auburn came first, in 1831; then Laurel Hill, in 1836; then Green-Wood, in 1838. Others followed— Green Mount, Spring Grove, The Woodland, Mount Hope, Worcester Rural, Cave Hill, Harmony Grove; and the era of the ‘rural cemetery’ had begun” (qtd. in Pike, *Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, 23). The shift from the churchyard or home front does not mean that the people were less “religious”; rather, it echoed the shift to providing order. Just as the mourning etiquette provided structure for people during a difficult time, so did the setting up of rural cemeteries. Neatly kept rural cemeteries kept order and put a structure to where the dead were buried. As a practical function, the cemeteries were kept up and “were designed like parks, making the visit a pleasant experience” with “[b]enches, paved pathways, gardens, ponds, and fountains” in order to “give a serene setting to those wishing to meditate, mourn or commune with nature” (Atkins 4). In the Victorians making the cemeteries beautiful, the cemeteries echoed the idea of the Victorian “beautiful death.” The burial places were no longer malodorous, grotesque sites. Instead, they were peaceful places where the mourners could feel comfortable. This change from urban to rural cemeteries echoes the parks that were built. Parks were tamed forest, which was streamlined and neat. Likewise, the rural cemeteries made death neater, less grotesque.

As technology advanced, postmortem paintings became rarer as photography began to take over the postmortem custom. As part of the tradition, nineteenth-century

postmortem photography captured the images of loved ones and left a memoriam for their loved ones. The photographs were a daguerreotype, a picture on polished silver; consequently, they were expensive and mostly only affordable for the upper-middle class to upper class families. Many post-mortem photographs were of children and reflected society's high value of children and the high infant mortality rate. Keith Davis, author of *The Origins of American Photography: 1839-1885 From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate*, explains "the fear of sudden death lent real power to the photographer's familiar slogan: 'Secure the Shadow ere the Substance Fade'" (120). Moreover, photographers captured the deceased in their beds and portrayed them as sleeping. These paintings differed from their predecessor—post-mortem paintings—in which the artists depicted the subject as living. Symbols within the paintings, such as black roses or weeping willows, were the only indicators of a life cut short. The change between the paintings and photographs suggests shifting attitudes towards death.

As the nineteenth century progressed, death became commodified, and photographers were able to make a living taking postmortem photographs. Photographs of living individuals were already popular by photographers such as Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes, two of the most noted nineteenth-century photographers. They not only photographed people but nature as well. In *Young America: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes*, Grant Romer and Brian Wallis question, "[W]hat other daguerreotypists would have been audacious enough to "photograph frost on a window, clouds overhead, a solar eclipse, a branded hand in closeup, or a surgical operation in progress" (11). If they stepped out in photographing nature, it is unsurprising that they took postmortem photographs since death is part of nature. Towards the later

part of the nineteenth century, postmortem photography continued to change. Barbara Norfleet, who put together a collection and study of death and photography in *Looking at Death*, asserts, “The post-mortem photograph no longer was a plain rendering of the body, but instead a record of the fancy coffin and the splendor of the flower arrangements. Often the flowers were arranged in an artistic manner just for the memorial photograph” (117). In the earlier photographs, photographers captured the deceased outside of the coffin, whereas in later photography the deceased were normally photographed in their coffins. The face was the focal point of the photography and was captured either above or below it instead of at the same level. While this practice may seem morbid to us in the twenty-first century, those in the nineteenth century, especially early on, took care of the deceased’s body. We see examples of this in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Sleeping Beauty II* along with *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, two key books on postmortem photography.

Furthermore, even children were not as shielded from death as they are now. They assisted in preparing the deceased’s body and in wearing mourning clothes. As a result, children were not sheltered from death as they mourned the loss of siblings. “Well aware of the high child mortality rate, youngsters frequently experienced the deaths of siblings firsthand in their homes. Children were commonly posed with deceased siblings, binding together the living with the dead. Sadly then, the clearest and most compelling surviving images of mid-nineteenth century melancholy and high mortality rate.

As a distinctly Victorian practice, post mortem photography signifies the pervasiveness of death as both reality and artistic subject in the mid-nineteenth century, when the average American adult could expect to live only forty years and when the accelerated rate of infant deaths, due in part to epidemics of cholera and tuberculosis,

made children's connection to life seem especially tenuous (West 139).

Photographers offered the closest memento to preserving their loved one's life.

Nevertheless, the preservation blurred the lines between life and death. Steiner asserts that the photographer's role was to "intertwine[...] the immortality offered by the photographic image with the fundamental equality of death, creating artifacts which uniquely reveal the era's perception of the individual" (71). Moreover, postmortem photographs "offered an unmatched opportunity to convey the funereal sentimentality of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, in a medium which quickly became more powerful in public perception than many others" (Steiner 71). As the United States expanded, postmortem photography "spread all across the United States, from large urban centers to more sparsely settled rural areas" (Steiner 72). The difference between the postmortem paintings and postmortem photographs were the paintings attempted to capture the deceased in life while "the photographer usually portrayed the subject clearly dead, or perhaps as if asleep" (Steiner 73). Both paintings and photography, however, prevailed during the century without one overshadowing the other. The photographs served as memorials for the living, which is why photographers attempted to take the picture within an hour of someone's passing. They wanted to preserve any life-likeness as well as capture the body before it began to decay because "embalming was not frequently, or very successfully done prior to the mid-1850s" (Steiner 74). Consequently, the post-mortem photograph serves as a liminal space. The loved one's soul was believed to have departed, although the body remained.

The high price people paid for postmortem photographs as compared to marriage or birth photographs during this era exposes the fixation on death and the prevalent

mournful and melancholy atmosphere. For example, in 1847, Poe commissioned a deathbed watercolor portrait of Virginia Clemm Poe, his wife and cousin, which was painted only hours after her death. Arthur Hobson Quinn, critical biographer, includes Arthur G. Learned's drawing of Virginia that he took from "the water color painted by an unknown artist after Virginia's death" (524). Nancy Martha West, editor of *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, asserts, "In fact, people were more willing to pay \$2 for a daguerreotype that memorialized a loved one's passing than they were to commemorate a marriage or birth. Often they would commission a photographer to take pictures of the deceased only hours after he or she had passed away" (West 139). Nevertheless, the people's choice to capture death rather than life events does not mean they did not value them. Instead, it was a way to hold on to those memories and "what might have been," especially in terms of the high infant mortality rate. Prior to a year old, most parents were afraid to put too much hope in their child living, which may explain why they did not typically capture birth. Many did not make it to their wedding day, which explains why there are fewer wedding photographs compared to postmortem photographs. These photographs served as a consolation rather than a painful memory although they "would more than likely occupy a prominent place in the house hold, displayed on a mantelpiece or parlor table" (West 139). The prominently displayed postmortem photographs reveal that the people during the nineteenth-century embraced rather than hid death. To them, the postmortem photographs provided solace and exposed their "willingness to include in the space of the portrait photograph what is painful as well as what is celebratory" (West 140). Through photographers willingness to capture death, they were able to capture a fuller range of emotion.

The photographs also “reflect a culture still experimenting with the use of domestic photography and still willing to be reminded that death awaits us all” (West 140). West further argues that the distinctive factor about the Victorians’ mourning is their “relative willingness...to indulge in painful memories that sustained their grief” (141). In turn, preserving these memories became “a form of consolation for the bereaved, its painfulness desirable precisely because it seemed to keep the presence of the deceased palpable” (West 141). Although West correctly asserts that the photographs made the idea of the deceased corpse more palpable, postmortem photographs were important to the people because they captured the deceased as the loved ones remembered them. Postmortem paintings portrayed a close likeness but not as close as postmortem photographs. Steiner argues,

[T]he daguerreotype plate is infinitely more accurate than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear—but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented. (Steiner 61)

The photograph was much like a mirror that reflects the loved one’s image.

Because the process was new and somewhat mystifying, people “believed that the photograph was true because it literally captured the substance of the subject; hence, photographic images were not merely made, but ‘taken’” (Steiner 61). The photographs were a “modern technological manifestation of the immortality long revered in painted portraiture” through which “[t]he artist conveyed an immortality which was the best

available in a world that placed such great spiritual value in the visual image” (Steiner 62). These photographs “provided a means to counteract the impermanence of life with a relatively permanent image that transcended the human mortality and gave to the subject some level of cultural permanence” (Steiner 62). The permanence the photographs capture serves as a memorial and tribute to the deceased and keeps the memories of that person alive. Moreover, the photographs provide loved ones the comfort of knowing that the deceased had family and friends surrounding them as they departed. Thus, they captured the deceased and mourners closeness to one another and reminded the mourners that their beloved went to heaven in peace. This same effect is in elegies as they describe either being by the dying person’s bedside or wishing they had been as they recount what might have happened in the final moments.

While many photographs were taken after death, there are series that capture the individual just before and just after death. Photographs of an individual right before and after death reveal the American Victorian’s desire to be at the dying person’s bedside. It also captures the life cycle. For instance, in *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement, and the Family in Memorial Photography*, compiled by Stanley Burns, a painting series titled “Woman Cradling Dying Son” captures such a scenario. The infant’s eyes and mouth in the first picture are opened as they mother holds her child as he dies. The next photograph shows the child with eyes and mouth closed, which was part of the Victorian mourning customs. The mother’s face in the second photograph is also distorted, which Burns suggests that “perhaps, the movement indicated her crying and distress” (22). Other postmortem photographs tell the narrative not only of death but also reveal the mourners’ faith, such as the paintings “Religious Family with Daughter in a Red Dress”

and “Mother Prays at the Side of Her Dead Daughter” (29, 34). They serve to remind the mourner and to reveal to guests the faith that sustains the mourners. They also serve as an expression of their grief even though they have faith. The photographs not only captured the parents’ grief but the siblings’ grief as well. For example, in “Young Girl Posed with Dead Sister,” the adolescent girl stares upon her deceased sister (36). The photographs of siblings with their dead loved ones reveal that children were not shielded from death. This is unlike today, where children are often excluded from funerals. Although mourners were not shielded from death, they did attempt to make death appear more as sleep even within photographs, or they attempted to beautify death. For example, in the photograph “Death’s Seal is on That Cherub Brow,” the parents included flowers to beautify the photograph in order to make their child’s death easier to cope with. In addition to flowers, other parents had their child’s favorite toy or a pet in the photograph to lessen the harshness of reality.

In memoriam, post-mortem photographs hanging in the home were not the only part of the home that reflected the mourners’ grief. Not surprisingly, the home was the center of the funeral customs. Unlike today, where bodies are taken care of by funeral directors and morticians, family and friends took care of the deceased. As a result, the home was a funeral home. When an adult passed away, the family draped black crepe, also used for mourning clothing, over furniture in the home. Similarly, when a child died, family members adorned the home in white crepe. They also covered all mirrors in black crepe. The covering of the mirrors served as a barrier between the living and deceased, because many people believed if they saw their reflection in the mirror before the deceased was buried, then they would be the next to die. Some also believed that they

might see the reflection of the deceased and then die. Although this superstition seems contradictory to the mainstream Christian beliefs, the liminal space between life and eternity occurred when the person passed away. The servants stopped the clocks at the time of death and restarted them after the funeral. Likewise, the windows were opened after a death and closed after the funeral in order to let the deceased's spirit leave the home just as the loved ones closed the eyes of the deceased to allow peace for the departed. Aires asserts that the lithograph— and we could add postmortem paintings and portraits— “played a role of the tomb, of the memorial, a sort of portable tomb adapted to American mobility” and that “the English and the Americans of that day were committing to paper or silk— ephemeral substances— what the continental Europeans were portraying on tombstones” (80). These memorials, “portable tombstones,” served as mourning memorabilia for generations. While it is true that they almost served as portable tombstones, they also served to transform the home into a literal funeral home.

In addition to the décor transforming the home into a funeral parlor, the home became the literal funeral home where the funeral was held. There was also a church service and graveside service. However, only the close male relatives and intimate friends attended the church service because women were considered to be too emotional. The domestic realm was considered a more appropriate place for women because it was a “private” realm. Later, in the 1860s and 1870s, women could be present at church funeral services, and by the last decade of the century, women commonly attended funerals (“Forget Me Not” 8). The private and public gender division parallels the Cult of Domesticity where women were “angels in the house” and embodied piety, purity, and submissiveness. Welter asserts, “Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter,

sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement, or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (152). This was because she was the moral compass. Welter explains, “One reason religion was valued was that it did not take a woman away from her ‘proper sphere,’ her home” (153). Home and religious piety went hand in hand. As the moral guides, women ran the homes, which included the directing of mourning decoration and outlook on the afterlife. However, since women were considered more fragile and emotional, they were excluded from the outside realm, including the burial. The value of reason over emotion is similar to the consolation verses lament elegiac tradition. Interestingly, nineteenth-century elegies did incorporate lament; however, they quickly lead to consolation. As a result, it is not surprising that women were excluded because the gender division holds to the idea that even within the nineteenth-century “Cult of Mourning,” consolation was a must. Some, such as Margaret Fuller, complicate the idea of separate spheres during this time, but many still felt women were too emotional to handle as much as men.

The same gender division carried into the stages of mourning and mourning clothing. The stages of mourning included full mourning, second mourning, and half mourning. For example, “Parents were mourned for one full year; brothers, sisters, and grandparents were mourned for six months” (“Forget Me Not” 9). However, these stages mostly applied to women because men were only in mourning for six months, particularly for the death of their wives, whereas women were in mourning for three years when they were widowed. More than likely, the gender discrepancy was set because men were expected to have both more social obligations and to find a mother for their children, especially if they had younger children. As the mourning period

progressed, women could introduce less harsh colors, such as grey, white trimming, and lavender, at the end while men wore a black suit and white shirt with no color as well as a black band around their arm. Afterwards, some wore grey for a partial mourning, but they were not required to do so. The discrepancy length between the mourning of the loss of a parent and the loss of children also reveals the high regard Victorians had for parents. Although children were not in mourning as long as adults, they were involved with mourning clothing and wore black trimming for three months.

While the bodies were buried, one part of them often remained with the family: locks of their hair. The hair, either from the deceased's brush or a lock cut off of their hair, remained a physical connection between the deceased and loved one. They could literally touch the hair of the person. We see the closest connection between the departed and loved one in the hair jewelry made from the deceased's hair. The loved one could literally carry on his or her body a part of the one who passed. Between "the 1840's-1880's," women became preoccupied with making hair jewelry (Mehaffey "Fashions"). Women in mourning took strands of the deceased's hair and placed it within a locket, created hair jewelry, or created a hair wreath. Besides connecting the loved one with the deceased, the wreath connected family members as a flower was made from each deceased family member's hair. The women placed the flower made from the most recently deceased person in the center. Afterwards, they encased the wreath in glass and hung them on the walls. In "MHS Collection: Human Hair Ornaments," Virginia Rahm describes the stages of preparing the hair for wreaths and other hair ornaments by "fasten[ing] [the hair] into a bundle" (71). Afterwards, the "groups of hairs... were drawn to form strands," and the "strands were tied to bobbins...to prevent tangling and to help

keep the strands in balance” (71). The hair was “made around some firm object—a wire, a tube, a pencil” until it was boiled and “carefully removed from the mold” (71). The mourner then took the hair work “to a jeweler, who affixed the beads, tips, clasps, or whatever was needed to finish the piece” (72). Detailed hair décor, “usually in the form of wreaths or floral arrangements, were also quite popular; these were ordinarily used for parlor ornaments. Instructions on how to make such jewelry or ornaments of hair appeared in many ladies’ magazines” (Mayo 55). Besides creating wreaths from hair, women often included locks of deceased loved one in other home décor. For instance, they include hair in perforated cardboard wall hangings. One such example is in Kenneth Ames’s *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Cultures*. The perforated cardboard reads, “[O]ur little babe was born November the 22, 1864 and died April the 12, 1865,” and contains the infant’s name, Jacob Fisher (Ames 102). As with the mourning hair wreaths, this lock served to connect the family with the deceased loved one and was displayed in the home. Other uses of hair from the deceased included jewelry made from hair and locks of hair in locket.

Besides the material culture within the home, epitaphs survived to provide a memento and served as material culture outside the home to commemorate the deceased. Ames asserts, “Equally compressed but charged and meaningful expressions appear in the cemetery and with other material culture associated with death. These texts echo some of the same sentiments, the same rhythm— and sometimes even the same words— thus linking house and cemetery, life and death, earthly and heavenly home” (135). As late as 1883, epitaphs were in etiquette books, such as Hill’s *Manual of Social and Business Forms* (Atkins 23). Some epitaphs include: “Gone, but not forgotten; Gone

Home; Sheltered and safe from sorrow; Heaven's eternal year is thine" (Atkins 23).

While these mottos are sometimes still used today, their predominance in nineteenth century America reflects the era's tone and attitude towards death. These sayings echo the Victorian sentiment of the "beautiful death," "death as sleep," and heaven as an eternal home. Furthermore, "Words and images were interchangeable parts of a wide-reaching religious comprehension that stretched from the church to the home, from the home to the cemetery, and from the cemetery to the afterlife" (Ames 135). The epitaphs "seemed to outlast any habitations of the living," and "[l]ike the photograph, the monument allows us to continue to see something tangible that at least represents the loved one whose body is in now in a sealed chamber in the ground, and the permanent gravemarker thus becomes a source of immortality" (Steiner 104). The epitaphs "added the power of words to confirm the immortality offered by the grave" and "expressed a general belief in complementary nature of immortality in both spiritual and physical forms" (Steiner 106). They were to "be expressive, but brief" (Atkins 23). Just as the words were meant to live on, so did the families hope the same for their loved one who went to eternity.

In addition to the words on the epitaph, the symbols on nineteenth-century epitaphs sent messages of peace, comfort, and hope. The dove symbolized peace or the Holy Spirit and represented the departed's faith and / or the family's faith. Books symbolized either the Bible or divine knowledge. A broken ladder, column, or wheel represented a prominent missing family member or life cut short. Pillows signified comfort and rest which also echoes the idea of the beautiful death or death as sleep. A clock represented either the time the loved one departed or the cycle of life. An opened

gate was emblematic of the opened gates of heaven where the soul went. Victorians also used trees, plants, and flowers as symbols. The weeping willow, one of the most common trees used on epitaphs, represented mourning. Roses and Forget-me-nots represented love that would not end. Wheat represented the bountifulness of life; white stood for purity.

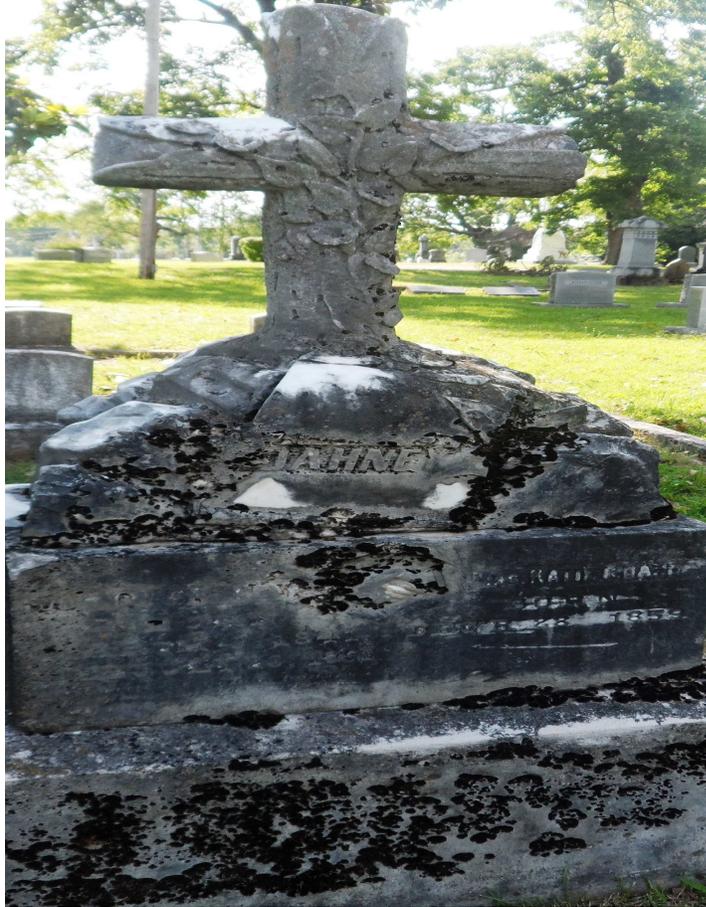


Figure 1: Antebellum Tombstone (1859)

Tombstone at Evergreen Cemetery.

Note:

The cross during the nineteenth-century represented a hope of reunion in heaven that comes through faith of Christ's resurrection after dying on the cross. The flowers appear to be lilies, which represent purity.



Figure 2: Civil War Tombstone (1863)

Tombstone of Major Sam Corley, ordained minister and chaplain who died in battle in 1863. Taken at the Confederate Cemetery in Helena, AR

Note:

The scroll image- This image shows that the deceased kept records. Also, it may refer to Major Corley's occupation as minister and chaplain who taught scripture.



Figure 3: Child's Tombstone (1881)

Tombstone of Russie Bately

Taken at Evergreen Cemetery Murfreesboro, TN

Note:

The dove was used as a symbol of peace and purity. Many children's either had engravings of lambs or doves as a mean of portraying the child's innocence.

Like epitaphs which commemorated the dead and comforted the living, eulogies given by preachers, family members, and friends provided consolation for the mourners and honored the deceased. In prose form, the eulogy includes the deceased's strong attributes and might refer to humorous accounts of their life, which provides a sense of comfort to the bereaved as they think of fond memories of their loved one. While eulogies are longer than epitaphs, they are often brief because they are presented most often during a funeral or memorial service which has time constraints.

Similar to epitaphs and eulogies, the elegies written by family members and friends are a lasting written form that preserves the mourner's melancholy and praises the deceased. Unlike eulogies, this is a poetic form. The inclusion of death poems in popular magazines of the upper-middle class and upper class reveals their popularity. These popular magazines combined societal tradition and literature. For example, Steiner notes a list of suggested funeral poems in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* from "1841-1842" (39). Because Poe edited the magazine from 1841 to 1842 and even some occasionally afterwards, it is no surprise that a list was included, which listed "To One Departed," and William Cullen Bryant's "The Maiden's Sorrow" (Steiner 39). Elegies would be placed in the subgenre "Consolation Literature" during this time as "[t]he clergy, female writers, and publishers of women's novels and magazines filled the needs of mourners by producing and publishing books of prayers, poetry, and stories about death" (Mehaffey "Consolation Literature"). Most scholars think of the Little Eva's deathbed scene in Harriett Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when they think of literature concerning death. However, consolation poetry is often overlooked. Within the

elegiac tradition, there was a mixture of male elegists and female elegists. Thus, the magazine genre linked the elegiac literary tradition and the nineteenth-century culture.

Women were considered the more emotional of the two sexes, so their publishing elegies did not surprise readers. Furthermore, women were the “domestic figures,” and the domestic sphere was the key place of mourning. In “Crippled Girls and Lame Old Women: Sentimental Spectacles of Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing,” Rosemarie Thomson contends, “Although the idea of domesticity shifted considerably over the century, it was fundamentally a division of labor that assigned women to the privatized realm of the home, which became the site and source of feeling, religion, morality, childrearing, purity, and order,” which allowed women to be “both confined and enabled by domesticity” (129). Although Thomson discusses this point in terms of analyzing the disabled and lame in women’s writing, it applies to women elegists. If the domestic is part of emotion, religion, morals, and order, it is unsurprising that women often wrote and published elegies, sentimental poems of death.

Emotion, specifically lament, is a key component in the elegy as is hope for eternity (religion). Likewise, elegies are mourning rituals, which provide some semblance of order to death. While some men did write elegies, most elegies outside of the “high literature” circle were by women. Therefore, although scholars mostly focus on the published elegies by male poets, women elegists should also be analyzed. This is especially pertinent if, as Cheryl Walker author of “Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets Revisited,” argues, “Nineteenth-century American women did not function in a world isolated from men or from male literary productions” (232). The magazine market during this time was open for works by women in so far as poetry or thriller

fiction; thus, many of these magazines, such as *Peterson's Magazine*, *Harper's*, and *Godey's Ladies Book* included their elegies. While Monika Irene Cassel, author of *Poetesses at the Grave: Transnational Circulation of Women's Memorial Verse in Nineteenth-Century England, Germany and America*, states that “the poetess clearly can be understood conceptually as performing melancholia rather than doing the work of mourning,” her broad argument does not hold true to all poetesses (3). Moreover, male poets both perform melancholia through their elegies and mourn. “Poetesses” are no exception. The personal elegies that mothers wrote after the loss of their children are a part of a mourning process. Although women published these, male poets had done the same through all ages, such as Milton's *Epitaphium Damonis* who mourns the loss of his friend and performs the conventional elegiac conventions. Nevertheless, scholars should adhere to Cassel's argument that “the connection between the domestic and the national in the figure of the poetess needs to receive more attention” (4). In the introduction to *Victorian Women Poets, Writing Against the Heart*, Angela Leighton explains that although some, such as Ellen Moers, Elaine Showalter, and Gilbert and Gubar have analyzed women's literature, most of the scholarship focuses on women's prose, not women's poetry—aside from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson. Leighton contends, “women's poetry of the nineteenth century, much more than the novel, was written and read as part of a self-consciously female tradition” (1). However, Leighton focuses on British poets. American poetesses, specifically American women elegists, deserve more attention so that nineteenth-century scholars can obtain an even deeper understanding of American culture. Women's elegies provide insight into the private and public function of elegies. Furthermore, these elegies give a glimpse into the

quest for a national, distinctly American, voice. Tricia Lootens, author of “Hemans and her American Heirs: Nineteenth-Century Women’s Poetry and National Identity,” provides Lydia Huntley Sigourney as an example of an American woman elegist who was “[o]bsessed with mourning and national identity— with religion, patriotism, and pacifism” (245). Unfortunately, Lootens dismisses Sigourney as self-promoting and the British poetess Felicia Hemans as a “Romantic genius” (246). Though Sigourney may have attempted to make a career of writing poetry, she is nonetheless still as important as Hemans. Although John Milton published his elegies *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*, he presents a private mourning within the poems. The same holds true to Sigourney’s work. She presented American issues within the elegies, such as her elegy ‘Be silent, O Grave!’ “her elegy for the Mohegan leader Mazeen” (249). The Caucasians taking away the Native Americans’ land was a distinctly American issue which she took on.

Although the elegy as a genre began much earlier than the nineteenth century, elegiac verse took on a unique meaning during that century. Specifically, most elegies were written either for a close loved one who died from an epidemic or for those lost amid the devastation of the Civil War. The elegy became popular as poets sought comfort and wanted to “render the chaos and confusion of the war more comprehensible” (Henderson 111). The elegies were “preoccupied with the same images of the unburied or unidentified dead,” as is true with Walt Whitman or other canonical poets (Henderson 111). These elegies both followed the elegiac tradition established centuries before and were important as nineteenth-century consolation literature. The elegy has its roots in the ancient elegiac tradition that inspired book of Lamentations, which mourned the demolition of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple in the sixth century B.C., continued with

the third-century B.C. Greek elegiac poets, such as Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus, and subsequently endured in the seventeenth century with Milton's *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*. Edmonds explains that the elegy later became used for "shorter and more 'occasional' themes" and form was not the focus (1). Instead of the classic elegiac distich, a couplet composed of a hexameter followed by a pentameter, the nineteenth-century elegies often used regular meter. They sometimes used free verse, which echoes the Emersonian call for free form. In *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism*, John Draper explains, "Since Classical meters hardly apply in English poetic nomenclature, 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" (7). Nineteenth-century elegies kept the melancholy subject of mourning but not necessarily the form. Pastoral elegies were a special form of the elegy, and some nineteenth-century elegists held to keeping some of the pastoral elegy elements but not form, which is not surprising since Nature was an important topic.

The exploration of nature during the America's land expansion served as a resource for writers as they depicted the culture around them. The philosophical question, "Is nature benevolent, malevolent, or uncaring," goes back prior to the nineteenth century, but as pioneers traveled West and had to "conquer" the untamed land, the question continued and prevailed as a topic among nineteenth-century writers. Leo Marx focuses on this in *The Machine in the Garden* and examines the psychological implications technology infringing upon Nature has in literature as "a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. ... Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent

image of the machine's sudden entrance onto the landscape" (343). These same issues make it unsurprising that elegists would adapt the pastoral elegy, such as Walt Whitman's pastoral elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom," upon the death of President Abraham Lincoln where he includes the encroaching image of the train carrying President Lincoln's body. Nineteenth-century elegies were both part of the elegiac tradition and a part of the nineteenth-century mourning culture because elegies replicate and enact the process of mourning. As this project will demonstrate, Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Louisa May Alcott were a part of both the long-running elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning culture.

Chapter II:

Mourning, Memory, and Melancholy in Edgar Allan Poe's Elegies

“Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore.’” Poe’s repeated refrain has become engrained in American popular culture from *The Simpsons* to Nox Arcana’s 2007 CD “Shadow of the Raven,” which includes the songs “Midnight Dreary,” “The Raven,” and “Nevermore.” Many think of “The Raven” only around Halloween or associate it with the Gothic genre. However, in “The Raven,” Poe aimed to present a universal state of sorrow to which all readers could relate. Consequently, this chapter uses “The Raven” to establish key elegiac conventions to refer to in his other elegies. His elegies draw from both the elegiac tradition and from the nineteenth-century culture of mourning in which he lived. Besides providing a close reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s most analyzed elegies, “The Raven” this chapter explores Poe’s merging of his aesthetics with elegiac conventions in “The Sleeper (1831),” “The Paeon (1831),” which he later revised into “Lenore (1843),” “To One in Paradise (1833),” and “To Annie” (1849). Furthermore, Poe sets a precedent for Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, and Stephen Crane, who also deviate from focusing solely on the death of children and on the traditional views of heaven. In his poems, Poe’s speakers struggle with loss and their desires to connect with a deceased loved one. Through his elegies, Poe describes the grave scenes of the dearly departed.

Besides incorporating nineteenth-century public mourning practices, Poe privately laments the death of his mother, Eliza, the mother of a childhood friend, Jane Stanard, and his wife Virginia. The numerous deaths of his female loved ones makes his focus on the “death of the beautiful woman,” as he describes in *The Philosophy of Composition*, seem logical. Instead of the typical nineteenth-century focus on the death of children, he

is more haunted by the death of these women than by infant mortality. Poe's December 3 1835 letter to Beverley Tucker reveals the effect of the death of his mother— and even the death of his father. He proclaims, "I have many occasional dealings with Adversity— but the want of parental affection has been the heaviest of my trials" (183). Most likely, Poe took the death of Jane Stanard hard because he thought of her as a source of parental affection. In an April 14, 1859 letter, Marie Clemm explains to Sarah Helen Whitman, "It is true dear Eddie did love Mrs. Stanard with all the affectionate devotion of a son. When he was unhappy at home, (which was very often the case) he went to her for sympathy, and she always consoled and comforted him" (Thomas and Jackson 58). Moreover, Maria Clemm explains that Poe took her illness hard and that Robert "told me [her], of his and Eddie's visits to her grave" and tells how he "pointed to her [Jane Stanard's] last resting place...when we would visit the [Shockoe] cemetery" (Thomas and Jackson 58). Poe connects with her through the gravesite, which reinforces the significance of the epitaphs and gravestones during the nineteenth-century as a consolation.

Poe's continual mourning and melancholy is seen in his reaction to his wife's death, which he records in a January 4, 1848 letter to George Eveleth. Poe exclaims that he "love[d] as no man ever loved before" and that during her illness he "became insane, with long periods of horrible sanity" and that "[d]uring these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank, God only knows how often or how much" (Thomas and Jackson 716). Through all of Poe's sorrow, it is unsurprising that he depicts death as sleep and expresses a desire to reunite with a deceased love one. He blends those elements with his aesthetic values of the death of a beautiful woman as the most beautiful

topic in poetry, the repeated refrain, the speaker's frustration with living without the loved one, and the terror of the soul to craft his elegies. Significantly, Poe writes this reply to Eveleth six months after Eveleth's July 27, 1847 letter to him. The long span between Poe receiving the letter and his response reveal the intensity with which Poe mourned Virginia's death.

Many critics, such as Arthur Hobson Quinn, author of *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography*, connect Poe's "The Raven" with the raven in Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, a work that Poe reviewed in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Others, like Joseph Jones author of "'The Raven' and 'The Raven:,' Another Source of Poe's Poem," attribute the Raven figure to other sources. Jones makes parallels between Poe's raven and the raven in "an anonymous poem published in *Fraser's* entitled '*The Raven; or, The Power of Conscience. An Old Border Legend*'" (187). Another possible source could be from ancient Greek and Roman myths Poe would have known. More than likely, all of these works played a part in Poe's conception. More importantly, these possible sources of inspiration further reveal that Poe was influenced by his predecessors and their culture as well as his contemporary literature and culture.

In the opening lines of Poe's "The Raven," the speaker laments the loss of his "Lenore." Silverman speculates, "There is no telling just how much Virginia's progressive illness and his anticipation of her death figured in the poem, but the 'bleak December' perhaps recalls the other December when Eliza Poe died, as Pallas again invokes Allan, and Lenore, like the earlier tale 'Eleonora' and the poem 'Lenore' touches on the name of William Henry Leonard'" (241). Whether or not Poe had these ideas in mind, there is little doubt he still reflected back to his mother's death and his wife's

looming death. Quinn adds that while there is not any doubt his worry over Virginia played a role in his source of sorrow “the primary inspiration was the abstract love of a beautiful woman” (443). This abstract love includes Platonic love for women. In the opening stanza, the lament comes as the speaker remembers how “Once upon a midnight dreary” he “pondered, weak and wary” (1). The lamentation deepens as it is “bleak December” with “ghost upon the floor” and he remembers his “sorrow-sorrow for the lost Lenore” (7-8, 10-11). He sets the time of the poem at midnight like he does in “The Sleeper” because it is a time of unrest or darkness. As Poe does in his other elegies, his speaker here seeks consolation from remembering his deceased, the “rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore” (12). Benjamin Franklin Fisher sees Lenore’s death as “symbolizing a dynamic that once existed in the man’s emotional imaginative makeup but that has now departed” (“Mourning and Eve[ning] 85). If so, the speaker mourns the loss of a part of himself, which makes sense if he and Lenore are one as a couple and complete each other.

The raven that the speaker finds when searching for what is tapping at his door symbolizes his tormented soul when the speaker tells the raven to “tell [him] what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore” (47). The speaker states that the raven comes from “a Plutonian shore,” which reveals he knows the raven is connected to death. The raven “sitting lonely on the placid bust” is much like the narrator who sits lonely in the room thinking of Lenore (55). The speaker says the raven’s repeated “Nevermore” is “as if his soul in that one word he did outpour” (56). This statement can be viewed as the speaker’s own soul saying he will nevermore see his love Lenore. The connection of the speaker’s soul and the raven is further seen when the speaker remarks of the raven:

“Other friends have flown before- / On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before” (58-59). In this line he sees the raven as holding the hope and doesn’t believe it will stay. It will fly away like Lenore did. If so, he is not only connecting the raven to himself but also to Lenore. The raven’s “fiery eyes [that] now burned into [his] bosom’s core” also links the raven and speaker together because in the beginning of the poem the speaker says he himself has “all [his] soul within [him] burning” (74, 31). The speaker appears more vexed when “the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer” (9). He wants a relief, “respite and nepenthe,” from the raven so he can forget his pain if he can “forget this lost Lenore” (82-83). The raven’s saying “Nevermore” to this is like his soul saying the torment will not stop (84). He calls his home “Horror haunted” and is seeking reprieve to know if there is “balm” or healing ointment in Gilead (88-89). Again the raven, or his soul, says “Nevermore” (90). Therese M. Rizzo, author of “The Cult of Mourning,” contends, the raven is “an agent of mourning” and not just a symbol of the speaker’s grief because the raven can “‘tell’ the narrator ‘truly’ if he will ever find peace and ‘balm’ in the biblical ‘Gilead’” (150). Rizzo further argues, “the raven’s ambiguous ‘Nevermore’ either reaffirms the search for meaning in death or critiques the very premise upon which the cult of mourning promised solace to followers” (150). While Rizzo raises an interesting point and then explains that this ambiguity contrasts to the clear perversion of norms in “Ligeia,” she does not expound upon this point. Whether the raven’s response affirms the cultural norm or attempts to counter the idea of a heavenly solace, the speaker acts out the mourning process. Furthermore, the “Nevermore” echoes the natural reaction of the speaker to desire an immediate connection with Lenore.

As in his other mourning poems, Poe includes a futile desire on the part of the speaker for reuniting with his lost love. He asks the raven to “tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, / It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore / Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore” (93-95). He has hope of seeing her one day, which is why he tells the raven that his response of “Nevermore” is the “sign of [their] parting” and that he wants the raven to go back to “the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!” and to “Leave no black plume as a token” (97-99). He does not accept that he will not see Lenore again. The raven’s response of “Nevermore” to the speaker asking if he and Lenore will meet again suggests either the speaker, Lenore, or both will not be in heaven peacefully together. He does not accept they will never see each other again. If the raven is the speaker’s soul, this shows the speaker is still disturbed and deep down believes they will not be reunited. His soul is beneath the shadow of the bird.

The raven’s refusal to leave in the last stanza suggests that the raven is the speaker’s own beleaguered soul. The speaker says, “And the raven, never flitting, still sitting, still is sitting / On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door” (103-104). Poe uses the repeated “still, still” to reveal how truly tormented the speaker is (103). He cannot overcome his memory of Lenore and even says his soul, the raven, will never depart. He and the raven both have “all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming” (106). He even uses the possessive pronoun my to describe how “his shadow” or the raven’s does not allow his, the speaker’s, shadow to break free, which is why he sees his shadow lingering on the floor (107). If the raven’s eyes, soul, are like a “demon’s that is dreaming,” and the speaker and raven are one, he is calling himself a devil that is

dreaming, and he is one that cannot move on from his mourning the loss of Lenore (105). This is a constant mourning, which is like those during Poe's time who never truly got over their grief from losing a loved one. They may not have shown their grief publicly because public grieving was often considered distasteful, but inwardly many during this era felt helpless and empty after losing a loved one.

As in "The Raven," Poe expresses private lament in "Annabel Lee." Some of the contenders for the lost love include, Annie Richmond, Sarah Helen Whitman, Fanny Osgood, Elmira Shelton, or Virginia Clemm Poe¹. Although critics are less certain of the poem's autobiographical influence in the "The Raven," Silverman contends, "Annabel Lee represents all of the women he loved and lost" (402). Quinn asserts, "[T]he best judgment agrees with Mrs. Osgood" that Virginia was the source of inspiration (606). Whether or not any of these women served as muses, the speaker in "Annabel Lee"

¹ Poe's love for Annie Richmond is seen as he takes the laudanum on November 5, 1848, three days after Annie sends him an indecisive answer to his marriage proposal and then encourages him to propose to Sarah Helen Whitman (Thomas and Jackson 764-765). Perhaps, she could have partly inspired Poe as this occurred not long before "Annabel Lee" was written. A less likely candidate, Sarah Helen Whitman, a contemporary poet, rejects Poe's proposal, which she recounts in a September 27-28 1850 letter to Mrs. Hewitt. Still the rejection would have stung Poe as a form of loss (Thomas and Jackson 780). Poe definitely noticed the talents of Frances Osgood, another contender as the source of inspiration. He praises her in August of 1849 in the *Southern Literary Messenger* (Thomas and Jackson 821). Elmira Royster, widow and Poe's love interest from his younger days, is yet another rejection Poe experienced late in his life. She rejects him around July of 1849. As his cousin and only love whom he married, Virginia Clemm Poe is the most likely candidate as the source of inspiration. However, all of these women and rejections add up and most likely are all sources of inspiration for "Annabel Lee" and even most of his elegies of the "dead, beautiful woman."

correlates to the melancholy and beauty that Poe saw in the death of these beautiful women.

In the first stanza, the speaker's narrative childhood flashback to "many and many a year ago, / In a kingdom by the sea" where "a maiden there lived whom you may know / By the name of Annabel Lee" establishes a sadness of a time long since passed (1-4). He not only says he was infatuated with her but she with him when he says, "she lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me" (5-6). The introduction to the speaker's memory establishes a connection the speaker and Annabel Lee. This reveals their close bond of love, which helps the reader comprehend the speaker's grief after she dies. He says he and she were children in their own "kingdom by the sea" (8). They had created their own, probably imaginary, world.

Poe invokes the elegiac lament when the speaker exclaims, "the winged seraphs in Heaven / Coveted her and me" which was why "A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling / My beautiful Annabel Lee" (11-16). He is angry at "her high-born kinsmen" in heaven who "bore her away" from him (17-18). The tomb they "shut her up in" separates the two (19). He is angry that they took her away and changed their happy "kingdom by the sea" into a place of sadness, mourning. When the speaker shouts, "The angels, not so happy in Heaven, / Went envying her and me," the speaker is enraged at heaven while mourning his loss (21-22). He blames the angels for the wind that "came out by night, / Chilling and killing" his Annabel Lee (26). The speaker's inclusion of "as all men know, / In this kingdom by the sea" shows how those who have had happiness like his and lost it grieve (23-24). Repetition is usually an important convention of elegies. Consequently, Poe incorporates the repetitive refrain "In the kingdom by the sea," and the speaker repeats

Annabel Lee's name, which enhances the melancholy tone. The speaker's repetition puts the focus on his connection to Annabel Lee, and her repeated name gives the mournful effect of sadness or longing for her much like a person who is crying and shouting the name of the person who has left him or her.

In lines twenty-seven through thirty-three, Poe continues the traditional elegiac convention of lament and the desire to connect to the departed loved one. The speaker declares that their love "was stronger by far than the love / Of those who were older" and "wiser" than them (27-29). Even "the angels in Heaven above" and "the demons down under the sea" cannot separate their souls (30-31). Not even death can cut off his memory or sever the connection between their souls. Their bond is constant and never to be broken. The speaker's remark that their love was more powerful than even those older and even wiser shows love has no boundaries. Their bond was quick yet powerful, even if it did not have time to develop or grow over much time. Heaven and hell, death, cannot keep them apart. He is, however, missing her presence.

In keeping with the elegiac tradition, the speaker finds consolation for this lament. Philip Edward Phillips, author of "Teaching Poe's 'The Raven' and 'Annabel Lee' as Elegies," contends, "Unlike 'The Raven,' 'Annabel Lee' provides some measure of consolation in the forms of commemoration in verse and apotheosis, but this consolation is at best subtle and subject to interpretation" (80). Phillips notes the consolation first comes through the speaker's remark that their love is stronger than the love of the past family members. Indeed, however, the consolation is temporary. The speaker of "Annabel Lee" finds consolation in his dreams. He states the dreams are constant "For the moon never beams without bringing" him dreams "Of the beautiful Annabel Lee"

(34-35). Even the stars “never rise” without him “feel[ing] the bright eyes / Of the beautiful Annabel Lee” (36-37). He even lies all night near Annabel Lee “In her sepulcher by the sea- / In her tomb by the sea” (34-41). The dreams that connect them are only temporary. However, Annabel Lee’s bright eyes reveal the speaker tries to connect with her soul, which is a more permanent connection. This is where they reach the apotheosis, translation into the heavens, where they will have a perfect heavenly form (heavenly moonbeams) and reach the perfect love. Significantly, he remembers her at night. This is not unusual because the quiet and loneliness of the night normally brings about memories. This passage is much like bedside scenes in elegies. The speaker may not be with Annabel Lee as she is dying, but he lies by her grave.

Typically, in elegies, the speaker either describes being at the dying loved one’s bedside or considers what it would have been like to have been by his or her loved one as he or she took a last breath. Some scholars find “Annabel Lee” too unconventional to be an elegy because of the speaker’s dramatic actions of sleeping next to her tomb. However, the speaker’s deep grief is not unusual, and the speaker’s actions are not so bizarre. Consider Rufus Griswold’s response to his wife’s death. Adam Bradford, author of “Inspiring Death: Poe’s Poetic Aesthetics, ‘Annabel Lee,’ and the Communities of Mourning in Nineteenth-Century America,” explains that after Rufus Griswold’s wife Caroline died during childbirth, he “kept vigil, embracing her body for some thirty hours” (87). Bradford also notes that forty days after his wife was buried Griswold “went back to the cemetery and persuaded the Sexton to open Caroline’s vault. There he removed the lid to her coffin along with the shroud covering her face before kissing her ‘cold black forehead’ and clipping a memento of hair ‘damp with death dews’” (87). Poe’s fiction is,

thus, not far from the reality of deep grief. Furthermore, the scene in “Annabel Lee” and Griswold’s actions are much like nineteenth-century lithographs where the bereaved stand by their loved one’s grave. Both artistic forms, including fiction and painting, and the actual actions of the nineteenth-century people are acts of true bereavement and are a part of acting out mourning. In the end, Poe is more impacted by and knowledgeable of the nineteenth-century culture than most scholars, such as Silverman, give credit to him for. True, he may exaggerate and criticize some of the nineteenth-century cultural norms in some of his poems or short stories, but he expressed true grief and mourning in his elegies. In the poem, Poe exposes his knowledge of a commonly held death superstition. In Quinn’s critical biography, he briefly comments “that the night air was filled with evil spirits,” and “in 1831 few people slept with their windows open” (185). However, just as important, family members believed in closing their loved one’s eyes after death to provide comfort. In turn, the family members received consolation in knowing their loved one was at peace.

In the opening stanza of “The Sleeper,” the speaker establishes both the melancholy tone and reveals the speaker’s lament. G. W. Pigman defines lament as “an attempt to master grief rather than surrender to it” and believes that “even when elegy does not enact an abbreviated process of mourning by progressing from praise and lament to consolation and recovery, the recurring features of elegy are psychologically coherent expressions of different parts of the process of mourning” (45-46). One stage is denial as seen when the speaker states, “A conscious slumber seems to take, / And would not, for the world, awake” (14-15). Another stage is anger, which the speaker reveals when he asks, “can it be right” (19). Later, the speaker bargains, another stage, when he calms and

asks that though she be dead. “Soft may the worms about her creep! / Far in the forest, dim and old, / For her may some tall vault unfold” (47-49). The speaker enters the loneliness phase or depression stage when he discusses the “solemn stillness” (37). By the end, the speaker enters the acceptance phase when he discusses the dead that groans within. His love is now with them. Because Poe wrote “Annabel Lee” and “For Annie” around the same time, the sources of inspiration of both are significant. Just as these the women listed earlier are possible sources of inspiration, these women may be possible sources of inspiration for “For Annie.” Specifically, Annie Richmond plays an intricate part in Poe’s life where he went through numerous rejections from women within a short timeframe.

In “The Sleeper,” Poe not only incorporates lament as an elegiac convention but also has elements of a specific type of elegy, the pastoral. In pastoral elegies, nature laments the death of the speaker’s loved one as he mourns. When discussing the pastoral, Thomas Harrison and Harry Leon see “[t]he role of Nature, having its origin in man’s grief for the death in Nature, reappear[ing] in the frequent contrast between the cyclic course of the seasons from death to life, on the one hand, and the finality of human death on the other” (3). The speaker describes this as the “opiate vapour, dewy, dim” that “exhales from out her golden rim” as it is “softly dripping, drop by drop, / Upon the quiet mountain top” and as it “steal[s] drowsily and musically / Into the universal valley” (3-8). The rosemary that “nods upon the grave” and “The lily that “lolls upon the wave” as it wraps “the fog about its breast” echoes the speaker’s lament (9-11). These images of nature projecting the human quality of mourning falls into Ruskin’s pathetic fallacy, which Milton also used in *Lycidas* when the trees, flowers, and caves mourn Lycidas’s

death. However, this differs from the “randomness of the sea’s movement,” which Ellen Lambert notes in *Placing Sorrow* (175). The randomness differs from nature’s purposeful mourning as seen in the speaker’s choice of the words “a conscious slumber seems to take / And would not, for the world, awake” (14-15). The image of Lethe, the underworld river, evokes both terror and bleakness, which is a result of the lament. Lethe symbolizes forgetfulness, which represents the speaker’s desire to forget the awful pain he is going through.

The speaker seeks consolation through describing Irene as sleeping. In stanza three, he exclaims, “The lady sleeps! Oh, may her sleep / Which is enduring, so be deep!” and repeats it again in stanza four: “My love, she sleeps! Oh, may her sleep / As it is lasting, so be deep.” The consolation also comes as he believes heaven will “have her in its sacred keep” and that the grave will “change[...] for one more holy” and the coffin will be exchanged for “one more melancholy” (40-42). Ariès explains death is portrayed as sleep because “[i]n both sleep and death there is a concentration of the soul outside the body, whereas ordinarily the soul is diffused throughout the body” (354). Moreover, the speaker seeks further consolation in knowing that she might “lie / Forever with unopened eye, / While the pale sheeted ghosts go by” (43-45). He consoles himself by believing that the worms will creep softly about her. The closed eyes suggest she will have peace, which consoles the speaker because part of the nineteenth-century death customs was to close the eyes or “window” to the soul so the deceased can “sleep.” Furthermore, the speaker discovers consolation in his idea that that the grave is temporary. He believes that “some tall vault” will unfold and fling “its back / And winged panels” and allow her to

rise triumphantly “o’er the crested palls / of her grand family funerals” (50-54). Thus, she will overcome the grave (possibly through resurrection).

The elegiac complaint comes when he realizes the air can enter freely into her opened grave. He describes “The window open to the night” and “the wanton airs, from the tree-top” that blow “laughingly through the lattice drop” (19-21). He expounds, “the bodiless airs / flit” in and out of her grave as they “wave the curtain canopy” “fitfully” and “fearfully” (22-25). He insists on knowing “why and what she is dreaming” in her grave (31). Part of the complaint is that she cannot answer. Without her assurance, he cannot have comfort in knowing she is safe.

As is typical with elegies, the speaker praises and commemorates the deceased. The bereaved lover does so when he declares, “All beauty sleeps! - and lo! where lies Irene, with her Destinies!” (16). The main praise here is her beauty. The speaker also praises his love when he entitles her “Oh, lady bright!” (18). The title “bright” suggests that she has something noteworthy about her that makes her stand out or shine (18). Through praising her beauty and giving her the title “lady bright,” he honors her (18). This is similar to Walt Whitman honoring President Lincoln in *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d*.

While Poe does not depict a bedside scene, he does describe her corpse as if he is staring at her: “Strange is thy pallor! strange thy dress! / Strange, above all, thy length of tress, / And this all solemn silentness!” (34-36). As true to bedside descriptions of the dying, he attempts to remember what she looks like through his description. He also attempts to keep her memory alive as he reminisces about their childhood experience of throwing rocks at the sepulchers. He reflects on the graves “Against whose portal she

hath thrown / In childhood, many an idle stone,” but the sound “ne’er shall force an echo more” (55-56, 58). Even though the speaker exclaims, “Thrilling to think, poor child of sin! / It was the dead who groaned within” (59-60). The seeming disconnect between the past and Annabel Lee, who is now one of the dead, is the speaker’s way of coping. Ultimately, his reminiscing creates nostalgia.

Unlike “The Raven” and “Annabel Lee,” Poe’s lesser-known and anthologized elegy “A Paean” (1831), which Poe later revised into “Lenore” (February 1843), is extremely brief, only eleven quatrains. However, it is significant as an elegy as the speaker is a bereaved husband. Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, in *The Poe Log*, list the other poems published by Elam Bliss in the second edition with “A Paean.” These other poems include: “To Helen,” “Israfel,” “Irene,” “Al Aaraaf,” and “Tamerlane” (116). He later publishes it in the January 1836 of *The Messenger*, and also the “the *Richmond Enquirer* reprints” it (Thomas and Jackson 185, 188). Quinn contends, “‘A Paean’ with its short, almost jerky lines, and its frequent lapses into banality, is so far distant from ‘Lenore’ of later days that it would misrepresent Poe’s achievement in 1831 to speak of it here in that later and more familiar form” (184). Although “A Paean” may not be the most polished of Poe’s works, it needs to be analyzed as part of the elegiac tradition and nineteenth-century mourning culture. In “Poe’s Revisions of ‘Lenore,’” John Broderick argues, “I believe also that the poetic superiority of the final version can be demonstrated through analysis” (594). While Broderick certainly shows the poem’s progression, the original version must not be set aside. As an elegy, the initial word choice says something about even the writer’s own grief. To understand the later versions of “Lenore,” scholars must first analyze the initial version.

Silverman connects the source of inspiration of “A Paean” to George Darley’s “The Wedding Wake” (1929) (71). The poem contains the death of a beautiful bride, so Poe drawing upon it would be possible since “A Paean” was published only two years later. The speaker in “A Paean” does not discuss nature’s mourning. Rather, he focuses on the loss of his dear love, and his own bereavement. The key lament the speaker has is that his love “ever died so young” (4). We see his lament through his striking the coffin “loud and long / through the gray chambers to [his] song” (29-31). His striking the coffin and his mournful song expose his grief, and the speaker’s choice to use the adjective “gray” to describe his chambers parallels the bleakness he feels.

The speaker finds consolation as he believes the speaker will “join the untainted mirth / Of more than thrones in heaven” and states she is “more than fiends on earth” (37, 40). He further consoles himself that “she is gone above / With young Hope at her side” (21-22). While he does not use the term “heaven” to say where her soul is, he believes she has been good enough to be “above,” which is typically associated with Heaven. The optimistic outlook comes from the “young Hope” she has carried with her.

In the complaint, the speaker describes the friends who gaze on her “and on her gaudy bier / And weep! –oh! To dishonor / Dead beauty with a tear” (6-8). The complaint that he has is that their tears and lament were insincere because they only “loved her for her wealth;” yet, “they hated her for her pride,” which causes her “feeble health” and death (9-11). He sees them as not truly grieving as he is. Consequently, this creates his disdain for their trying to control his mourning. He reads their controlling his mournful song “while they speak / Of her ‘costly broider’d pall’” as hypocritical (13-14). Rather

than the parade of mourners honoring the dead as in many elegies, the mourners serve to expose the hypocrisy.

Even from the title, “A Paean,” the deceased is being praised because she is worthy of tribute. Additionally, the final stanza sums up the praise as he wishes her “But waft thee on thy flight, With a Paean of old days” and says he will not hold Mass or, requiem, but instead will hold on to his memories (43-44). He is honoring her in his own way.

Similarly to “The Sleeper’s” speaker, the speaker in “A Paean” reflects upon what seeing her body is like. She lies “all perfum’d there / With the death upon her eyes / And the life upon her hair” (26-27).² It is as if he is staring at her on her deathbed. The deathbed scene often blurs the boundaries between life and death because the bed serves as a liminal space. The speaker’s noting the death in her eyes and the life in her hair blurs these boundaries because, while her eyes show no sign of life, the speaker notes how the hair grows even after a person dies. This sentiment is why many families kept a lock of hair, and several pieces of literature incorporate this idea, such as Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* who carries a lock of little Eva’s hair after she dies. Kete labels these keepsakes, such as hair wreaths, as “‘tokens,’ imbued with what was seen as the essence of personhood— the affections— of those who have touched them” (105). Other hair sentiments include “hair woven into rings,” other hair jewelry, and hair wreaths (159). Since the hair grows after death and keeping a lock of a loved one’s hair is significant, Poe’s fixation on his loved one’s hair growing is not unusual.

² Because there were not advanced ways to preserve a body, the deceased were treated with oils and perfumes in order to make the smell bearable.

Unlike Poe's "A Paean," "To One in Paradise," which Poe first titled "To Ianthe in Heaven," can be read either as a poem about a scorned lover or as a bereaved lover. In *The Poe Log*, Thomas and Jackson recount that in January of 1834 that "*Godey's Lady's Book* publishes Poe's 'The Visionary' (later called 'The Assigination'), including 'To One in Paradise'" (136). Later, in August 1835, *The Messenger* publishes the poem (163-164). Eve Morisi contends, "For if the concept is commonly indicative of death—as the mention of 'Paradise' seems to corroborate—the short lyric also points at its figurative signification" (141). Regardless, this poem can be considered an elegy. Rather than opening up with nature mourning for the deceased, "To One in Paradise" begins with the poet praising the deceased. For example, the speaker states, "Thou wast that all to me, love, / For which my soul did pine" (1-2). He calls her "A green isle in the sea, love, / A fountain and a shrine," which is "All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers" (3-5). Consequently, he is praising her for being a solace and for bringing him happiness as seen when he argues that all her flowers were his.

Because she was everything to the speaker, the speaker laments: "A voice from out the Future cries, / "On! on!"—but o'er the Past / (Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies / Mute, motionless, aghast!" (10-13). The mute and motionless speaker reveals that he cannot get over his grief, the bleak gulf. He adds that for him "The light of Life is o'er!" and that he will have happiness "No more— no more— no more" (15-16). The dismal refrain "no more" shows his lament. The refrain also echoes his repeated refrain "nevermore" in "Annabel Lee" and "The Raven." Even the sea is solemn and sorrowful language until it reaches the sandy shore under "the thunder-blasted tree" (19). The torn tree symbolizes the speaker's intense grief.

In the final stanza, Nature again laments with the speaker:

Alas! for that accursed time
 They bore thee o'er the billow,
 From love to titled age and crime,
 And an unholy pillow!
 From me, and from our misty clime,
 Where weeps the silver willow! (27-32)

The speaker grieves their separation just as the silver willow weeps, a symbol of grief and mourning. In addition to not being able to overcome his grief, he complains that his days are trances and that his nightly dreams are haunted by the memory of his loved one as he thinks of her gleaming footsteps and her eternal ghost-like dances.

As in “The Sleeper,” Poe’s “For Annie” (1849) combines both traditional mourning or grief and Poe’s “Terror of the Soul.” Thomas and Jackson note, on March 23, Poe writes Annie Richmond and deems it “the best I have ever written” (798). This possibly reveals that he wrote it for her as a defense against the Lockes who spoke ill of Annie and her husband (797), Thomas and Jackson discuss another source of Poe sharing his poem prior to publication. They recount, “Poe writes Anson Gleason Chester, a young Presbyterian minister in Saratoga Springs, New York” (799). He copied “For Annie” and asks Chester to not “let them pass out of [his] possession until published” (799). On April 1, 1849, Silverman argues, “Poe drew the connection between Annie and his mother even more directly in ‘For Annie’” and notes “a mood of maternal tenderness [that] lapses into and out of a crepuscular fright” (400). The speaker thanks Heaven that “The crisis / The danger is past” and that “the lingering illness / Is over at last” (1-4). He

even is happy that “the fever called ‘Living’ / Is conquered at last” (5-6). The speaker’s equating life as an illness may seem unconventional; however, in reality this view is not atypical. The Victorians, and others preceding and following, hold the belief that heaven is eternal; thus, life on earth is only a small part of eternity. The problems, or “fever,” subside after death. Furthermore, death means the person has “conquered at last” the troubles of the world. This idea continues in the next stanza when the speaker says even though he is “Shorn of my (his) strength, / And no muscle I move / As I lie at full length,” he is “better at length” (8-12). Either the speaker is content with not being well, or he has died and defeated life by dying as in the first stanza. Poe intentionally makes the reader unsure in order to present a different view of the separation of loved ones. Quinn notes that Poe “reproduced an emotional state by a short throbbing measure, in which the very incoherencies mirror perfectly the mood” (600). The mood is melancholia and mourning.

If the narrator is dead and “rest[s] so composedly,” Poe is again keeping the Victorian idea of death as sleep (13). The vague line between rest and death extends when the speaker says his composed restful sleep may be such

That any beholder
Might fancy me dead-
Might start at beholding me,
Thinking me dead. (15-18)

Again, this rest or death brings about a stop to “The Moaning and groaning, / The sighing and sobbing,” to “that horrible throbbing,” and “The Sickness-the nausea / The pitiless pain” (19-26). The feeling calls the “burning of the brain” he states is “of all tortures /

That torture the worst” (30-32). These symptoms of his illness also can be seen as parts of lament, possibly from mourning Annie’s death. Poe uses his unreliable narrator with a “maddened” brain and repeated refrain of “fever called ‘Living’” to blur lines.

The consolation comes from lines three through thirty-eight where the speaker says he has “drank of a water / That quenches all thirst” (3-38). Death “abate[s]” and “quenches all thirst.” The “lullaby sound” comes from that “water that flows” and comforts (39-40). Poe erases any doubt that death is what gives peace when the speaker says the water comes “From a spring but a very few / Feet under ground- / From a cavern not very far / Down under ground” (41-44). The speaker’s description of his grave follows to continue both revealing how it brings peace and is a sleep. The speaker exclaims that he does not want it “foolishly said” that his room “is gloomy” and his bed “narrow” (46-48). Furthermore, in order to get any rest “you must slumber / In just such a bed” (51-52). The “room” is the tomb or grave and the “bed” is the coffin. He wants those living to not see his death as sad or coffin as confining his soul. Moreover, his statement “For man never slept / In a different bed” holds to the idea that all men must die and that, while there is no escape, death is not the end or awful (49-50). Lastly, in this stanza Poe presents the idea that to get true rest one must die, or “slumber / In just such a bed” (49-52). The coffin is a bed, not a place where the body lies never to wake. Poe’s idea in these lines holds the nineteenth-century sentimentality that death equals sleep. Consequently, consolation and solace come from knowing the rest is an eternal, peaceful one and is not a frightening outcome.

Not only does death bring rest but it also erases all trouble and leaves no regrets to the speaker. He is “Forgetting, or never / Regretting ” his “old agitations / Of myrtles and

roses” (55-58). In describing his grave that has “A holier odor / About it, of pansies- / A rosemary odor, / Commingles with pansies- / With rue and the beautiful / Puritan pansies,” the speaker paints a similar picture to the grave in “The Sleeper” that has flowers blooming, much like in lithographs of the time (61-66). Instead of a picture, the speaker uses the sense of smell as sadness, “Rue,” is mixed in with Rosemary, which represents memory or happiness (65). Here, Poe reflects the typical view of death during this era. Loved ones miss their departed but have happy memories of them and even are happy they are at rest or peace in the afterlife. They wanted to believe their loved one went on to a happier place.

Lament often leads to recollections of the past, maybe a happier time, or another time of grief. Poe includes this when in this poem as grief brings about reflection, memories of Annie. He “dream[s] of the truth / And the beauty of Annie / Drowned in a bath / Of the tresses of Annie” (69-72). Annie’s beauty, specifically her hair, bathes him, revealing a comforting memory for him and her. His immersion in her hair brings happiness. The speaker enacts mourning in his longing for his dead lover as well as mourning his own death. The ambiguity of whether the speaker is mourning his own death or Annie’s death, allows the poem to be a poem of mourning. Some elegists reflect upon their own death that will occur in the future, but Poe’s approach is unique in that we do not know whether the speaker or Annie is dying at that moment.

The consolation comes as the speaker believes Annie comes from heaven to comfort him as he dies. He says,

She tenderly kissed me,

She fondly caressed,

And then I fell gently
 To sleep on her breast-
 Deeply to sleep
 From the heaven of her breast. (73-79)

This is a dream of his reunion with Annie. She is like an Angel of Death who does not kill but instead brings the soul to heaven. As he dies, “When the light was extinguished,” she covers him and prays to the angels, specifically Mary “queen of the angels” to protect him as he dies (79, 83). The ending of “To Annie” leaves peace as he almost consoles the onlooker that his

heart it is brighter
 Than all of the many
 Stars in the sky
 For it sparkles with Annie-
 It glows with the light
 Of the love of my Annie-
 With the thought of the light
 Of the eyes of Annie. (95-102)

As in “The Sleeper,” Poe includes the eyes as the soul of the person. The fact that Annie’s eyes, soul, gives light provides the speaker with the hope of a peaceful afterlife for both her and the speaker.

The poem comes full circle as the speaker turns from his memory of Annie and meshes it with telling the reader he knows “her love” as the onlooker, the reader, sees him resting so the reader “fanc[ies] him dead” (92). The speaker’s acknowledgement of

the onlooker, the reader, shuddering when looking at him reveals the terror of death. Overall, death is not just peaceful or terrifying but possibly both. The idea of a corpse scares most both in Poe's time and now while simultaneously the bereaved desires a peace for their loved one. In Poe's life, he did not mourn the death of Annie Richmond; however, he mourned being unable to marry her since she was already married. In fact, this is why he took "half the laud[a]num" he had while taking a letter to Annie and planned to take the rest after he returned to kill himself (Thomas and Jackson 765). Furthermore, this is the only recorded time of Poe using drugs; it was mourning rather than addiction that drove him to attempt suicide. The speaker saying the reader would believe he was dead in "For Annie" parallels Poe's taking the half the laudanum and planning to commit suicide.

Ultimately, Poe incorporates lamentation, consolation, complaint, and parade of mourners, which places him within the elegiac literary tradition. Simultaneously, he participates in his time's mourning customs and, consequently, is part of the nineteenth-century cult of mourning as he attempts to portray death as sleep. Although he does not include all elegiac or customary elements in all of these elegies, he includes the majority. As a result, scholars should address these elegiac elements so they can see how he fits his own philosophy into the elegiac conventions. While "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" have received thorough explication, these lesser treated poems deserve more treatment than they have been given. The melancholy tone and elegiac mode are suited for Poe's sensibility and his life circumstances, specifically the death of many women he loved or their rejection of love. Elegies also suit Poe's preoccupation of the "death of the beautiful woman," so his choosing to write elegies is unsurprising. Since beauty and death are

integral part of his aesthetics, the elegiac mode works well for Poe. Furthermore, Poe's works reveal he was influenced by literary and cultural sources, particularly mourning traditions which tie well into his elegies.

Chapter III:

Melodies of Mourning: The Elegies of Emily Dickinson

“The Crisis of the sorrow of so many years is all that tires me” – Emily Dickinson
(*Selected Letters* 294)

The opening lines penned by Emily Dickinson upon the death of her nephew Gilbert convey her perpetual melancholy. When most think of Dickinson, they do not think of her as active within her society. The same used to be true in Poe scholarship. Fortunately, scholars, such as Kevin Hayes who wrote *Poe and the Printed Word* and the numerous authors in *Poe in His Own Time*, edited by Benjamin Franklin Fisher, placed him in his milieu. Like Poe, Dickinson knew the cultural changes, traditions, and literature of her milieu as well as her predecessors and contemporaries. For example, her father assisted in bringing the railroad to Amherst, and she followed the experience with a poem about the invasion of the iron rail on the landscape. Similarly, Dickinson was alert to the happenings of her neighbors. She saw the effects of death upon her neighbors and the mourning traditions they followed and included them in her poetry. For instance, in “There’s been a Death, in the Opposite House,” she notes the parade of mourners, tossing out the old mattress on which the deceased slept, and the opening of windows to release the soul of the departed loved one. Additionally, she reveals in letters that she has read many elegies, including those of Milton, the Brownings, and Keats. Thus, she is aware of her culture, contemporaries, and poetic conventions.. In turn, she uses these conventions in elegies she wrote upon the death of her loved ones. When scholars think of Dickinson, death is indeed a common theme they touch upon, such as in her most notable works “I heard a fly buzz by when I died” and “Because I could not stop for

death.” However, they often neither think of her as an elegist nor look critically into some of her lesser known poems and poems within her letters. Her consistent inclusion of death as a theme makes the elegy an appropriate form for Dickinson. Additionally, she, like Alcott, is aware of the domestic literature and incorporated domestic images within her elegies. Dickinson merges her fascination with the theme of death, disdain for institutionalized religion, and domestic images to create elegies worth scholarly attention.

Besides Dickinson’s elegies sent to family and friends upon the death of her father, mother, and nephew, her other elegies include: “I meant to find her when I came,” “Her final summer was it, And yet we guessed it not,” “I cannot live with you,” “Her ‘Last Poems,’” “I Measure every grief I meet,” and “I did not reach thee.” While Dickinson foregoes the traditional elegiac meter, she incorporates the elegiac conventions of lament, consolation, procession of mourners, nature mourning alongside the mourner, and reflection on the deceased’s last day. Dickinson’s elegies written upon the death of her loved ones that she includes in her letters¹, in addition to her posthumously published elegies, place her as an active participant in her milieu. The elegiac influence of Dickinson’s literary predecessors and contemporaries, such as John Milton, John Keats, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, demonstrates that Dickinson is a product of both the literary elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning customs.

¹ In examining the elegies within the letters, this study does contextualize the elegy by examining the text that surrounds the elegy within the letter. With that said, the letters themselves are not the elegies but rather serve as a biographical connection to the author’s life and to contextualize the elegy.

During her lifetime, Dickinson experienced numerous deaths, but especially heart-rending for Dickinson were the deaths of her father, mother, and nephew Gilbert. The epigraph to this chapter shows the culminating effect of the deaths of these family members. In the elegies Dickinson wrote in her letters where she discussed the death of a particular family member, the speaker is Dickinson herself; however, we cannot assume so with her other elegies. In her letters, Dickinson explicitly discusses the grief and sorrow the loss has caused and is echoed in the elegy within the same letter. Nevertheless, the other elegies outside of the letters do not provide enough context to know if they pertained to the death of one of Dickinson's close loved ones. While we do have some dates for her poetry, they are simply a guess, and Johnson, her editor, uses the word "about" when giving the composition date to signify that we cannot be sure of the date since most of her elegies were published posthumously.

As patriarch of the family, Edward Dickinson's (1803-1874) death was the first of many that affected Emily Dickinson. Sewall describes Edward Dickinson as having a "powerful personality" and notes that many scholars, such as Clark Griffith and John Cody, contend that Edward Dickinson caused the reclusiveness of Emily Dickinson (44). While Emily Dickinson loved her father, and perhaps was the one who knew him best as a man "who never played," she still asserted that she did not really know him (*Selected Letters* 62). She found him aloof and difficult to understand. However, she still found his personality bemusing as she labeled him "the oldest and the oddest sort of a foreigner" (66). Nevertheless, the humor she found in her father's oddities leaves after his death. The melancholia enters into her elegy for him, a tone which Sewall asserts "never departed" (69). The same melancholy permeates Dickinson's later letters and elegies.

In a letter to Mrs. J.G. Holland during “late January 1875” after her father’s death in 1874, Dickinson includes a brief stanza of an elegy for her father. Prior to the brief elegy, Dickinson discusses how empty the house feels and calls her home a “House of Snow-true-sadly-of few” where her Mother sleeps “in the library,” her sister Vinnie “in the Dining Room,” and her Father “in the Masked Bed- in the Marl House” (Johnson 227). Dickinson compares her father’s death to others sleeping. This depiction keeps with the nineteenth-century depiction of death as sleep because, although her father is deceased, she describes her father as resting in a “[b]ed:”

How soft his Prison is—
 How sweet those sullen Bars—
 No Despot— but the King of Down
 Invented that Repose! (1-4)

Her lament is seen as she remarks, “When I think of his firm Light-quenched so causelessly, it fritters the worth of much that shines” (Johnson 227). Her grief is reflected in that she sees no hope in anything. The prison imagery enhances the bleakness, which comes from the speaker seeing the loved one’s death as needless. Dickinson’s use of the word “sullen” yet “sweet” to describe her father’s casket or tomb might appear to be an oxymoron; however, they expose the bitter sweetness of losing a loved one (2). While Dickinson laments his death, the sweetness comes from knowing he is at peace. Dickinson’s reference to “the King of Down” being the one who “Invented that Repose” goes back to the idea of the original sin in the Garden of Eden (3-4). Her own lines cause her to reflect on “Dust unto the Dust,” which her father would often repeat. She seems disturbed by the fact that he may not have realized his own finality when saying the

phrase. In her closure to Mrs. Holland, she thanks her for “the Affection,” which “helps [Dickinson] up the Stairs at Night,” as she goes by her father’s door that she “used to think was safety” (Johnson 227). The consolation comes as she states, “The hand that plucked the Clover—I seek, and am” and desires to see Mrs. Holland (Johnson 227). Her desire to see Mrs. Holland suggests she desires comfort and consolation.

Although the young Dickinson was not close to her mother, they developed a bond later in life. Just as Dickinson mourns her father’s death, she mourns and feels the absence her mother’s death leaves. As Richard Sewell notes, Dickinson and her mother were not close until later in life because “[a]s in many New England homes, the parents did not cultivate intimacy with their children” (89). One possible reason that Sewell does not discuss is that often that intimacy did not occur because parents were afraid of losing their children due to illnesses and did not want to become too attached. Most children were not even named until after one year of age. While the parents did name them after one-year-old, a distance still existed due to this lack of connection during the first year of the children’s lives. Dickinson wrote in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mrs. Holland that a bond or connection came “when she [Dickinson’s mother] became our Child” and that when they were younger their mother had “always brought us something” when she traveled; however, “Now, would she bring us but herself, what an only Gift-Memory is a strange Bell- Jubilee, and Knell” (89). The memories Dickinson has of her mother are both ecstasy and melancholy.

Dickinson’s language in the elegies she incorporates in her letter mirror the language she uses throughout the entire letter, which reinforces the elegiac conventions. For instance, in a letter to Maria Whitney, whom Dickinson calls “Sweet friend,” she

writes, “Our Mother ceased— / While we bear her dear form through the Wilderness, I am sure you are with us” (285). The image of Dickinson and her family carrying their mother (and wife) through the desert is a metaphor for the anguish and lament they feel, and Dickinson realizes that Whitney likely is empathetic and carries the same burden. She exposes her lament by stating, “Remember me to your Annie and Kate. Tell them I envy them their Mother. ‘Mother’! What a Name!” (286). Dickinson’s remark reflects the grief and pain she feels of not being able to have her mother with her. Yet, in another letter Dickinson writes to Mrs. J.G. Holland, Dickinson describes her Mother as flying in death and recounts that “[t]he dear Mother that could not walk, has flown” (285). She finds consolation in her mother not suffering. Moreover, in the letters, Dickinson focuses on her mother’s last days. She writes,

She seemed entirely better the last Day of her Life and took Lemonade-Beef Tea and Custard with a pretty ravenous that delighted us. After a restless Night, complaining of great weariness, she was lifted earlier than usual from her Bed to her Chair, when a few quick breaths and a ‘Don’t leave me, Vinnne’ and her sweet being closed. (286)

In a letter to her Norcross cousins, Dickinson has remnants of the elegiac focus on the deceased’s last day as she explains, “She [Dickinson’s mother] was scarcely the aunt you knew. The great mission of pain had been ratified-cultivated to tenderness by persistent sorrow, so that a larger mother died than had she died before. A few weeks later, she was still trying to rally her forces”² (88). Although she and her mother had a strained

² The bereaved not only wished to be with the loved one during the dying’s last days but also wished others the same comfort. For instance, in June of the year her mother died, her friend Charles Clark’s brother died,

relationship, she still praises the deceased. She writes, “That the one we have cherished so softly so long, should be in that great Eternity without our simple Counsels, seems frightened and foreign, but we hope that Our Sparrow has ceased to fall, though at first we believe nothing” (Johnson 286). The elegiac lament, consolation, focus on the last days, and praise of the deceased within Dickinson’s letters are included within her elegy for her mother, “To the bright east she flies.”

Unlike many elegies, Dickinson’s elegy for her mother begins with a consoling image as depicts her mother as flying “to the bight east” and that “Brothers of Paradise / Remit her home” (1-2). The consolation comes from Dickinson knowing that she is at her eternal home, heaven. Instead of finding consolation by depicting death as sleep, Dickinson finds consolation in depicting her mother as a flying bird. This shift is unsurprising because Dickinson loves nature. She parallels her mother with a free flying bird, not a slumbering soul. While the family does not find consolation through a deathbed scene, they do seek consolation by “Fathoming what she was” and wondering “what she is” now (7-8). They dream about what she is now as a soul in heaven. Nevertheless, Dickinson exclaims that her mother was “enticed to come,” which suggests she was not ready for death, an elegiac complaint (6). Dickinson laments that her mother “dissolves the days / Through which existence strays” and that she is “Homeless at home” (10-12). On earth, Dickinson is homeless, perhaps because she does not have her mother. Or, her mother is “Homeless at home” where she has left behind all she has known (12). In either case, Dickinson presents a bleak outlook and mourns her mother’s

and Dickinson wrote in a letter to Clark that she “hope[d] he [Clark’s brother] was able to speak with you[Clark] with his closing moments” (289).

death. Later, she would write to her cousins that her mother's death felt like "many kinds of cold- at times electric, at times benumbing- then a trackless waste" (Johnson 89).

Dickinson's lament is seen through the stages of grief of pain (electric), numbness, and sorrow (waste). All of these are crippling like the cold and express the intensity of her grief.

In addition to the elegiac conventions employed within her letters, Dickinson incorporates customary nineteenth-century mourning practices. For instance, she returns condolences and states, "Thank you for the Love— I was sure whenever I lost my own I should find your hand" (286). She included the idea of planting of flowers on graves. She recounts, "The Clover you brought me from Father's Grave, Spring will sow on Mother's— and she carried Violets in her Hand to encourage her" (286). The flowers are Dickinson's connection with her mother. She also connects her parents because the clover was from her father's grave, and she puts it on her mother's grave.

The most traumatic death Dickinson experienced was the death of her eight-year-old nephew, Gilbert, on October 5, 1883. Dickinson's letter to Susan Gilbert Dickinson after the death of Gilbert Dickinson can be classified as a prose elegy. Dickinson begins with the elegiac consolation that comes at the beginning even before the lament. She remarks, "The Vision of Immortal Life has been fulfilled" and that he "must instruct" her and "Show us [the Dickinsons]... the way to thee!" (293). In "The Elegiac Modes of Dickinson," Patricia Thompson Rizzo notes, "Dickinson assumes the role of the child in calling on Gilbert to instruct her" (109). However, on another level, Gilbert not only becomes like a parent guiding the child, Dickinson, but also Gilbert serves as a sort of angel that leads them; this representation is typical of young children who died being

called an angel because of their innocence. Rizzo grounds her argument in the comparison of Dickinson's elegies with that of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*.³ Although this exposes Dickinson's participation in the literary tradition, Rizzo's argument ignores its participation in the nineteenth-century cultural tradition.

Children's graves from the nineteenth-century often featured a stone angel atop of the grave or at the least had an image of an angel. On the surface, the twenty-first-century person may believe that the nineteenth-century person saw the angel as a protector of the child. Indeed, some nineteenth-century citizens did find comfort in thinking the young innocent child would have a guide. Others, however, believed the children became angels because of their innocence. Either way, the bereaved found comfort in the angel imagery. In her poem, Dickinson finds comfort in seeing Gilbert in all things that are quick. She exclaims, "I see him in the Star, and meet his sweet velocity in everything that flies-His Life was like the Bugle, which winds itself away, his Elegy an echo-his Requiem ecstasy" (qtd. in Johnson 293). His memory is preserved in lyrics. Rizzo asserts that the mournful bugle sound is "part of the prolonged lamentations of the traditional pastoral pipes of the elegy" (107). In an 1883 letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland, Dickinson acknowledges that she finds consolation in the idea that Gilbert's grandparents were "waiting for [him]" and that he could ask them to "open the Door" to the afterlife. She asks, "who were waiting for him?" and exclaims that the loved ones would give "all we

³ Rizzo compares the music that plays before Anthony's demise to the bugle that plays for Dickinson's nephew's death. The music in the play and the bugle music both have a strong lexicon.

possess we would give to know” if he, Gilbert were resting comfortably in paradise (294). This seems to contrast with her poem:

There was a little figure plump
 For every little knoll
 Busy needles, and spools of thread—
 And trudging feet from school

 Playmates, and holidays, and nuts—
 And visions vast and small—
 Strange that the feet so precious charged
 Should reach so small a goal! (9-16)

Here, the dead children are not in paradise; rather, the speaker mourns a life cut short. Their experience of play, school, holidays, and make-believe is cut short. Perhaps the difference is the personal connection between poet and subject. In the spring of 1880, Dickinson writes Thomas Wentworth Higgins about the death of a child. While Dickinson does not depict the dead child as an angel in heaven but rather “A Dimple in the Tomb,” she shows reverence by exploring the idea that even the place of death, or “ferocious room,” still makes “A Home” (Johnson 661). This dichotomy is not unusual for this time period because the home played such an intricate role in death, as well as all other stages of life such as marriage.

After the consolation, the elegiac lament comes as the bereaved, Dickinson and family, are “surprise[d]” at “The Passenger” to the immortal life, her eight-year-old nephew (Johnson 293). The grief comes from Gilbert’s life being cut short and from the

family wondering what might have happened had he lived. Although Dickinson does not reflect on Gilbert's actual deathbed, she does reminisce about his life, such as he "rejoiced in Secrets" and playfully says, "'Don't tell Aunt Emily!'" (Johnson 293). She also remembers his energy and that he was "No crescent" but rather "traveled from the Full- / Such soar, but never set" (293). The elegiac consolation comes from memories. She finds peace in remembering happy times with her nephew.

In examining other Dickinson family members and mourning customs, scholars must look at Sue's (Gilbert's mother) reaction to Gilbert's death. Johnson notes that "Mrs. John Jameson, a neighbor 'intimate with both Dickinson households' wrote her son Frank three weeks after Gilbert's death. Sue's grief, though apparently not so devastating as Austin's, is sharply etched" (Johnson 205). Johnson also adds, "So in the village gossip. Sue's period of formal mourning was indeed, at least in the eyes of Austin and Mabel, unduly prolonged. In their letters she was often called 'the great big black mogul'" (Johnson 205). On the surface, Johnson's footnote seems insignificant; however, the "three weeks" were not "unduly prolonged" as Austin and Mabel note. By 1883, the year of Gilbert's death, mourning periods were shortened but not to that extreme. Around 1920 is when the wearing of elaborate mourning clothing fell off, so the 1880s society still adhered to customary dress. A mother mourning for a child usually wore mourning clothing for a year. For the first six months (First Mourning,) the mother wore bombazine and crepe and for the next six months (Ordinary Mourning) black silk. During the final three months (Half Mourning), the mother could wear half mourning colors, such as maroon (Atkins). In Mrs. Jameson's response to someone commenting to her daughter Helen that Sue "would probably 'make a parade of her grief,'" Mrs. Jameson noted that

their community is “an abominable place For defamation of character and how easily the worst will be believed of folks” (Johnson 205). Yet, Sue’s actions were not atypical. In fact, even Emily Dickinson, Gilbert’s aunt, “never fully recovered from his death,” so it is not so unusual his mother continued on in grief (206). Perhaps, their response to Sue’s grief was due to Austin and Sue’s strained relationship.

In addition to the letter that contains the first elegy, Dickinson sent an accompanying elegy concerning Gilbert’s death, in which she proceeds on with the elegiac lament. Dickinson declares, “Expanse cannot be lost / Not Joy, but a Decree / Is Deity- God’s vastness is law but that does not mean all is happiness” (Sewell 205). In essence, God may encompass all, but “all” includes grief. While God may provide comfort, the speaker reveals that this does not mean all events are joyous. She even notes Sue’s grief: “The World that thou hast opened / shuts for thee” (Sewell 206). Although Dickinson recognizes Sue’s grief, she presents the entire family’s grief as she tells Sue that she is “not alone” and that “We all have followed thee” (Sewell 206). The mutual loss interconnects them; thus, there is a communal lament. Each family member realizes he or she is not grieving alone, which is part of the consolation process.

Besides lament, Dickinson incorporates the elegiac praise of the deceased as Gilbert is one who now lives in “infinity” behind “Those rumor’s Gate was shut so tight.” He not only is an infinite being but has virtue in order to make it on the other side of the secured “Gate” to eternity. The praise continues as Dickinson declares, “Before my Beam was sown, / Not even a Prognostic’s push / Could make a Dent theron” (Sewell 205) The possessive personal pronoun “my” suggests belonging to Dickinson or the speaker. Dickinson offers elegiac consolation to Sue: “Escape more slowly / To the Tracts of

Sheen,” or happiness because “The Tent is listening / But the Troops are gone!” (Sewell 206). She encourages her to look for the beauty, or shine, because her grief is known, and she will receive consolation. Dickinson desires for Sue to seek happiness where she can when everyone has left and family and friends are not around to provide comfort.

On top of personal elegies for family members, Dickinson includes elegiac themes in some of her other poems. For instance, in the opening stanza to Dickinson’s “I meant to find Her when I came” (~1863), the speaker expresses regret that he or she meant to find “Her” but “Death-had the same design-” (1-2). The lament comes from the fact that death reached the loved one before the speaker could. Regret is part of the speaker’s lament as Death got to “t[ell] her so the first-” and “she had past, with Him-” (7-8). Dickinson personifies death and presents life as a race or competition. The speaker realizes time is fleeting. Moreover, the speaker’s realization causes him or her to realize what he or she has not accomplished. Another part of the lament comes from not being able to say goodbye, which leaves a lack of closure and consolation.

The elegiac complaint comes when the speaker contends, “the Success-was His- it seems- / And the Surrender-Mine [the speaker’s]—” (3-4). The mourning comes from death winning out and the speaker feeling as if he or she had to give up the loved one to death. The complaint is the acknowledgment that death is stronger than any desire to have the loved one live. The complaint intensifies as the speaker states, “I meant to tell Her how I longed / For just the single time—” (5-6). The speaker’s complaint reveals regret about not being able to do more to comfort the dying, which is a normal part of the grieving process. The speaker’s lines reveal that the speaker has regret and does not have the closure because he or she wishes to tell the departed how he or she feels.

Unlike some of Dickinson's other elegies, the elegiac consolation comes in the final stanza. However, the only "Repose" the speaker has is "to wander-now—" (9). The consolation the speaker wants is "To rest," which the speaker states "would be / A privilege of Hurricane" (10-11). The reference to the privilege being "of Hurricane" suggests that it would be the greatest privilege equal to the size of a hurricane. Nevertheless, a hurricane leaves destruction; thus, rest seems a strong force that leaves scars. If the speaker has too much time on his or her hands, the rest could lead to loneliness. Likewise, too much quietness brings back painful memories.

In contrast to "I meant to find her when I came," Dickinson's elegy "Her final Summer was it" begins with a reflection of the deceased's last days. The reflection is unconventional in that the speaker does not think back in this stanza to the deceased's bedside but rather remembers a much longer time, a final summer when they "guessed it not" to be her last. The speaker laments that they did not know why the departed was so busy with "tenderer industriousness" (4). They lament that they did not realize she was preparing for death. The speaker treats death as "A further force of life" that "developed from within-" prior to death (5-6). The deceased's "hurry" in getting things in order was made "plain / When death lit all the shortness up" (7-8). The speaker again exposes lament when they "wondered at [their] blindness" (9). This is a communal grief as seen in the speaker's use of third person "We" (9). Not only do they lament because of their blindness but also because of their "Stupidity" in not seeing her slowly pass away (12). After the beloved's death, the speaker reveals the loved one as pale or growing "duller than [their] dullness" (13). They grieve because they believe they could have helped her live longer and that they could have spent more time with her.

Moreover, the speaker praises the deceased as “the Busy Darling” (14). The speaker admires the industriousness of their loved one. The speaker contrasts the loved one who was “so busy...finishing” while they were “So leisurely” living life and not being observant that their loved one’s life was quickly passing. The speaker reveals the separation death leaves when he or she declares, “I cannot live with You-” (1). “It would be Life” equates to eternity (2). This depiction, while not typical of Dickinson’s skepticism, suggests a hope. If the speaker were with the deceased for life, they would both be in eternity, regardless of whether the speaker means Heaven or another eternal realm. There is hope for a reunion with the loved one. Furthermore, the elegiac consolation comes from the hope of the deceased receiving a new body after death. Life is fragile “Like a [Porcelain] cup” that is “Quaint— or Broke” and becomes “Discarded of the Housewife” (7-10). The speaker exclaims, “A newer Sevres pleases— / Old Ones crack” (11-12). The cup represents the body where the promise of a new body occurs after death. Furthermore, Allison Giffen asserts that this phrase reveals Dickinson’s “concern with aesthetics and the choice of art” and the cracking cup “suggests fear of her potential fate” (277-278). While Giffen conflates this analogy with the “female” poet, actually, Dickinson is participating in the male-dominated elegiac tradition. For instance, John Milton’s speaker in *Epitaphium Damonis* desires to know if his own work has meaning as he questions the meaning of Damon’s life. Damon asks, “Shall your virtue vanish without renown / And keep company only with the host of unknown shades?” (21-22). Likewise, Dickinson worries about her own validity as a poet. Certainly, in Dickinson’s elegy, the image of a cup is domestic. However, the craftsmanship is what concerns Dickinson, not the hearth and home. The artistic images—the product— is what

she wants to present and champion, not domesticity. Rather than promoting traditional femininity, she is concerned with artistic merit and meaning.

The elegiac complaint comes from the separation from loved ones that death creates. The speaker exclaims, “I could not die—with You – / For One must wait” in order to “To shut the Other’s Gaze down” because the first one to die “could not” (13-16). The speaker provides a glimpse into the nineteenth-century culture. One of the nineteenth-century beliefs includes closing the eyes of the deceased loved one to provide peace for the deceased as seen when the speaker states, “For One must wait / To shut the Other’s Gaze down— / You-could not—” (14-16). The speaker seems to see the closed eyes as providing a protection against the “freeze,” which is “death’s privilege” (18-20). The closing of the eyes is not only a deathbed scene image but also a nineteenth-century superstition that someone must close the deceased’s eyelids to allow the soul to reach eternity in peace. This idea goes back to the notion that the eyes are considered a window to the soul.

Because this elegy is less traditional in the hope of eternal life, the speaker focuses on her love for her beloved rather than for Christ. The speaker tells the loved one, “Nor could I rise-with You— / Because Your face / Would put out Jesus’ — / That New Grace” (21-24). Later, the speaker even says that the beloved shone more than Jesus who “Shone closer by” (27-28). Less traditional is also that the speaker is “homesick,” not for Heaven but for earth. Furthermore, while the deceased “served Heaven,” the bereaved “could not” (31-32). The reason the bereaved could not be rewarded is because the deceased “saturated [the mourner’s] Sight,” so the one left behind “had no more Eyes / For sordid excellence / As Paradise” (33-36). The speaker unconventionally desires to

be “lost” if he or she is with the deceased who is lost even if the speaker’s “Name / Rang loudest / On the Heavenly fame” (37-40). The speaker declares that even if the deceased “were...saved,” he “was condemned” that it “were Hell” because he and the loved one weren’t together (41-43). While the speaker seeks consolation that they “must meet apart” through the speaker being “here” and the deceased “there / With just the Door ajar / That Oceans are- and Prayer-” (44-47). Yet, no consolation comes, only lament, through the simple word “Despair” (49). The despair comes from the gulf between the bereaved and deceased. This gulf intensifies the grief and loneliness of mourning and does not console the bereaved.

In “I Measure every grief I meet,” the speaker continues the despair. At the beginning, the speaker explains,

I MEASURE every grief I meet
 With analytic eyes;
 I wonder if it weighs like mine,
 Or has an easier size. (1-4)

The speaker’s measuring his or her grief against others reveals the lament. The speaker’s intriguing eyes show the empathy that comes with lament as the mourner seeks others in the same position. The speaker’s own grief is great in that he or she believes that others have a lighter grief. The speaker shows the stages of mourning when asking if the bereaved has “bore it [grief] long,” or if “it just beg[an]” (5-6). The speaker’s own lament is “so old a pain” that he or she “could not tell the date” of when the pain began (7). Thus, the lament does not end. The lines “I wonder if it hurts to live, / And if they have to try” echoes Poe’s lines “The fever of living” (9-10). Living in grief hurts, and the lament

is a disease that the bereaved “have to try” to overcome (10). The speaker’s wondering if “[t]hey would not rather die” if they could chose to live without their loved one or die with them suggests his or her own preferring death to the pang of grief (12). The speaker’s “wonder[ing] if when years have piled- / Some thousands-on the cause” and “Of early hurt, if such a lapse / Could give them any pause” suggests the pain builds and that a break in pain is abnormal (13-16). These lines also reveal the pain does not end but builds through life.

While most, but not all, elegies offer some form of consolation, this speaker’s intense grief does not allow for consolation, even in heaven. He or she would “go on aching still / Through centuries above” and be “Enlightened to a larger pain / By contrast with the love” (17-20). The bereaved’s lament only intensifies because his or her love grows. The speaker states,

The grieved are many, I am told;
The reason deeper lies,—
Death is but one and comes but once,
And only nails the eyes. (21-24)

The fact that death comes “only” once means the departed will not come back to life.

There’s grief of want, and grief of cold,—
A sort they call “despair”;
There’s banishment from native eyes,
In sight of native air. (25-28)

The grief of “want,” “cold,” and “despair,” are the loneliness of missing a loved one and the bereaved desiring to be with the departed (25-26). The “banishment from native eyes

/ In sight of air” suggests a separation, which creates the hurt (27-28). The elegiac solace or consolation comes from the “piercing comfort” of “passing Calvary” (31-32). Yet, the consolation actually still pains the grieving. However, the speaker also realizes,

To note the fashions of the cross,
 Of those that stand alone,
 Still fascinated to presume
 That some are like my own. (33-36)

Others do share in grief, so there is some consolation. Yet, on a deeper level, the speaker parallels his or her dismissal of the norm as a way to stand out from the Christian who carries a burden or cross. Consequently, the speaker finds peace in others who may empathize because they have gone through something similar. Thus, there is a collective mourning.

In “I did not reach thee,” the elegiac complaint and lament come from the speaker who does not reach the beloved before he or she died. Nevertheless, hope comes in a reunion in that the speaker’s “feet slip nearer every day” (2). The speaker opens the narrative poem and states, “One Desert and a Sea— / I shall not count the journey one / When I am telling thee” (4-6). The obstacles—rivers, hill, desert, and sea— reveal the distance between the deceased and the bereaved. Although the life here, or the first of the two deserts are “cold,” the second one will be “cool as land,” or more grounded (7, 10). The speaker’s going through the Sahara is “too little [a] price / to pay” to have the departed’s company, “Right hand” (11-12). The speaker exclaims,

The sea comes last. Step merry, feet!
 So short have we to go

To play together we are prone,
 But we must labor now,
 The last shall be the lightest load
 That we have had to draw. (13-18)

The sea of life goes quick as they dance and realize they have a limited time together. They must also work until the load, or life, is done and the end will be easier. There is consolation at the end if there is happiness in the final days. The speaker describes how

The Sun goes crooked—that is night—
 Before he makes the bend
 We must have passed the middle sea,
 Almost we wish the end
 Were further off—too great it seems
 So near the Whole to stand. (19-24)

The sunset is the setting of life after middle age where wish they have more time. The speaker explains,

We step like plush, we stand like snow—
 The waters murmur now,
 Three rivers and the hill are passed,
 Two deserts and the sea!
 Now Death usurps my premium
 And gets the look at Thee. (25-30)

Death gets to see the beloved before the speaker, which creates lament and complaint.

The speaker's harsh word choice that death "usurps" him suggests he has no control over

death and echoes the melancholy and bleakness of the poem, which is the opposite of traditional pastoral poems (29).

Besides Dickinson participating in the nineteenth-century mourning custom of including elegies within her letters, specifically for the death of a loved one, she responds to the elegiac tradition and cultural tradition of including other authors' elegies within her letters. For instance, she incorporates Elizabeth Barrett Browning's and William Cullen Bryant's poetry within her letters; thus, she reveals that she is aware of the elegiac conventions used by these poets.

In an April 25th, 1862, letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dickinson reveals her literary preferences for "Keats-and Mr. and Mrs. Browning" as poets and "Mr Ruskin-Sir Thomas Browne- and the Revelations" for prose (Johnson 172, Letter 261). Dickinson's literary preferences reveal that she admires both male and female poets. Also, it reveals that she knows the elegiac conventions these poets used. However, she had not read Whitman as she says, "I never read his Book— but was told that he was disgraceful" (173). Although she might not have read the Whitman's most well-known *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, she still admired other elegists. In August 1862 of the same year, she asks Higginson, "Have you the portrait of Mrs. Browning? Persons sent me three- If you had none, will you have mine" (179). The fact that multiple people presented her with Elizabeth Barrett Browning's portrait suggests she made her admiration of Browning known. She also presented him a picture "of Mrs. Browning's tomb" given to her by Dr. Holland (210). She also found Helen Hunt's poems to be "stronger than any written by Women since Mrs. Browning, with the exception of Mrs. Lewes" (214). Moreover, Dickinson's literary preferences reveal she is inspired by both

British and American literature. For example, in a letter to Forrest F. Emerson, Dickinson invokes the elegiac focus on the deathbed scene (326). Johnson notes, “In referring to Helen Jackson, ED alludes to the deathbed moment of Keats, whose friend Joseph Severn was with him and reported Keats’s last words: ‘Severn, lift me up, for I am dying. I shall die easy. Don’t be frightened. Thank God it has come’” (326). She even tells Higginson that she will send him a photograph of her “in a day or two” (323). She was additionally influenced by Bryant. In a lengthy letter to her Uncle Joel Warren Norcross, Dickinson refers to the ending of Bryant’s *Thanatopsis*. She writes, “The last duel I fought did not take but five minutes in all— the wrapping the drapery of his couch about him- and lying down to pleasant dreams” (Johnson 32-33). Furthermore, in that same letter, she later recollects the lyrics of “Lady Beauty,” a well-know nineteenth-century song that uses elegiac conventions. The song reads, “Roses will fade-time flies on,” which is much like a pastoral elegy as nature echoes the speaker’s lament (33). Dickinson’s inclusion of this song not only shows her cultural awareness but also how other genres can have elegiac conventions.

In addition to the Brownings and Keats, Dickinson was also influenced by Milton’s and Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s elegies. Ronald Sudol examines another elegy by Dickinson that may have been influenced by Milton whose first line reads, “Lay This Laurel on the One.” Sudol asserts that Dickinson’s “Lay this Laurel on the One” is a transition poem, which dwells “at the threshold” between her earlier elegies that she treats “in a rather generalized way” versus the “highly characteristic perspective of village society” and “Convey an affirmation of something other than confidence in the

truth of immortality” (10). The seemingly simple, short four-line elegy summarizes the melancholy of death. The speaker commands,

Lay this Laurel on the One
 Too intrinsic for Renown—
 Laural—veil your deathless tree—
 Him you chasten, that is He! (1-4)

To a point, Sudol is correct that unlike the earlier poems, here Dickinson chooses the word “Laurel” to show reverence. However, Sudol does not apply the elegiac conventions when explicating this poem. The honor Sudol mentions falls into the elegiac praise of the deceased. Certainly, because most of these later elegies were written around the time when Dickinson experienced many deaths, she has a personal connection and reason to praise the deceased.

Each family member or friend who passed away had a special meaning, so she shows reverence. He also suggests that while Dickinson was somewhat influenced by Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s “Decoration: Manubus date lilia plenis,” which “appeared in the Decoration Day issue of *Scribner’s Monthly* in June 1874,” she captured the essence of death’s “‘intrinsic’ value” more than Higginson does (10-11). In a letter to Mabel Loomis Todd, Higginson exclaims “Lay a Laurel on the One” to be “the condensed essence of that and so far finer” (qtd. in Loeffelholz 663). Sudol asserts that Milton’s *Lycidas* may have more of an influence than Higginson’s *Decoration*. While it is true that Milton invokes “O ye Laurels,” scholars cannot know for certain that Dickinson read *Lycidas*, though it is very probable. She did read *Paradise Lost* and quotes from it in a letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland. She calls Milton or Milton’s speaker “the

great florist,” and “The flower that never will in other climates grow,” which comes from the second book of *Paradise Lost* (Johnson 328). Ultimately, her references to *Paradise Lost* do not prove she read *Lycidas*, but it does reveal she admired Milton and that there is a strong possibility that she was influenced by his elegies.

Upon yet another death of one of Dickinson’s closest friends, Dr. Holland (a physician and novelist), Emily Dickinson sends a letter to his bereaved spouse (Mrs. J. G. Holland). She incorporates elegiac conventions. In the letter, Dickinson expresses lament of the death of Dr. Holland as she states, “We read the words but know them not. We are too frightened with sorrow” (336). Grief made the message of his death hard for them to comprehend as they were struck with grief. She laments that she could not be there by his bedside and includes the elegiac complaint. She exclaims, “If that dear tired one must sleep, could we not see him first” (276). The consolation comes as she says, “Heaven is but a little way to one who gave it, here. ‘Inasmuch,’ to him, how tenderly fulfilled. Our hearts have flown to you before-our breaking voices follow. How can we wait to take you all in our sheltering arms?” (277). She is more traditional and references Heaven as a place of postmortem immortality, which is rare for Dickinson, because they were close friends. She then exposes her own heartache. She explains, “Could there be new tenderness, it would be for you, but the heart is full- another throb would split it- nor would we dare to speak to those whom such a grief removes, but we have heard ‘A little child shall lead them’” (276-277). Perhaps, she suggests that a child-like faith will lead to eternal life.

Shortly after, on April 1, 1882, Dickinson loses her friend Charles Wadsworth, a minister whom Dickinson respected. In a letter to Otis P. Lord, she writes, “My

Philadelphia [Charles Wadsworth] has passed from Earth” (278). Dickinson’s choice to call Wadsworth her “Philadelphia” suggests a deep “*phileo*” love. In the only known letter from him, he states that “[Y]ou have all my sympathy, and my constant, earnest prayers” and that he is “very, very anxious to learn more definitely” of her “trial” (Wolff 389). While no other letters remain and she does not reveal her plight, the fact that she confides in him and that he cares about her sorrow and does not want to “intrude upon” it shows the comradery they had. The brotherly love comes from him being her mentor on spiritual matters. She also notes the passing of Ralph Waldo Emerson who she learned about from her father’s law student. Dickinson equates Wadsworth with Emerson, which reveals that she felt the loss of both close friends and literary figures. She seeks consolation in a later letter to James Clark asking if he know if Wadsworth’s “Children were near him at last, or if they grieved to lose that most sacred life.” Dickinson includes an elegiac praise of the deceased as she hopes one of his offspring resembles him and exclaims, “How irreparable should there be no perpetuation of nature so treasured” (284). She honors Wadsworth and hopes he lives on through his children and calls him “a Balm” and believes knowing those closest to him will help ease the lament and pain.⁴

Two years after the loss of Dr. Holland and one year after the loss of Gilbert, Dickinson experiences the loss of her friend—according to some scholars, lover—Judge Lord. She writes to Mrs. Holland, “When I tell my sweet Mrs. Holland that I have lost

⁴ In the same letter, as she reflects on Charles Wadsworth’s death, Dickinson refers to the death of Wadsworth’s mother and asserts she knew someone had died when first visited Dickinson because he had “Black with his Hat.” The men often wore black on their hats as the main part of their mourning attire, especially during the 1850s and 1860s. His mother dies on October 1, 1859 (Johnson 284-285).

another friend, she will not wonder I do not write, but that I raise my Heart to a drooping syllable- Dear Mr Lord has left us” (302). She presents death as sleep when she retells the story of the last day his nieces passed on to her. She recounts that his death was “a Sleep that ended with a smile” (302). The consolation begins here and continues in the elegy as she includes that while all is “Quite empty,” all is still “quite at rest” (302). The speaker, Dickinson possibly since this is from a personal letter, laments as she is like the Robin who “locks her Nest / and tries her wings” who “does not know a Route” (302). Grief makes the speaker feel lost as she is “Crumbless and homeless” and only asks “but one request” that “The Birds she lost” (302). The elegiac complaint comes as the speaker or Robin “puts her Craft about / For *rumored* Springs” (302). The image of the robin preparing to fly but only hearing rumored “Springs” echoes the speaker’s lack of home of rebirth or newness and suggests that the speaker’s hope for happiness is only false hope (302). This elegy follows the pastoral elegy although it does not include sheep, shepherds, or hills. Rather, it includes nature mirroring the speaker’s own grief. Just as the Robin, one of her favorite creatures she uses to symbolize the poet, does not ask for “Noon” or “Boon” but only her offspring, so the speaker wants their loved one back (302). The speaker’s reaction is like Dickinson’s desire to have Judge Lord back as seen in a later March 1884 letter where she thanks them “for the sympathy” and reveals her lament as she “hardly dare to know that I have lost another friend, but anguish finds it out” (303). She again incorporates the elegiac lament as she describes how “Each that we lose takes part of us” (303). Yet, the consolation is that “A crescent still abides,” or the memory of the person remains with the living and comes “like the moon, some turbid

night” when it “Is summoned by the tides” (303). This falls in line with the artist believing and hoping that they leave something behind through their work when they die.

Ultimately, Dickinson experienced numerous deaths of family, friends, and fellow artists, and her elegiac verse reflects upon them, drawing simultaneously on the elegiac literary tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning traditions. While some scholars have looked briefly at her more well-known elegies, few have connected them to her milieu or acknowledged her influence on American and British elegiac writing. Likewise, while many more women were publishing elegies in popular magazines, Dickinson stands out as she does not seek to publish for monetary gain as seen when she tells Higginson that publishing her work was “foreign to” her thoughts (Wolff 188). She also valued male elegists as well. She relies more on the pastoral conventions and older elegiac conventions of lament, consolation, and praise of the deceased more so than solely sentimentalism, which most female elegists embraced during the nineteenth-century, as reflected in her elegies and letters. She also presents death as sleep, a standard approach to death. All in all, she is a complex elegist who is a product of both the elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning culture. Nevertheless, she stands out in that she questions the hope for consolation though belief in an eternity in Heaven; yet, she does not entirely dismiss the notion of a reunion. This dichotomy and complexity makes her an intriguing figure, and scholars must delve even deeper into her letters and poetry to truly see her value. Dickinson is known for her theme of death, so more scholarship should certainly be done on Dickinson as an elegist.

Chapter IV

Mournful Melancholy: Louisa May Alcott's Elegies

During her lifetime until the present, Louisa May Alcott has become best known for *Little Women* (1868), *Little Men* (1871), and *Joe's Boys* (1886). However, scholarship lacks on her thrillers and poetry, particularly her elegies. Alcott wrote many of her elegies following the deaths of close family and friends; thus, in her poetry, she presents her private grief and thoughts and makes them public through publication. After seeing the progression of the literary elegiac tradition as well as how the elegy played a part in the nineteenth-century mourning customs, this chapter will examine how Alcott approaches the elegiac topics of lament, complaint, consolation, the parade of mourners, exaltation of the deceased, and the last day of the beloved. We can see how her approaches to these elegiac topics differ in her elegy on a public figure, "Thoreau's Flute" (1863), from her more personal elegies, such as "Transfiguration" (1878). This study presents Alcott as an important elegist whose works need to be analyzed within the male-dominated tradition and within the nineteenth-century mourning tradition. Like Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson, Alcott was influenced by her society and affected by the nineteenth-century cult of mourning. Like Dickinson, Alcott incorporated her more personal elegies within letters to family members. Furthermore, her elegies span a wide range within the literary elegiac tradition, including the pastoral.

As a nurse, one of the few respected occupations a woman could take during the nineteenth-century, Alcott was affected by the bleak and somber effects of death due to the Civil War. Mark Schantz places "death poetry" in context of the carnage left behind from the Civil War and states that "death poetry" offered comfort by pointing to an

afterlife and, thus, a reunion with the deceased loved one. He contends that “poetry of death provided an intellectual and artistic lens through which Americans might conjure and comprehend the carnage of war” (98). Schantz further contends that not only do the poems require the speaker to think about death but also that they bring the reader to the reality of dying and deceased. Elegies “salved the pain of earthly separation for its readers” (98). Randall Fuller argues that a correlation exists between an author’s proximity to the Civil War and to the personal grief a speaker expresses in a death poem. Specifically, Fuller examines the poetry of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, and Frederick Douglass. Fuller explains that Whitman’s poetry became more thought provoking after he worked closely with the soldiers, while Hawthorne’s reading war accounts and speaking with veterans affected him so much so that it silenced him. Fuller provides Hawthorne’s *Atlantic Monthly* works as evidence. Because Alcott served as a nurse like Whitman, Fuller’s argument can be applied to Alcott’s elegies. When Fuller’s idea is applied to Alcott’s elegies, it complicates the reading of her elegiac poetry, in which she has both a speaker who mourns in one elegy and a speaker who tries to understand what the dying individual experiences. For example, Alcott presents a more personal grieving in “Transfiguration” verses the speaker’s focus on the experiences of the dying in “Little Paul,” a figure Alcott takes from Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* who is a direct descendent of Nell from Dicken’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1856).¹ While his argument focuses on

¹ Alcott was deeply influenced by Dickens. Stern describes how Alcott “dipped into the *Pickwick Papers*” (55). Just as Beth, Amy, Jo, and Meg in her *Little Women*, Alcott and her sisters enjoyed reading and writing their own papers like Dickens.

“death poetry,” and not solely “elegies,” the same arguments apply because elegies are death poems; the difference is that elegies have conventional themes of lament and consolation.

Although Fuller does not look specifically at Alcott’s elegies, he does discuss her *Hospital Sketches* and provides contextualization in terms of the Civil War, the high mortality rate of the nineteenth century, and the ways that the experience entered into her writing. On her first night entering the hospital to work as a nurse, she sees “a poor man die at dawn” and ends up “sitting all day between a boy with pneumonia and a man shot through the lungs” (110-111). She describes the evenings at the hospital as the times when “sleep and death have the house to themselves” (114). The same melancholy and depiction of death Schantaz notes in *Hospital Sketches* can be applied to Alcott’s elegies. She writes not of soldiers’ deaths in the poems; nevertheless, the melancholia that results from being a nurse and seeing so many die does affect her.

In addition to Alcott’s role as nurse affecting her, the deaths of close family and friends impacted her as she played nurse to them. We know she wrote many of her elegies following the deaths of close family and friends. She was especially affected by the deaths of her sisters Elizabeth and May, her mother, and her close friend Henry David Thoreau. For instance, in her journal entry for March 14, 1858, Alcott describes her “dear Beth[’s] death” (*The Journal of Louisa May Alcott*, Myerson, Shealy, and Stern 88). She explains how Beth called them together and held their hands a few days before she passed away. She recounts how she “saw a light mist rise from the body, and float up and vanish in the air” and how her “[m]other’s eyes followed” hers, which the doctor said was “the life departing visibly” (89). In her journal entry the next month, Alcott states of

Lizzie's death that "I don't miss her as I expected to do, for she seems nearer and dearer than before; and I am glad to know she is safe from pain and age in some world where her innocent soul must be happy" (89). She adds, "Death never seemed terrible to me, and now is beautiful, so I cannot fear it, but find it friendly and wonderful" (89). In these journal entries, Alcott incorporates sentimentalism and evokes the beautiful death. She places these same conventions within her elegies. Although this is a typical convention, Alcott's personal connection to those she composes the elegies for makes them personal.

Through Alcott's elegies, she participates in both the literary elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning custom of writing poems for deceased loved ones. She incorporates the elegiac conventions of lament, consolation, complaint, the parade of mourners, exaltation of the deceased, and the last day of the beloved. Draper's argument that later elegies did not have to contain elegiac meter can be applied to Alcott's work because she does not include elegiac meter but does include the elegiac content through these elegiac conventions. In discussing these conventions, G. W. Pigman asserts that lament is an effort to overcome grief instead of giving in to it and believes that although the elegy consists of an abbreviated mourning process that the psychological stages of grief—praise, lament, consolation, and recovery—are still incorporated in the elegy. Even though Pigman grounds his argument in Milton's *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*, the same applies to Alcott's elegies. In each elegy, we see these stages as either the speaker or the dying attempting to come to terms with the death of a loved one or even their own death.

The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott, edited by Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy, includes Alcott's letter to Sophia Foord concerning Henry David Thoreau's

death. Alcott's letter contains many elegiac elements that work their way in to "Thoreau's Flute," her poem written upon Thoreau's death. Alcott focuses upon her father's being at Thoreau's bedside as he passed away. She notes, "Father saw him the day before he died lying patiently and cheerfully on the bed he would never leave again alive" (74). She additionally provides Foord with the news that although Thoreau "was very weak" he "suffered nothing and talked in his old pleasant way" (74). Thoreau's lack of suffering serves as consolation, an elegiac component she includes in "Thoreau's Flute." Alcott's discussion of Thoreau's statement that Nature took "a long time to do her work but he was most out of the world" and her mentioning Emerson's discussion of the noble and pure Adelvezia flower operates as a precursor to her pastoral setting in her elegy. Moreover, her description of Nature wearing "her most benignant aspect to welcome her dutiful and loving son to his long sleep in her arms" serves the same purpose. Alcott's description of the "lovely day clear, and calm, and spring like" where they "all walked [Thoreau's] coffin with its fall of flowers" sets precedence for the parade of mourners in the elegy. In the letter's concluding lines, Alcott contends, "I never can mourn for such men because they never seem lost to [her] but nearer and dearer for the solemn change" (75). This sentiment correlates with the elegy's end where Thoreau lives on through his poetry and nature.

In "Thoreau's Flute," Alcott incorporates the pastoral elegiac setting, which is appropriate because of Thoreau's love of nature and because it blends Christian and pagan beliefs. Consequently, she follows the elegiac tradition most closely in this poem. The speaker introduces the pastoral in the opening stanza where the mourner laments and reflects, "We, sighing, said, 'Our Pan is dead; / His pipe hangs mute beside the river; /

Around it wistful sunbeams quiver, / But Music's airy voice is fled" (1-4). The pastoral elegy goes back to the "third-century" Greek poets, such as "Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus" (Kennedy 12). The term "pastoral elegy" came about because the idylls, "eclogues," use "imagery such as nymphs and shepherds or singing and weaving" in addition to "the close relation between pastoral and elegy" (Kennedy 12). The pastoral elegy becomes part of the pastoral tradition because "death is the ultimate form of the separations and losses that pervade pastoral poetry" (Alpers 91). When discussing the pastoral, Thomas Harrison and Harry Leon see "[t]he role of Nature, having its origin in man's grief for the death in Nature, reappear[ing] in the frequent contrast between the cyclic course of the seasons from death to life, on the one hand, and the finality of human death on the other" (3). Nature mourns in "Thoreau's Flute" as "Spring mourns as for untimely frost; / The bluebird chants a requiem; / The willow-blossom waits for him" (5-7). Nature's mourning reveals the deceased's connection with nature. We see this also as he haunts "the hills, the stream, the wild, / Swallow and aster, lake, and pine" (17-18). Madeline Stern, in her Alcott biography, notes that "[n]one who knew him could forget him' even his flute remembered, for it was said that a passing breeze had evoked from the instrument a plaintive note as if, in happier meadows that those that stretched to the river, the Concord Pan piped on" (113). Ellen Lambert contends that in the pastoral elegy the speaker's lament pours into the setting and other poetic elements. In "Thoreau's Flute," spring takes on a mournful song and the willow blossom waits to receive Thoreau's spirit. Consequently, Nature connects with the speaker and with the deceased. If Nature connects with both the speaker and deceased, Nature, in a way, reunites the two.

Moreover, Alcott blends the pastoral landscape with the elegiac praise for the deceased as the speaker hails Thoreau as “The Genius of the wood,²” like Milton’s “Genius of the shore” in *Lycidas*, and that “For such as he there is no death” (8, 11). The title fits Thoreau as he honors Nature in his lifetime through his writing and work while at Walden Pond. Consequently, he will live on through nature and through his poetry.

For example, the speaker asserts,

His life the eternal life commands;
 Above man’s aims his nature rose:
 The wisdom of a just content
 Made one small spot a continent,
 And turned to poetry Life’s prose. (12-16)

The praise places Thoreau’s work over man’s mundane goals because he is wise as he crafts a work out of one idea. The praise comes for Thoreau as a writer who left no “vain regrets” and provided poetry, “that finer instrument,” and “[g]ave to the world no poor lament” but instead “wood-notes ever sweet and strong” (25-28). The speaker’s realization that Thoreau left behind no lament but rather a positive legacy is significant because Alcott leaves a legacy through this elegy.

² On June 24, 1863, Alcott writes to Annie Fields thanking her for promoting “Thoreau’s Flute.” She also runs the lines “Spring mourns as for untimely forst, / The Ggenius of the wood is lost” (84). She asks if “the r in frost [is] as objectionable as in lorn” because she wants her “little ship,” the elegy, to be “as an honorable flag” that flies “at the mast head” (84). From this, we can see Alcott’s dedication to “Thoreau’s Flute.”

Besides nature being a part of the lament and praise, nature provides consolation for the speaker. For example, the speaker states,

O lonely friend! he still will be
 A potent presence, though unseen, —
 Steadfast, sagacious, and serene
 Seek not for him, —he is with thee. (29-32)

The speaker does not find the traditional solace of having hope to be reunited with the departed but rather finds solace in a lingering spirit. Nevertheless, Alcott blends traditional Christian solace with the peace of the lingering spirit in the last stanza. The phrase “Seek not for him” echoes the statement of the angel to Mary in Christ’s tomb when the angel says not to fear and to know that He has risen. The syncretism parallels Alcott’s own Christian beliefs that blend with the Transcendentalist ideas she hears through Thoreau and Emerson. Consequently, the syncretism is quite appropriate. The consolation also comes as nature “ne’er forgets” to pay tribute “yearly on the coverlid / ’Neath which her darling lieth hid” by writing “his name in violets” (21-24). The speaker finds solace in knowing Thoreau is not forgotten. He remains a good shepherd who watches over his sheep, the future poets, even after his death. Moreover, we can see how her approaches to these elegiac topics differ in her elegy on a public figure, “Thoreau’s Flute,” from her more personal elegies. For example, through examining “Thoreau’s Flute,” we can see how she carries on the elegiac tradition Walt Whitman uses in his elegy for President Lincoln, another public figure, in “When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom’d.” In contrast, her other elegies offer a more personal lament, or the speaker focuses upon what the dying experiences as they come to terms with their own demise.

Fifteen years after writing “Thoreau’s Flute,” Alcott composed “Transfiguration” upon the death of her mother. As in her letter to Foord, her letter to May Alcott after their mother’s death reveals much that is included in “Transfiguration.” In the letter, Alcott depicts her mother’s death as sleep or “rest” and finds consolation knowing that “after two months of pain and weariness” their mother could “rest” (225). Unlike in “Thoreau’s Flute,” the speaker of “Transfiguration” desires to lament but cannot. The “balm” to relieve “every pang of grief” comes from “counting up the treasures” the deceased leaves behind and provides solace (22-24). The speaker not only laments but so do also the rest of the loved ones as seen in the pronoun “we.” While the “we” is not the public “we” as in “Thoreau’s Flute,” it is a collective close group that mourns. Instead, the “we” are those whom the loved one cared for in the domestic sphere. The traditional pastoral setting is not used because the loved one leaves behind a happy home, not a literary legacy. Part of the consolation comes from “life’s gold” that refines, which allows the deceased’s “art divine” to “change mortal weakness to immortal power” (2-4). The immortality of the afterlife provides solace for the speaker. Furthermore, consolation comes from the “happy thought” the deceased transforms and “live[s] again—brave, beautiful, and young” (11-12). She lives while “nothing but the weary dust lies dead” (40). The speaker’s belief that the deceased will transform keeps true with the “Cult of Mourning” belief that the deceased goes to a better place and gains a new body.

As part of the consolation, the loved one is remembered and honored because of her virtue. The speaker hails her “Oh, noble woman!” and asserts that she becomes more royal as lays down her “scepter and crown “To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen” (41-44). She does not live on through Nature as Thoreau does but rather lives on in the

unknown and unseen eternal realm. Alcott presents her mother as carrying her faith until the end to the afterlife, which most likely Alcott believed to be in heaven. Her honor comes not from artistic creation but from her “noble strife / of a victorious life” (6-7).

Her virtues consist of:

Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time;

Hope that defied despair;

Patience that conquered care;

And loyalty, whose courage was sublime. (25-28)

Moreover, her virtue comes from her “great deep heart that was a home for all” and the fact that she is “Just, eloquent, and strong” and “protest[s] against wrong” (29-32). She also practices “[w]ide charity” and knows “no sin” as she “[m]ates poor daily needs / with high, heroic deeds” (32, 34). She has earned the title “royal soul” that death can be “proud to take” because she taught those left behind “how seek the highest goal,” how “to earn the true success,” and how “to live, to love,[and] to bless” (45-48). Additionally, the speaker honors the deceased’s immortal power alongside her Christian virtue. Clifton Spargo maintains that elegiac idealization of the deceased allows the speaker to elevate the deceased to having a supernatural power over society in areas where they once had power. Thus, death increases power. Spargo further elaborates that the loved one’s death leads the speaker to think of his or her own death. Spargo’s idea applies to “Transfiguration” because the deceased has power to create other happy realms, just as the speaker in “Thoreau’s Flute” depicts Thoreau the power over future poets and poetry after his death.

The grieving process begins prior to the subject's death through the speaker's focus upon the deathbed scene. For instance, the speaker reminisces about how "[a]ge, pain, and sorrow dropped the veils they wore / [a]nd showed the gender eyes / of angels in disguise" as the loved one who bore "discipline so patiently" passes away (13-16). The deathbed scene often blurs the boundaries between life and death because the bed serves as a liminal space. The deathbed scene leads to the speaker reminiscing about "[t]he past years" that "brought their harvest rich and fair / while memory and love / [t]ogether, fondly w[eave] / A golden garland for the silver hair" (17-20). Alcott also uses the mourning custom of focusing upon the deceased's hair. Many during this time kept locks of their loved one's hair after he or she was gone. Furthermore, she includes the elegiac focus upon the last days, which also represents the acceptance stage of grief the speaker is in. Although poets use the deathbed scene as an elegiac convention, it also presents another part of the grieving process. Using a historical, theological, and cultural lens, Jeffery Hammond argues that scholars should read elegies as part of the mourning process, not just simply an art form. He argues that the Puritan elegies have been pushed to the background unlike other Puritan poetry because scholars have overlooked one of the most customary types of poetry of the time. While Alcott writes her elegies a couple of centuries later, she presents a traditional approach to coping with death. In this poem, the deathbed scene is both an elegiac convention and a representation of the remembrance stage of the grieving process.

In "Little Nell" (1865), most certainly based upon Dickens's Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the lament comes as "[t]ender tears" fall over the grave. Nature mourns with the mourner when the "[w]inter sunlight" "shed[s] / [g]olden shadows like soft

blessings” on Little Nell’s “quiet little bed” (5-8). The verb “shed” portrays the sunlight as weeping, and through Nature weeping, Nature blesses the deceased’s work. Through the speaker’s grief, the elegiac complaint emerges. The elegiac complaint emerges as the speaker remembers the “frail form” that “[h]ad borne its heavy load of grief, / [o]f loneliness and care” (9-12). We see the loneliness again in a later stanza where the speaker recounts how Little Nell was “[b]eset with sorrow, pain and fear” and “[t]empted by want and sin” (17-18). The main complaint is that she had no one to “guide or counsel her,” except “the brave child-heart within” (19-20). The speaker’s desire for Little Nell to have had guidance echoes the nineteenth-century sentiment that children must be directed. The speaker possibly suggests that Little Nell would not have died if she had had guidance and that her death was unfair.

The complaint leads the speaker to think about Little Nell’s virtue, which results in the praise of the deceased. The speaker praises Little Nell as one who is “[s]trong in her fearless, faithful love” (21). Because the speaker puts Little Nell’s dedicated love first, it is the first virtue honored. It is a love that is “[d]evoted to the last” (22). Besides virtue, the speaker honors her for her steadfastness as she wanders “[u]nfaltering through gloom and gleam” (23). The speaker also labels her “noble child” as she leads “[t]he gray-haired, feeble, sin-bowed man” “through pathways strange and wild” (25-28). The sinful man contrasts to pure “patient, loving, noble Nell” who is “[l]ike light from sunset skies” because of the “beauty of [her] sinless life” (57-59). Although the speaker notes Nell’s “solemn sense of coming change,” she remains “[a] home whose light and joy she was” (37-40). Her happiness and purity go hand-in-hand.

Alcott keeps to the elegiac focus on reminiscing about the past and the deceased's last days. The speaker recounts Nell's "plant[ing] fragrant flowers / [a]bove the poor neglected graves / through quiet summer hours" (42-44). Even "[t]he dim aisles of the ruined church" remember Nell as they "[e]cho the child's light tread / [a]nd flickering sunbeams thro' the leaves" that "[s]hine on her as she read[s]" (46-48). The speaker's focus shifts from remembering the past to the elegiac convention of describing the deceased's last day. The speaker remembers the "holy silence" and "golden shadows" "[w]hen Death's mild face ...look[s] on her / and [t]hey laid dear happy Nell" (49-52). The speaker's remembrance of Nell's last days provides the speaker with a connection to Nell and brings about consolation.

Alcott interweaves the consolation convention throughout the lyrics and sets up the stages of mourning as circular. The consolation comes after Nell passes "through the world's dark ways," and she finds rest buried in "the quiet spot" where her "little feet had [once] trod" (29-32). Moreover, comfort comes after her "long wandering" as "[k]ind voices bid her come / [t]o that last resting-place on earth" and she finds "a home" (32-36). Further comfort comes from knowing that although she had "wandered o'er the earth" giving "one hand to the old man" the "angels led her on / [u]p a sunlit path to heaven" (53-56). While Alcott presents a traditional approach of hope of a reunion with the deceased loved one in heaven, we can see the impact nature as a theme has on her elegy. In fact, the sunny pathway that the speaker presents is almost serene and pastoral.

In "Little Paul," based on Paul Dombey from Dickens' *Dombey and Sons*, Alcott incorporates a different type of pastoral elegiac setting and has the speaker to focus upon the deceased's mourning process as he comes to terms with his own demise. Instead of a

peaceful pasture, the sea serves as the new serene pastoral setting.³ The sea becomes pastoral as the “[c]heerful voices by the sea-side” ring “through the summer air” (1-2). We see the serenity as the “[h]appy..., fresh, and rosy” children “s[ing] and sport... freely there” (1-4). The tone shifts from jovial to melancholy, however, when “pale” Little Paul, “neglectful” of the other children, sits “among the gray rocks” (6-8). The gray color of the rocks symbolizes Paul’s bleak melancholy. As in the traditional elegiac pastoral, the tone shift occurs because Nature mourns with the speaker. In this case though, nature echoes the dying person’s sadness. Alcott both provides Paul’s bleakness as an elegiac convention and presents Florence as the lamenter. Typically, the speaker is the one grieving, but it is not so in this case. In contrast to the speaker lamenting the loss of her mother in “Transfiguration,” the speaker focuses on the dying Paul as well as another bereaved figure other than the speaker. However, because Alcott spends time with dying soldiers, she can put herself in the place of the dying, which we see in “Little Paul.” The speaker in “Little Paul” may be more of an empathizer than a griever because, like Alcott who experienced soldiers dying, he or she delves deeply into what it is like to be the one who is dying. As a result, she can effectively present a speaker who desires to know and understand what the dying Paul experiences.

Besides playing with the pastoral and lament conventions, Alcott twists the traditional convention of including a parade of mourners. Traditionally, the parade of mourners occurs at the funeral as bereaved pass by the casket. However, in this poem, the parade of mourners occurs prior to Paul’s death. Although he cannot “join their pastimes” or “dance upon the sand” and can only “wave his wasted hand,” they bring him “many a

³ Alcott does much like Poe in “Annabel Lee” where the sea serves as the setting.

treasured gift[s]” because he is “best beloved among them all,” which makes their “childish heart grieve sadly” when they think of him (9-16). Alcott does not have the parade of mourners occur after Paul’s death but prior because the speaker empathizes with Paul as he isolates himself and feels alone. The children each bring him a gift shows him to be almost on another plane than them. He has essentially, thus, already died because he is the isolated “other.” Consequently, the parade of mourners preceding his death creates a melancholy, almost funeral-like, tone, so the reader can identify with Paul’s loneliness and isolation as he comes to terms with his own demise.

Instead of the mourner seeking consolation for losing a loved one, the dying Paul receives consolation. He first finds comfort through Florence “as “her dear voice sound[s] near him,” which makes him “happy and content” (19-20). The “great billows” and their “ceaseless fall” also bring “pleasant music / To the ear of little Paul” (21-24). After Paul is brought to a new place because of his illness, he lies on a bed “paler and more wasted” as the thoughts of the sea comfort him (41-42). Even though he is “where the city’s din and discord / echo round him day by day,” the sea calls to him and provides “tender music” and makes him feel as if the sea is “very near” (43-48). The consolation comes from his remembering “the deep tones of the ocean” that “[l]inger in the frailest shell” (49-50). His preserved memories of his “lonely sea-side musings” and his “talk of golden waters / rippling on his chamber wall” serve as a catharsis (51-54). Likewise, the sea’s “melody” “cheer[s]” his heart. Again, because the speaker places emphasis on the dying rather than himself or herself, the reader can connect with Paul’s last stage of grief, acceptance.

In lieu of having the mourner reflect upon the deceased's last days, Alcott creates a different effect by having the speaker recount Paul's last days and not his or her own desire to have been with him. As a result, Alcott places the focus on Paul instead of the bereaved. Paul "cling[s] fast to faithful Florence" as he "[m]umer[s] fintly night and day / [o]f the swift and darksome river / Bearing him so far away" (57-60). The river brings him "[t]owards a shore whose blessed sunshine / [s]eem[s] most radiantly to fall / [o]n a beautiful mild spirit (61-64). Alcott includes the elegiac convention of the bedside death scene. She keeps the water imagery through the "tide of life" that "ebbe[s] slowly / [t]ill the last wave die[s] away" (65-66). He transforms from being a "fragile wreck" that lays "[o]n the sister's bosom" to being "[l]ifted high above them all" out of "death's solemn waters into the arms of the "spirit mother" who bears little Paul's soul (67-72). The ending echoes the nineteenth-century melancholy tone set because so many children passed away and would not have a "mother" with him or her. Both "Little Nell" and "Little Paul" parallel the high infant and childhood mortality rate.

Alcott's "Our Little Ghost," a poem about a child who died young and became a family ghost, is atypical as an elegy as it has a gothic, eerie tone on one level; on another level, it is an elegy of loss. The bone-chilling description in the opening sets the melancholy tone and is much like the "midnight dreary" opening of Poe's midnight dreary in "The Raven" and the moon tide setting of Poe's "Annabel Lee." The speaker describes "the silence of the night / When the lonely moon rides high / When the wintry winds are whistling" (1-3). The "owl's shrill cry" parallels the speaker's melancholia (4). The "quiet, dusky chamber, / By the flickering firelight," reminiscent of the chambers with ghostly candlelight flickers in "The Raven," enhances the speaker's melancholy tone

(5-6). Nature sets the melancholy tone in an almost pastoral way where there is peace in the quiet night; yet, the image of the lonely moon parallels the speaker's loneliness.

Although the tone ghost imagery is Gothic, the speaker's elegiac praise of the deceased brings a more typical approach to the elegy. The "ghost" or loved one is "winsome," or charming and "Rosy-cheeked and bright of eye / With yellow curls all breaking loose / From the small cap pushed awry" (9-12). Although the figure or deceased loved one is ghostly, or "big gark," it "brings no dread" (14). Perhaps this is because the ghost is innocent as a child. The "baby's busy fancy / Makes a kingdom of a bed" (15-16). The speaker specifically praises the deceased innocence and youthfulness and has its own realm. The pureness of the deceased child allows him or her to rule.

Besides it being pure, the loved one, or ghost, is "fearless" and is "safe" both day and night. Although the speaker creates a melancholy tone through the "lonely moon," "sighing winds," and "solitude," the moon is "fair" and the winds are "gay," and the solitude is "full of friends," so the tone is not so bleak because the ghost, or departed loved one, "brings no regrets" (17-22). The loved one's do not regret remembering the loved one, and nature does not continue lamenting as there always "[s]hines a sun that never sets" because the loved one is a "happy little soul" (23-24). Solace comes from the speaker believing their loved one is content, even if he or she has not gone into eternity.

The speaker employs the elegiac consolation through thinking fondly of the departed. Likewise, the speaker finds consolation in the familiarity and amiability of the deceased, or ghost, rather than fear. The speaker depicts the "merry" and "dancing" cheerful ghost brings joy during a time of typical sadness as a means of consolation (25-26). Furthermore, because the ghost is close and is "[l]ike a tricky household elf /

Nodding to the fitful shadows / As they flicker on the wall,” the loved one, or ghost does not seem so far away, which helps with sadness (28-30). The image of the loved one “[t]alking to familiar pictures” has a double meaning (31). The ghost both is familiar with the photographs but the pictures are also “familiar” in that they are part of the ghost’s family. If the grieving family believes the loved one is still with them, they have consolation even though they hear the ghost’s owl-like “shrill call” (32). The consolation comes from the speaker’s depiction of the ghost as amiable as well as the departed loved one’s engagement with the family members.

Specifically, the ghost comforts its own family as it “lovingly” puts its “hand on father’s shoulder,” “head on mother’s breast,” and “watches each familiar face / [w]ith a tranquil, trusting eye” (40-44). The dead child performs the actions a loving alive child would do. Consequently, the deceased acts as a comforter and even comforts itself, “[w]ith tranquil, trusting eyes, / like a sleepy little bird” as it “sings its own lullaby” (44-46). If there were no consolation, the ghost or dead loved one would not be depicted in a loving manner. For example, the ghost is “thoughtful” by helping the tired “lonely gambols,” or grieving family (34). The speaker describes the ghost as cherub-like with “chubby hands on chubby knees” as it “sits winking at the fire” (35-36). It also is “innocent and lovely” and has “baby eyes” (37-38). This image keeps in line with the nineteenth-century depiction of deceased children as pure angels. The “[s]unny fields of dandelions / Brooks, and birds, and butterflies” all represent the child’s pure nature (39-40). In these lines, Alcott is very much traditional, which may be because of her personal losses she experienced.

The concluding stanza echoes nineteenth-century sentimentality that those who have died before will watch over the children and be with him or her since the parents cannot. The speaker exclaims, “Then those who feigned to sleep before / Lest baby play till dawn, / Wake and watch their folded flower, / Little rose without a thorn!” (49-52). The bereaved, “the hearts that love it most,” find peace as they “[p]ray tenderly above its sleep / ‘God bless our little ghost’” (54-56). Instead of a grim figure, the “little ghost” is more of a little angel watching over them, which is a typical depiction of deceased children in the nineteenth-century. In *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century*, Laurence D. Lerner notes, “The pathetic description of Little Nell on her death bed not only stirred the hearts of thousands of readers, it activated the pens of a good number of imitative novelists” (126). Dickens influence not only British authors’ fixation on childhood death but American writers as well. Besides influencing the novelist, he also influenced poets’ inclusion of childhood deaths. As a result, he influenced the elegiac tradition. While Lerner includes a discussion of childhood death in poetry, Dickens influenced not only British elegists but American elegists, particularly Alcott.

As in many elegies, in “Our Madonna,” which Alcott wrote after the death of her sister May, Alcott praises the deceased as a poet and outlines the poet’s life. The title is intriguing because Alcott herself never officially joined any church although she did attend the Unitarian church from time to time. What may have inspired the name may be the nineteenth-century notion of the angel in the home. Alcott may have viewed May as an angel in their home. Additionally, Alcott portrays May as a poet, which many elegists do. Alcott writes, “As child, her wayward pencil drew / On margins of her book /

Garlands of flowers, dancing elves” (1-3) Alcott praises her whimsicalness and love of nature, including “Bird, butterfly and brook” all before “she knew ‘t was Art” (4,8). Hence, Alcott suggests that the poet’s ability is innate. She praises the poet’s beauty, “Slender and fair and tall,” and praises the beauty of her art, the “goddesses she traced / Upon her chamber wall” (10-12). What she praises most is how she seeks “everywhere / Ideal beauty, grace and strength / in the ‘divine despair” (14-16). Alcott praises her as “Ambitious, brave, elate” woman who could “mould life with a dauntless will” and “seek and conquer fate” (18-20). As a poet she had “[r]ich colors on her palette” that ‘glowed” because of her “Patience [that] bloomed into power,” and her “endeavor,” thus, “earned its just reward,” and “[A]rt had its happy hour” (21-24). While some may argue Alcott deviates from the women’s reform by praising her sister as “A wife, low sitting at his feet,” she actually praises her sister’s ability to be both artist and wife (25). She may sit beneath him, but she “paint[s] with tender skill / The hero of her early dreams, / Artist, but woman still (26-28). Alcott admires her sister’s ability to be “content to be the household saint / [s]hrined in a peaceful home” because she is able to “shut the world away” and to forget “even Rome” (31-34). She praises her sister’s unselfishness as one “[g]iving a life to win a life, / [d]ying that she might bless” even if only for a “brief, blissful past” (35-36, 38). Being a mother brought out “[h]er loveliest and last” as she sees the baby face (40); ultimately, she is the Madonna, mother with child.

The lament comes in the last stanza as “Death the stern sculptor, with a touch / No earthly power can stay” (41-42). The stern sculptor portrays the speaker’s lament at death being cold and distant. The fact that death can change “to marble in an hour / The beautiful, pale clay” also exposes the speaker’s lament (43-44). Nevertheless, Alcott

presents the elegiac consolation at the end where peace comes from “Love the mighty master” that mixes “his stints with tears” and “[p]aints an immortal form to shine / [u]ndimmed by coming years” (45-48). Just as an artist leaves a memorial for painters, Alcott pays tribute to her sister, a fellow artist, in this elegy.

Ultimately, Alcott deserves reconsideration as a significant poet in the literary elegiac tradition who integrates nineteenth-century mourning customs into her verse. Alcott should not only be placed as a participant in the literary elegiac tradition because she includes the typical elegiac conventions but also because she participates in a mostly male dominated tradition and exposes her knowledge of the specialized pastoral elegy within the elegiac tradition. When scholars do acknowledge women elegists, they too easily dismiss the elegies’ complexities as well as some historical context that the elegy reveals, such as the high infant mortality rate. More works should be done on female elegists, particularly Alcott.

Chapter V:

Malicious Mourning: Elegies of Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane, one of the most well-known end-of-the- nineteenth century writers, is recognized for his war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, as well as his bowery novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. However, like Alcott, an insufficient amount of Crane scholarship exists on his poetry. Likewise, many critics focus on the naturalism, another nineteenth century movement, of his short story “The Open Boat,” which places men against nature during the storm that sinks the vessel. Marston La France explains, “Any conclusions about his [Crane’s] fiction which run contrary to the values set forth in the poems are likely to be wrong” (131). Thus, if Crane’s poetry reflects themes in his prose, critics should examine his lines through multiple lenses just as they have his prose. Even during Crane’s lifetime, his poems received more favorable credit than some would lead readers to believe. For instance, David Dickason argues that Elbert Hubbard’s continued publishing of Crane’s poetry and prose in *The Philistine* reveals that the public and critics had continued interest in Crane (279-288). Dickason includes other critics’ favorable reviews, such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and William Dean Howells, to support the point that even others besides Hubbard understood the importance of Crane’s works. Thomas O’Donnell argues that the perception that Stephen Crane’s *The Black Riders* was dismissed during his time is a misconception (236). Moreover, O’Donnell believes Thomas Beer started the misconception because he called Crane a mad man and only quoted two favorable reviews by Lotos and Bookman. He additionally claims John Berryman, a 1950 biographer of Crane, perpetuates the myth by asserting critics fervently opposed Crane’s poems. The main issue O’Donnell has with Berryman is that he only

cites Bookman and no other sources that critique Crane. O'Donnell gives favorable reviews from *Nation* and William Dean Howells in *Harper's Weekly* to reveal Crane's work did have favorable reception in some of the major journals of his time. Although Howells did not like Crane's form, he enjoyed the theme and recognized the significance, which is seen when Howells calls *The Black Riders* the best text of that year. O'Donnell provides the review of *The Black Riders* in the *Atlantic Monthly* as a third source of positive review of Crane's poems. Although Howells did not like Crane's form, he enjoyed the theme and recognized the significance, which is seen when Howells calls *The Black Riders* the best text of that year. O'Donnell asserts the positive review by Howells and those in *Nation* and the *Atlantic Monthly* contradict the notion that Crane's poetry had no positive reception during his time. If Crane's poetry had a positive reception during his time, then we should consider the poems' merits and how they reflected the culture of the time.

His poems, *The Black Riders* and *War is Kind*, are free verse and not as formalized as some, such as Howells, would like; nevertheless, his poems reflect the isolation of his novels and short stories. Daniel Hoffman, one scholar who does look deeply into Crane's poetry, correctly argues Crane's poems are about the intertwined relationship of "man's relations to God, to his beloved, and to his fellow-man" (175). However, Hoffman's idea can be taken one step further. Not only does the isolation in Crane's poems result from man's need to connect with God, a lover, and fellow-man, the isolation results in an expression of mourning, a topic seen in elegiac poetry. Crane's mourning results from both a public and private mourning. Like Walt Whitman, who expresses a nation's mourning the loss of President Lincoln in "When Lilacs Last in the

Dooryard Bloom 'd," Crane mourns the cruelty and death that America experiences as results of war. Moreover, he expresses private lamenting in his elegiac poems, which may stem from the death of his father and the rejection of Nellie Crouse and Amy Leslie. The elegiac elements Crane utilizes are the stages of grief, including lamenting, idealization, and denial. Moreover, Crane's speakers desire to connect to the deceased; nature expresses humanity's mourning, and the poems' brevity create a mournful effect. Crane's poetry enters another stage of the elegiac tradition as he also expresses the mournful spirit that occurs when man is separated from God.

In Poem XIV, Crane expresses society's lamenting because of the death war leads to. It is the public's mourning loss of life, which Crane reveals in poem fourteen when the speaker describes the morbid scene:

There was crimson clash of war.
 Lands turned black and bare;
 Women wept;
 Babes ran, wondering.
 There came one who understood not these things.
 He said: "Why is this?"
 Whereupon a million strove to answer him.
 There was such intricate clamor of tongues,
 That still the reason was not. (1-9)

The weeping women and crying babies portrays a scene of mourning just as Whitman describes those that came out to see the passing train carrying President Lincoln's body in "When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom'd." The mourning comes from the destruction and death of war. Not only does Crane depict the mourning of humanity but also nature's response. The desolate and dark land is nature's response to war; thus, nature mourns with mankind. This is not unlike Emerson, another nineteenth century poet, who says in his essay *Nature* that nature reflects the mood of mankind. James Colvert calls for a connection between *The Red Badge* and *The Black Riders* in how the protagonist in the novel is perplexed and does not know if nature is "hostile, or sympathetic, or merely indifferent" and in the poems nature can be a dangerous "reptile swarming place" (165). Crane actually is presenting a complex nature, which does include its mirroring humanity's emotions. Trying to limit nature as either benevolent or malevolent would be like trying to limit a person as either wholly pure or evil. Crane's complex portrayal of nature makes it multidimensional, and one of those dimensions is mourning.

Both man and nature mourn together again in poem seventy of *War is Kind*¹:

The sea bids you mourn, oh, pines,
 Sing low in the moonlight.
 He sends tale of the land of doom,
 Of place where endless falls
 A rain of women's tears,

¹ The *War is Kind* poems are not numbered with roman numerals in the standard edition, only *The Black Riders* poems, so I only use roman numerals for *The Black Riders* poems.

Men in grey robes-

Chant the unknown pain. (1-7)

The sea and pine trees' mourning parallel the women's crying and the men wearing grey, mourning, clothing. The men's chant is their enacting mourning. David Shaw's argument on three poems (Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead," Alan Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," and Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Door Yard Bloom") can be applied to Crane's poetry. Shaw contends all three poems "show how the places of fracture are also 'breaks' in the sense of strokes of luck or good fortune, opportunities to recover a wholeness that has been lost" (161-162). Crane's poems also express a sadness that results from the loss of wholeness, whether it be society's loss or an individual's loss, which we will later look at. Thomas Gullason dismisses the traditional labels attached to Crane, such as "realist, naturalist, symbolist, parodist, ironist, [and] impressionist" because they distort Crane's "craft and vision," and says boldness is the first appealing quality of Crane's work (86). Gullason states that Crane's epitaph is in the poem of *The Black Riders* that describes a funeral for a soldier and ends with "But they said he had courage" (95). Ultimately, Crane's boldness as a writer allows him to deeply examine man's social reality, soul, and nature. This is exactly what Crane is doing in expressing mourning with his elegiac poems. Crane exposes man's grief for society and then turns to man's individual grief within his soul.

Crane's personal involvement as a newspaper reporter during the Spanish-American War allows him insight that other poets during his time who wrote poetry about war lacked because they did not have a first-hand experience, such as Richard Hovey who wrote "Unmanifest Destiny" and William Vaughn Moody who wrote "On a

Soldier Fallen in the Philippines”(58). Unlike these two poets, Crane’s job as a reporter allowed him to be on the front lines of the war. Crane’s significance as a poet follows in the tradition of national mourning poetry that goes back to the Revolutionary War. Max Cavitch explains the tradition goes back to before 1799 where “the young nation had already caught dramatic glimpses of itself in the mirror of mourning” (80). Cavitch expounds: “From the start of the Revolutionary War to the end of the century, the deaths of soldiers, patriot noncombatants, illustrious citizens, and non-citizen subjects had inspired a wealth of elegies that reflected back to their audience various images of a country in tears” (80). Consequently, Crane carries on this tradition at the end of the following century.

In addition to expressing a public loss, Crane’s speakers express personal lamenting due to loss of a lover in conjunction with idealizing the lost love, both of which are grief processes expressed in an elegy. Cavitch defines the idealization as “its elevation to a position of unassailable virtue and undiminishing value” (108). Crane expresses lamenting and idealization in poem VIII:

I looked here;
 I looked there;
 Nowhere could I see my love.
 And-this time-
 She was in my heart.
 Truly, then, I have no complaint,
 For though she be fair and fairer,
 She is none so fair as she in my heart. (1-8)

Even in this short poem, the speaker expresses his longing to see his beloved as he seeks high and low. However, he couldn't find her until he searched his heart. This is much like when one loses a loved one and in their grief they almost forget they are gone until they remember the death. In this poem, there does seem to be a solace through inward reflection; however, most of Crane's speakers express an unrequited solace and seem to be grappling with an irreconcilable pain. The speaker's repeating "fair and fairer" - elevates the beauty of his lover (7-8). The speaker's elevating the deceased echoes his elevating Lily Munroe in a letter (Winter 1893-94) where he calls her "Dearest" and then again "dearest, the one of all."

Crane not only takes on the male persona who lost a love but also describes a female lamenting and desiring to connect in poem XXV. At the grave scene where a female lover who has lost her love encounters a spirit, she desires to reach out to her lover by placing flowers on his grave. The scene is as follows:

There came a drooping maid with violets,
 But the spirit grasped her arm.
 'No flowers for him [the wicked man], he said.
 The maid wept:
 'Ah, I loved him.'
 But the spirit, grim and frowning:
 'No flowers for him.' (3-9)

The woman's sadness comes from trying to reach her love, but she cannot because he was wicked. The adjective drooping describing the maiden as she carries the violets returns back to the notion that nature mourns with humanity. Her next stage of grief is

blocked by the spirit separating them. The positive conclusion Hoffman finds in Crane's poetry is redemption and connection through the two sinners coming together, which is a way to alleviate the melancholy of isolation. Hoffman then biographically connects this to Crane's own odd relationships, such as his attraction to "older women, usually married, often of questionable reputation- a Canadian mother of seven, an ex-actress, another man's mistress, two chorus girls, a streetwalker, [and] a madame" (110). Hoffman's evidence of Crane reflecting on "chivalry" in his poem "Intrigue:"

Thou art my love,
 And thou art the ashes of other men's love,
 And I bury my face in these ashes,
 And I love them-
 Woe is me. (1-5)

He sees Crane as welcoming misery in this stanza. Although Hoffman is correct that the speaker desires unobtainable women or ones who are social outcasts and that he is miserable because he cannot obtain them, the poem reveals the speaker's lament of a dead love as seen in that he buries his face in her ashes and even loves them, the ashes. He elevates her by calling her his love. As in other elegies, such as Poe's *Annabel Lee*, the speaker reflects on the loved one and searches for a way to connect. In this case, he connects through the ashes.

Crane takes the perception of mourning to another level by having the speaker in poem XXXVIII express another person's personal lamenting. As in several of the other poems, nature also reflects the sadness of humanity. The speaker reminisces:

The ocean said to me once:
'Look!'
Yonder on the shore
Is a woman, weeping
I have watched her.
Go you and tell her this,-
Her lover I have laid
In cool green hall.
There is a wealth of golden sand
And pillars, coral-red;
Two white fish stand guard at his bier.
'Tell her this
And more,-
That the kind of the seas
Weeps too, old, helpless man.
The bustling fates
Heap his hands with corpses
Until he stands like a child
With surplus of toys. (1-19)

The weeping woman ties into the typical portrayal of expressing grief. The grief we see in the poem comes from the deceased love. As part of the elegy tradition, comfort is usually provided for those who have lost their loved one. This poem falls into that tradition as the ocean, nature, tells the speaker to pass on the message that the departed is

resting peacefully. This is much like Poe's *Annabel Lee* where the speaker's beloved is in the tomb by the sea. Again, nature feels the emotion of humanity as the sea's king weeps for humanity and the corpses the sea holds.

Hoffman's notion that Crane presents man as isolated because he is separated from God also can tie into mourning elegies. If sin leads to a separation from God, there is death and a lamenting as a result of the separation. Hoffman feels that Crane cannot completely get away from the Calvinistic notion that man is sinful by nature, which is a notion in his uncle's pamphlet *What Must I Do to Be Saved?* This is seen in poem forty-six of *The Black Riders* when red devils, sin, come from his heart. Crane's acknowledgement of sin coincides with his rejecting a God that would condemn men to hell for their sins, but he cannot completely push aside a belief in the existence of God. In his chapter on Crane's poetry, Patrick Dooley believes Crane a theist rather than agnostic or atheist because he could not help but face God due to his family's religious Methodist heritage. Dooley defines the three stages of Crane's theology, beginning with renouncing Truth, moving to confronting conventional institutionalized Truth, and finishing with a doctrine "of modesty, restraint, and self-reliance" (117). Keith Gandal deems Crane's work as a "tragic human struggle between a mystic faith in self-revelation and a hard-boiled assertion of social and artistic conscience" (501). On another level, the struggle manifests itself in mourning the separation of man from God. In poem sixty-eight, the speaker expresses the gap and sadness of the separation of a spirit from God. The spirits repeated calling of "God!, God!," is much like that of a lover calling out the name of his dead lover trying to remember his or her name or trying to reach out. The separation is seen in poem LXVIII through the "black death-slime" (6). The separation

also manifests itself in Crane's speakers portraying God as a distant, cold figure as well, which is seen in poem one hundred and twenty-six. The speaker narrates, "A man adrift on a slim spar / A horizon smaller than the rim of a bottle / Tented waves rearing lashed dark points / The near whine of froth in circles / God is cold" (1-5). In the poem, not only is nature an uncaring figure but also God. The drifting figure symbolizes lost man. In fact, if a distant God controls a cruel nature where the sea has "incessant raise and swing" and "growl after growl," then "God is cold," and man is separated from God (Poem 126). The lamenting is seen through nature's response to the separation in the following stanza when the "Oceans may become grey ashes, / Die with a long moan and a roar / Amid the tumult of the fishes / And the cries of the ships, / Because The Hand [God's] beckons the mice" (15-19). The moaning and crying alongside the repeated refrain, "God is Cold" reveal a scene of mourning and serve as part of an elegy for the separation (Poem 126).

Besides exploring public and personal lamenting, Crane's works fall into the elegiac tradition in the brevity of his poetry and the melancholy tone the brevity, structure, and style create. Hoffman sees one of Crane's poetic stages as evoking emotion, such as in poem XXVII of *Black Riders*, which contains "nine adjective, adverbs, and phrases," that evoke emotion (60). The effect becomes stronger in poem XXXVII. The enclosing mountains in the poem represent an ominous tone and illuminate an eerie effect. These stages, Hoffman contends, contradict John Berryman's assumption that Crane did not experiment with form. Crane's poems are closer to T. S. Eliot's than symbolist or imagist. Hoffman accounts for Crane's lack of influence on twentieth century poets. He asserts that although Crane anticipated poetic change Crane's verse

was not much available to them because it was not reprinted except in a 1926 anthology during the time of the impressionist. Because of Crane's ability to create poetry that focuses more on allegory and parable instead of form, Hoffman sees Crane as a poet who would have been in line with Frost, Stevens, and Pound (58). The brevity of Crane's poems is another reason his poems may not have influenced them. Compared to his poems, modernist poems tended to move more towards longer, more complex approaches, such as Yeats's cyclical poems and Eliot's epic verses. However, Crane's poems depict "his private doom" of isolation (Hoffman 279). This is much like Edgar Allan Poe who, in *Philosophy of Composition*, calls for brevity to create a melancholy tone. Besides brevity, Crane also uses repeated refrain to create melancholy as Poe did. For instance, in "Intrigue," Crane describes pain. The speaker recounts:

I heard thee laugh,
 And in this merriment
 I defined the measure of my pain;
 I knew that I was alone,
 Alone with love,
 Poor shivering love,
 And he, little sprite,
 Came to watch with me,
 And at midnight
 We were like two creatures by a dead campfire (1-9).

In this short poem, Crane creates a melancholy tone through repeating "alone." His being "alone with love" suggests he was thinking on his past. The lamenting is seen when he

thinks of his love laughing. The pain comes from the memory and is how he knows his pain. The dead campfire equates to the dead love where the embers have died. The setting, which occurs at midnight, is much like Poe's *The Raven* that is also set at midnight. The time period considered most eerie is the crossing of the border from one day to the next.

Crane also uses repeated refrain when expresses grief in *War is Kind* in the repeated lines telling the maiden and babe: "Do not Weep" and "War is Kind." These lines juxtapose the following lines that portray war as murderous when the speaker describes the scene as:

Hoards, booming drums of the regiment,
 Little souls who thirst for fight,
 These men were born to drill and die.
 The unexplained glory flies above them,
 Great is the Battle-God, great, and his Kingdom-
 A field where a thousand corpses lie. (6-11)

The opposing lines reveal an irony of war death where the living have lost a loved one but are told the dead are heroes. Crane's irony suggests that those who are mourning cannot be comforted because no matter how the loved one died, they are gone and cannot be brought back. Crane uses the brevity of the poem to leave the image of death and loss on the readers' minds. In addition, while Crane does not have a formalized rhyme scheme, the poem does not lack structure. Rather, the structure Crane chooses also aids in creating the effect. The first two stanzas mirror the next two stanzas structurally, which created the ironic dichotomy that death during war leads to valor. The speaker exclaims,

Do not weep maiden, for war is kind.
 Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky
 And the affrighted steed ran on alone,
 Do not weep.
 War is kind. (1-5)

And, in stanza three the pattern continues the same sentence structure with “Do not weep, babe, for war is kind. / Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches, / Raged at his breast, gulped and died” and ends with the same last lines as the first stanza (12-16). Likewise, the second and fourth stanzas have similar structure. Also, the six lines of the fourth stanza repeat words and structure:

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,
 Eagle with crest of red and gold,
 These men were born to drill and die.
 Point for them the virtue of slaughter,
 Make plain to them the excellence of killing
 And a field where a thousand corpses lie. (17-22)

The repeated structure and mirror stanzas reveal Crane does indeed have a purposeful format, even if he does not use traditional rhyme. Crane’s structure creates the mournful effect he desires. Although it is a public mourning Crane is expressing in this mirrored structure, he may be describing his personal lament of Nellie Crouse’s rejecting him. Robert Dowling deems Crane a “male avatar of his maiden weeping over the lost soldier, Nellie Crouse” (17). Whether the lament is public or private, the poem’s structure reveals a mournful tone.

Ultimately, Stephen Crane's poems deserve more literary attention because some of them fall into the elegiac tradition. He uses his lines to express a public and private mourning, stages of grief, and takes the elegiac form to a new level by exposing the isolation and mourning that humanity feels when they feel isolated from God. In addition, nature feels the mourning of humanity and mourns with it. Daniel Hoffman did Crane a service by analyzing his poetry, but more work is left to be done, as seen in these elegiac poems.

Conclusion:

Seeking consolation is a natural part of the mourning process. Since their beginnings, elegies have played a cathartic role. While it is the poem's speaker that seeks consolation, in many cases, the author's own desire to reconnect with a deceased loved one plays a part. While the different elegiac conventions of lament, praise of the deceased, complaint, and consolation have remained, they take on special meaning in the nineteenth-century milieu, a culture that was surrounded by death and destruction due to the Mexican-American War, disease, and Civil War. The elegies are one part of the nineteenth-century consolation literature and one part of the many nineteenth-century mourning customs. The black crepe in the homes and the black mourning clothing echoes the melancholy within the elegies. The postmortem paintings and photographs of children mirror the focus on the death of innocent, pure children. The epitaphs that praise a loved one parallel the elegiac praise of the deceased. Additionally, the use of the phrase "sleep" on epitaphs that show the loved ones believe in a resurrected afterlife are much like the use of the elegiac speaker saying their loved one sleeps. Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and Crane participate in the literary elegiac tradition and simultaneously participate in their mourning culture.

Through their elegies, all four nineteenth-century authors carry on both the elegiac tradition and the nineteenth-century mourning tradition. They have a similarity in that scholars have misunderstood them or have disregarded their "minor" works. Similarly, they all have knowledge of past and their contemporary elegists. They all have letters that provide personal insight into how they think and how they mourn. They each were affected by the deaths of family members, loved ones, and contemporary authors.

Specifically, Dickinson and Alcott were affected by both the deaths of contemporary writers and females.

Although they have these similarities, each of these poets brings his or her own personal grief to his or her elegies. Moreover, they each incorporate the elegiac lament, praise of the deceased, deathbed scenes, complaint, and consolation. However, they each are unique in how they have their speakers praise the deceased, how they complain about the loved one being taken away, and how they seek consolation through reuniting with his or her loved one.

Many have perceived Poe as an outcast, drunkard, and drug addict. Although he did have significant troubles, most of them stemmed from loneliness and loss, not drugs or alcohol. The alcohol and drugs were a result of his melancholy, not the cause. This misconception leads to many only considering Poe a madman. While he had idiosyncrasies, he was more aware of his culture than past scholars have noted and was indeed an active participant in the nineteenth-century milieu. As an editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, he would have known the deep mourning many experienced. His own personal losses were similar to most that surrounded him. He brings his own personal aesthetics to his elegies, specifically the death of the beautiful woman. His fixation in these elegies on the beautiful dead female, rather than deceased children like in most consolation literature, adds to the discussion of elegies and provides uniqueness to his works. Most likely, he appreciated the brevity of many elegies, which is why he incorporated their conventions. He adds to the elegiac tradition by including Gothic elements that are applicable to elegies, such as enclosed space.

Like Poe, early scholars stigmatized Dickinson as peculiar and as a recluse. However, more recent scholarship refutes this idea. Moreover, Dickinson's poetry reveals she was very much astute in nineteenth-century culture, whether it be her knowledge of contemporary British and American authors, her unique approach to nature (a common nineteenth-century theme), or her seeing the goings on outside of her window. Some of her poems are indeed briefer than Milton's elegies; nevertheless, she incorporates the elegiac conventions. She blends her love of nature with the pastoral to participate not solely in the elegiac tradition but specifically the pastoral elegiac tradition. She also participates in the domestic literature tradition but transforms items of the domestic into items of mourning.

Similar to Dickinson, Alcott has been misrepresented. Most scholars have labeled her as only a children's writer or a domestic novel author. However, she is much more complex. She, in fact, questioned whether she could even write about women when asked to write *Little Women*. Instead, she wanted to be known for her literary ability. She is not only a novelist but also a poetess who responds to both her predecessors and her contemporary male and female writers. Like Poe, she too combines Gothic elements into her elegies, specifically in "Our Little Ghost."

Crane provides a point of closure to the nineteenth-century elegy discussion. Like Alcott, he is only mostly known for a couple of works. However, his war poetry reveals the pervasive nineteenth-century melancholy lasted even until the end of the century. The bitterness and sarcasm of his poems intensify the elegiac lament. While Poe, Dickinson, and Alcott do not specifically address heaven as the place of reuniting with loved ones, Crane even more so provides a skeptical view that no such place exists. Crane's

skepticism is much like that of the modernists, but his participation in the elegiac tradition shows the elegiac tradition can be adapted to most movements because poets, specifically elegists, capture a collective psychological response to loss.

Overall, Poe, Dickinson, Alcott, and Crane are significant elegists in their own right. Each has had considerable scholarship in some areas but not in terms of elegies, at least with their minor works. All of these authors blur boundaries between the elegiac tradition and other movements and philosophies, such as the Gothic, domestic literature, Romanticism, Naturalism, and personal aesthetic philosophies. As members of the nineteenth-century mourning culture and the literary culture, all four authors are products and participants of their milieu and enduring elegiac tradition.

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