

THE ENGLISH ELEGY

Studies in the Genre
from Spenser to Yeats

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I

Interpreting the Genre: The Elegy and the Work of Mourning

Is the story in vain, how once, in the
mourning for Linos, venturing earliest
music pierced barren numbness, and
how, in the horrified space [which] an
almost deified youth suddenly quitted
for ever, emptiness first felt the
vibration that now charms us and
comforts and helps?

Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

Most studies of the elegy tend to describe rather than interpret the genre's conventions. In this introductory chapter, I attempt such an interpretation, asking how the traditional forms and figures of elegy relate to the experience of loss and the search for consolation. I wish to view this relationship between the language of elegy and the experience of loss as an event or action: rather than finding absence or loss to be somehow already "there" in the language, I am exploring how an elegist's language emerges from, and reacts upon, an originating sense of loss. Each elegy is to be regarded, therefore, as a *work*, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product and in the more dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience—the sense that underlies Freud's phrase "the work of mourning."¹

To stress the dramatic and not just the structural relation between loss and figuration, I begin by noticing how mythopoetic accounts of the origin of certain features of poetry and music, particularly those associated with elegy, converge on the event of loss. I interpret these accounts briefly, for they have much to tell us about the elegy itself. Following this, to emphasize the ways in which the elegy should be seen as a working through of experience and as a symbolic action, I compare the genre with various nonliterary responses to loss. For the

elegy, as a poem of mourning and consolation, has its roots in a dense matrix of rites and ceremonies, in the light of which many elegiac conventions should be recognized as being not only aesthetically interesting forms but also the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices.

Among the conventions to be interpreted in this way are the use of pastoral contextualization, the myth of the vegetation deity (particularly the sexual elements of such myths, and their relation to the sexuality of the mourner), the use of repetition and refrains, the reiterated questions, the outbreak of vengeful anger or cursing, the procession of mourners, the movement from grief to consolation, and the traditional images of resurrection. We also need to interpret the eclogic division within or between mourning voices, the question of contests, rewards, and inheritance, and the unusual degree of self-consciousness regarding the actual performance of the work at hand. One aspect of this last feature is the elegist's need to draw attention, consolingly, to his own surviving powers. More painful and more crucial, however, is the elegist's reluctant submission to language itself. One of the least well observed elements of the genre is this enforced accommodation between the mourning self on the one hand and the very words of grief and fictions of consolation on the other.

According to many accounts, the origins of architecture, sculpture, and even dance are essentially funerary. So, too, traditional narratives point to *loss* as the mother of the following, more specifically poetic, inventions: Orpheus's introduction of song, in mourning for the dead Linus, the blinded, love-torn Daphnis's invention of pastoral poetry; Apollo's frustrating derivation of the laurel, sign of poethood. The list could be longer, but it should at least include the invention of that most elegiac of instruments, the pipe or flute, by Pan, the patron god of pastoral and of elegy.

The term *elegy* itself derives from the Greek elegiac couplets, traditionally accompanied by the flute, or more precisely, by the oboelike doublepipe called *aulos*.² The elegiac verses of alternating dactylic hexameters and pentameters could contain a fairly broad range of topics, including exhortatory martial epigrams, political philosophy, commemorative lines, or amatory complaints. But behind this array of topics there may have lain an earlier, more exclusive association of the

flute song's elegiacs with the expression of grief. As Margaret Alexiou has written:

It is possible that Echembrotos, the Peloponnesian poet who was famous for his mournful *elegoi* accompanied by the *aulos*, was only one of a school of Dorian elegists, who used the form for a kind of lament; and it was this same Echembrotos whose music to the *aulos* was disqualified at the Delphic festival in 578 B.C. on the grounds that its mournful character was unsuitable. . . . Was it under some kind of pressure from the religious reforms of the sixth century that the mournful *elegos* was discontinued by the lyric poets, surviving only as a literary term?³

Latin adaptations of the elegiac form continued the fairly miscellaneous approach to content, but with an increasingly intense focus on the amatory complaint. Similarly, the English versions of the defining form admitted a variety of subject matter to so-called elegies. But the definition that gradually gathered currency, particularly after the sixteenth century, was that of a poem of mortal loss and consolation.⁴ In this way, the genre returned to its ancient association with the flute song of grief. With Spenser, and more explicitly with Milton, we return to Echembrotos and the Dorian elegists whose *aulos* reeds precede the mournful pipe players of Theocritus and Virgil.

The *aulos* was related to the Phoenician *giggras*, flutes played at the funeral rites for Adonis, and descended from an Egyptian wind instrument associated with mourning and with its divine inventor, Osiris, god of the dead.⁵ The Greeks themselves mythologized the invention of the wind instrument, clinching its association with loss and consolation in the legend of Pan and Syrinx, a legend whose particular sorrow invests the role of Pan and of pipes in pastoral and elegiac poetry as chronologically diverse as that of Theocritus, Spenser, Pope, Arnold, or Yeats. Even the contemporary poem "Syrinx," by James Merrill, continues the recognition of Pan as "the great god Pain."⁶ One wonders why the legend maintains its power. The answer may be sought by reviewing the story as told by one of its most influential narrators, Ovid.

We recall the carefully contrived narrative link in the *Metamorphoses* between the Pan-Syrinx story and the analogous, earlier episode of Apollo and Daphne. After Daphne has been transformed into laurel,

she is mourned and celebrated by a confluence of rivers. One river god is missing: Inachus, who is himself mourning the loss of his daughter, Io. Io, too, is bewailing her transformation into a milk-white cow guarded by Argos. To lull Argos and restore Io to herself and to her father, Mercury tells Argos various stories, including that of Pan's invention of the pipes. The reader thus comes upon this story in a complex network of metamorphoses and mournings linked back to the loss of Daphne.

The story of Apollo and Daphne itself exemplifies the dramatic relation between loss and figuration. Having insulted Cupid, Apollo is smitten with an unrequited passion for Daphne.⁷ He pursues her to the riverbanks of her father, Peneus, whom she begs for deliverance. As Apollo grasps her, Daphne becomes the laurel tree—only her gleaming beauty (*nitor*) remaining unchanged. But this apparently organic metamorphosis, by which the tree substitutes for the nymph, is only part of the story. Apollo's embrace of the actual tree will not in itself give comfort, nor will it be accepted: "But even the wood shrank from his kisses" (*refugit tamen oscula lignum*) (1.556).⁸

Only when Apollo turns to the projected founding of a sign, the laurel wreath, does he appear to accept his loss, by having invented some consoling substitute for Daphne:

" . . . at, quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse,
arbor eris certe" dixit "mea! semper habebunt
te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetrae:
tu ducibus Latiis aderis, . . ."

(1.557–60)

[Since thou canst not be my bride, thou shalt at least be my tree. My hair, my lyre, my quiver shall always be entwined with thee, O laurel. With thee shall Roman generals wreath their heads, . . .]

Even as he reiterates the desperate *te . . . te . . . te*, Apollo is having to *refer* to the nymph, or to the whole tree, by focusing on a detached part of that tree, the fragmentary sign alone which he can attach to his lyre, his quiver, or his hair, and which he already projects as a sign in the future absence of either nymph or tree. This second alteration, requiring an unnatural severing of the tree and an artificial entwining of its cut leaves, seems not only to suggest a move from organic nature to the item of an unnatural, societal code but also to enforce and

confirm that Apollo's consoling sign can never enjoy a purely organic relation to the object that it signifies, or for which it substitutes.⁹

Instead of becoming the object of a sexual conquest, Daphne is thus eventually transformed into something very much like a consolation prize—a prize that becomes *the* prize and sign of poethood. What Apollo or the poet pursues turns into a sign not only of his lost love but also of his very pursuit—a consoling sign that carries in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded. As a sign, the eventual relation between the wreath on the one hand and Daphne, or poethood, on the other is at once arbitrary and disjunctive. But Ovid's narrative invites us to watch the emergence of this arbitrariness and disjunctiveness as an event and to reintegrate the sign with the passionate story of its derivation. If there is a necessary distance between the wreath and what it signifies, that distance is the measure of Apollo's loss. Daphne's "turning" into a tree matches Apollo's "turning" from the object of his love to a sign of her. It is this substitutive turn or act of troping that any mourner must perform.

In view of the developing schema by which interruption and loss is followed by a figurative or aesthetic compensation, it is hard not to notice that the very *narration* of the similar Syrinx episode follows this design. Mercury's narrative actually breaks off just as Pan begins his equally interrupted plea to Syrinx. Since Argos has just fallen asleep, there is no need for Mercury to continue, and the story would be lost were its narration not displaced from the supposedly immediate teller to the explicitly mediating craftsman, Ovid. By an almost elegiac strategy, Ovid thus completes, as part of a more avowedly aesthetic object, the narrative that had been severed in the "actual" world.¹⁰

The Pan-Syrinx episode is similar to that of Apollo and Daphne:

... fugisse per avia nympham,
donec harenosi placidum Ladonis ad amnem
venerit, hic illam cursum inpedientibus undis
ut se mutarent liquidas orasse sorores,
Panaque cum prensam sibi iam Syringa putaret,
corpore pro nymphae calamos tenuisse palustres,
dumque ibi suspirat, motos in harundine ventos
effecisse sonum tenuem similemque querenti.
arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum
"hoc mihi concilium tecum" dixisse "manebit,"

atque ita disparibus calamis conpagine cerae
inter se iunctis nomen tenuisse puellae.

(1.701–12)

[. . . the nymph, spurning his prayers, fled through the pathless wastes until she came to Ladon's stream flowing peacefully along his sandy banks; how here, when the water checked her further flight, she besought her sisters of the stream to change her form, and how Pan, when now he thought he had caught Syrinx, instead of her held naught but marsh reeds in his arms, and while he sighed in disappointment, the soft air stirring in the reeds gave forth a low and complaining sound. Touched by this wonder and charmed by the sweet tones, the god exclaimed: "This union, at least, shall I have with thee." And so the pipes, made of unequal reeds fitted together by a joining of wax, took and kept the name of the maiden.]

As was true for Apollo, Pan's pursued object changes to a form in the natural world, a form that, like the laurel tree, must be further altered to yield a consoling sign or instrument. Once again, that subsequent alteration, moving from nature to artifice, requires both a cutting off and a refashioning of the cut fragment. Both episodes portray a turning away from erotic pursuits and attachments to substitutive, artificial figures of consolation. Unlike many other grievors in the *Metamorphoses*, such as Cycnus, Pyramus and Thisbe, Egeria, Niobe, and even Orpheus—all of whom fail to invent or accept an adequate figure for what they have lost and all of whom are consequently altered or destroyed—Apollo and Pan are successful mourners. (The fact that they are, after all, gods may tell us something of Ovid's pessimism regarding the difficulty of their task.) For unlike the others, they accept their loss and can retain their identities by what we may call a healthy work of mourning, a work that, as Freud points out, requires a withdrawal of affection from the lost object and a subsequent reattachment of affection to some substitute for that object. Ovid presents a condensed version of this process, a metamorphosis in which the lost object seems to enter or become inscribed in the substitute, in this case the found sign or art. Of course only the object *as lost*, and not the object itself, enters into the substitutive sign, and the latter is accepted only by a turning away from the actual identity of what was lost. Consolation thus depends on a trope that remains at an essential remove from what it replaces. As Freud wrote to Binswanger regarding the question of substitution in the case of

mourning, "No matter what fills the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else."¹¹

Ovid's psychological acuity captures this paradox at its most vexing. Not only does he present the precise moment at which the original loses itself to the substitute but he reveals the very point beyond which the sexual impulse is both continued and deflected. For a moment, Apollo and Pan embrace, respectively, the laurel and the reeds, according them the passion meant for the nymphs. Yet even in this moment, they recognize that they are embracing "something else," and that recognition is confirmed and reinforced by their subsequent inventions. Not only have the forms of their desired objects changed but the form of their desires must, in this moment of recognition and acceptance, change as well. As we shall see, one of the most profound issues to beset any mourner and elegist is his surviving yet painfully altered sexuality. Although it is crucial for the mourner to assert a continued sexual impulse, that assertion must be qualified, even repressively transformed or rendered metaphorical, by the awareness of loss and mortality. Indeed, our consoling images are most often figures for an immortal but metaphorized sexual force.

In the story of Pan's invention of the pipes, we have a clear example of how the sexual impulse is continued yet displaced onto a symbol of itself, and onto an instrument for assuaging the sorrow of that displacement. Granted, the pipe or the flute is appropriate to mourning, for it joins a sighing breath to hollowness. At the same time, its phallic nature is obvious, and it is far from arbitrary that the goatlike Pan, associated with Priapus, should be the one to invent this woeful, reedlike instrument; or that he, together with the flute's blend of plaintiveness and oblique sexuality, should be so integral to the elegy.¹²

The movement from loss to consolation thus requires a deflection of desire, with the creation of a trope both for the lost object and for the original character of the desire itself. The laurel and flute must symbolize not only Daphne and Syrinx but also the thwarted sexual impulse of the pursuers. As the texts suggest, that thwarting resembles a castration, since in each case it is in the father's territory that the pursuer is forced to check his desires and since Apollo's sign and Pan's new instrument are the pieces of their transformed loves and of their own transformed sexual powers, broken or cut, wreathed or sealed. Each is left grasping the sign of what he lacks, an elegiac token that

one can recognize in the cut flowers and the (sometimes broken or resigned) pipes of Alexandrian and Elizabethan elegists, or in Milton's painful plucking and shattering of berries and leaves, no less than in the mounds of broken lilacs in Whitman's elegy for Lincoln. These tokens do, of course, have several other layers of meaning; but this castrative aspect should not be slighted, for it lies at the core of the work of mourning.

It is becoming clear that there is a significant similarity between the process of mourning and the oedipal resolution. As I shall argue, the work of mourning appears to recapitulate elements of the earlier resolution. The full extent of this will emerge gradually in the course of this study, but certain features should be noted now. Each procedure or resolution is essentially defensive, requiring a detachment of affection from a prior object followed by a reattachment of the affection elsewhere. At the core of each procedure is the renunciatory experience of loss and the acceptance, not just of a substitute, but of the very means and practice of substitution. In each case such an acceptance is the price of survival; and in each case a successful resolution is not merely deprivatory, but offers a form of compensatory reward. The elegist's reward, especially, resembles or augments that of the child—both often involve inherited legacies and consoling identifications with symbolic, even immortal, figures of power.

Furthermore, since we noted that a paternal intervention forced Pan and Apollo not only away from erotic pursuits but toward an adoption of signs or aesthetic instruments, it is worth recognizing how thoroughly an important elaboration of Freud's Oedipus scenario stresses precisely this submission of the child to society's "symbolic order" of signs. According to Lacan, it is the figure of the father, representing the symbolic order, that formally intervenes between the child and the child's first object of attachment. The child's imaginary, dyadic relationship with its prior "love-object" is thus interrupted and mediated by a signifying system, which acts as a third term, much as the laurel sign or the pipes come between the gods and the nymphs. In the elegy, the poet's preceding relationship with the deceased (often associated with the mother, or Nature, or a naively regarded Muse) is conventionally disrupted and forced into a triadic structure including the third term, death (frequently associated with the father, or Time, or the more harshly perceived necessity of linguistic mediation itself).

The dead, like the forbidden object of a primary desire, must be separated from the poet, partly by a veil of words.

From this perspective the oedipal resolution actually governs the child's "entry" into language, an entry that the work of mourning and the elegy replay. (While it has other determinants, the "begin again" formula of so many elegies is only one indication of this reenforced entry into a preexisting order of signs or conventions.) Of course, the oedipal moment as Lacan presents it does not mark the child's first use of words! Rather it retraces and modifies earlier occasions when the self or its objects were displaced by signifiers of various kinds. Such occasions, notably the mirror stage and the *fort-da* episode, represent rehearsals for the formal alienation and symbolic castration of the child during the oedipal resolution. Since these superimposed occasions reveal themselves in the elegy, it is worth discriminating them now. I am by no means attempting comprehensive accounts of these stages, choosing instead to emphasize those aspects with greatest bearing on the elegy.¹³ I should also mention that I regard these stages not as strictly empirical, *precisely* dateable events but rather as explanatory models or typified narrative constructs, nonetheless based as they are on sets of observations.

During the mirror stage, an infant between the ages of six months and eighteen months locates an idealized image of himself either in mirror images or in the forms of others—in each case imagining himself to possess the integrity and functional completeness of what remains nevertheless a merely specular self. The actual and as yet primarily unformed and incompetent self is thus alienated and displaced by a coherent image of an idealized self, an imaginary "rough-cast" of the ego. The child's relation to this mirror image is dyadic, remaining within a condition of primary narcissism but now revealing a preliminary split in, or we might say *for*, the constitution of the self. In other words, the child still attaches his affections to himself, although this "self" is now an image; and the child still fails to discriminate a world genuinely other than himself. This latter failure is not, however, quite the same as the infant's earlier state of original, supposedly undifferentiated union with the mother, for it now involves a split both within the self and between the self and an outside image. By force of fantasy, these splits are simply not yet adequately registered or enforced.

If the child were to remain at this level, he would obviously fail to

establish a stable, socialized sense of himself or the outside world. But the groundwork clearly has been laid for subsequent and more thorough suppressions of an inchoate self in favor of a formalized identity, one based not so much on the images of private fantasy as on the intervening signs and positional codes of society. So, too, this phase foreshadows the elegist's consoling construction of a fictional identity not only for the dead but for himself as well.

It is worth bearing these elements of the mirror stage in mind, for we shall see how often a mourner is forced back to this primitive form of narcissism. Outgrowing the mirror stage, the individual will form attachments outside the self and will develop a self-image that is conditioned by and aware of an outside world. He will achieve a more sophisticated and somewhat more realistic form of narcissism. But the present menace of death may shatter his own perhaps more sophisticatedly narcissistic illusions of security; and the deprivation of someone whose presence had supported the survivor's self-image may join the threat of death to drive the mourner back to the earlier form of narcissism.

This regression may also be caused by the withdrawal of affection from the dead, followed by an inability to reattach that affection, or, more strictly speaking, libido, elsewhere than upon the mourner's self. This is what Freud described as the secondary narcissism at the core of melancholia. One of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner's damaged narcissism—but without allowing that repair to have permanent recourse either to the melancholy form of secondary narcissism or to the fantasies of the primitive narcissism associated with the mirror stage. "Adonais" and *In Memoriam* are the most obvious examples of elegies that cannot be fully understood without observing how they perform this complex reparation.

With the *fort-da* episode, we more obviously pursue the child's entry into language. An understanding of this episode is especially important to interpreting the elegy, and some of its elements will be discussed later.¹⁴ For the moment, we may recall Freud's description of the behavior of his eighteen-month-old grandson, who appeared to "master" the absences of his mother by the *fort-da* game. We know that children may master words before the age of eighteen months, but the *fort-da* game has captured the imagination of theorists like Freud and

Lacan because it seems to demonstrate the child's acceptance of certain rules of experience and of language.¹⁵

Whenever the child's mother left the room, he controlled his anger and grief by repeatedly casting away and then retrieving a wooden reel, to the accompaniment of the syllables *fort* and *da*. Freud saw the reel as a surrogate for the mother, and he interpreted the syllables to mean approximately "gone" (away) and "there" or "here" (in the sense of regained presence). Freud regarded this game of "disappearance and return" as "related to the child's great cultural achievement—the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach."¹⁶ By a primitive form of mourning, the child not only comes to terms with the otherness and absence of his first love-object; he also learns to *represent absence*, and to make the absent present, by means of a substitutive figure accompanied by an elementary language.

The alienating displacement of the inchoate self during the mirror stage is thus reinforced by this instance of instinctual renunciation and by this substitutive use of reel and syllables. The child is manipulating signifiers which are at an obvious remove from the actual mother they signify. So, too, the differential structure of language, here overlapping with the difference between presence and absence, is evident in the child's play with the two opposing syllables. In these respects, the child appears to have advanced his entry into language. Once again, the groundwork has been laid for his subsequent and more thorough submission to the laws of renunciation and symbolic codes.

While the *fort-da* game displays the child's acquiescence to a separation from his mother, the castrative element of that acquiescence does not occur until the oedipal stage, approximately two to three years later.¹⁷ Here, for the first time, the threatening figure of the father intervenes to enforce a separation that hitherto may have seemed only temporary or circumstantial. Now the child's instinctual renunciation requires a symbolic self-castration, designed to ward off the father's threat of actual castration. Henceforth the child's sexual satisfactions and choices of love-objects will necessarily take the forms of substitutes for his original desire. He will have to recognize that his sexual power is strictly limited: he cannot *be* the physical object capable of

satisfying the desires of his mother, nor can he sexually return to his earlier state of union with his origins. Instead, he now comes to *possess* a castrated, figurative version of such an object or power—the phallus. As we shall see, this psychological process is extremely close to the procedure of the elegy, and to the mythology that underlies the genre.

At this point we should pause over the question of gender. The terms of the argument thus far appear to have been particularly applied and applicable to the male child, just as the figures of authority and of compensatory but figurative sexual power appear to be exclusively masculine. And yet our discussion, particularly in its bearing on the work of mourning, does apply with similar force to both genders. The female child, too, is prevented from remaining in unmediated closeness to the mother. Her first sexual impulses—whether toward the mother or toward the father—are checked and redirected toward the choice of a substitute. Her enforced self-suppression, her acceptance of the rule of substitution, and her adoption of a positional identity governed by a symbolic code are not sufficiently different from those of the male to invalidate our discussion's relevance to both genders. For both, one may speak of a castrative renunciation of primary desire, and one may point to the subsequent exercise of a displaced version of such desire. The phallus is more obviously associated with the male; and its predominance in the symbolic code is no doubt partly the product of a discriminatory male culture. But for our purposes it is important to regard it as being, for *both* sexes, what Juliet Mitchell describes as an "expression of the wish for what is absent, for reunion (initially with the mother)."¹⁸

Recognizing that the phallus is "a ghost," I would therefore keep in mind Jacqueline Rose's warning:

When Lacan is reproached with phallogentrism at the level of his theory, what is most often missed is that the subject's entry into the symbolic order is equally an exposure of the value of the phallus itself . . . and that the status of the phallus is a fraud (this is, for Lacan, the meaning of castration). . . . Thus the phallus stands for that moment when prohibition must function, in the sense of whom may be assigned to whom in the triangle made up of mother, father and child, but at that same moment it signals to the subject that 'having' only functions at the price of a loss and 'being' as an effect of division. Only if this is dropped from the account can

the phallus be taken to represent an unproblematic assertion of male privilege.¹⁹

It would be a mistake, therefore, to see the phallic signifier itself as the source of an original alienation that, in the case of women, it no doubt aggravates and reduplicates. One may redress an imbalance by substituting a female figure for that of the phallus; but this would not entirely dissolve the woman's enforced distance (like that of the man) from her first object of desire, and while it would reduce the distance between male sexual emblems and female sexual power, it would not abolish the remaining distance between the preferred female emblem and the actual source or power from which it is disjunctively derived. The figure of the fertility goddess, or of a female fertility token, bears as metaphorical a relation to an individual woman's sexual impulse or powers as does the figure of Dionysus or Adonis or the phallus to those of a man. And if we were to substitute such a female figure for those in the subsequent discussion—a discussion largely reflecting the nature of the elegy thus far—our argument would keep much of its general force.

Only very recently, in the wake of the reconceived position of women in the society and culture at large, has a particular elegy positively reinstated the female fertility goddess and her emblems. In the Epilogue, I shall study how Amy Clampitt's "A Procession at Candlemas" rescues such figures from their virtual exclusion by masculine figures throughout the history of the genre. But for the moment we might anticipate that even this revisionary poem submits the goddess to the kind of chastening observed in the case of male figures.

Longstanding sexual discrimination has impinged on women's experience of mortal loss, and the difficulty in identifying with predominantly male symbols of consolation greatly complicates the woman's work of mourning. But we should not lose sight of how such symbols also relate to a sheer lack—man's or woman's—and how the genetic power that they represent could in many respects be of either gender. While I wish to draw attention to the hitherto largely unasked question of how differently men and women mourn, for the purposes of this study it is the substantial overlap in men's and women's mourning that should be stressed. Until as recently as Clampitt's poem, elegies written by women, such as Anne Bradstreet's or Emily Brontë's, have tended primarily to confirm this common ground.

Pursuing our sense of the child's entry into language, we should recognize that a further achievement occurs during the oedipal stage. Not only does the child manipulate signifiers, as in the *fort-da* game, he now takes up his own identity in relation to a symbolic code. Accepting the displaced and mediated relation forced on him by the authoritative third term, the father figure, he stabilizes an "I," a symbolic self that is now locked into a socialized *position*. The substitution of word for thing has thus been followed by the substitution of this conventionally prescribed signifier (this "I" within a harshly differential code) in place of a more thoroughly suppressed instinctual self. By virtue of this deeper act of "splitting," the child has taken up a position within the symbolic order. Once again anticipating the elegy, we recognize that by a work of divisive self-surpassal, or self-suppression, the child has created a "symbolic substitute for his own self."²⁰

An understanding of such splittings and self-suppressions, and of the acceptance of positionality, hierarchy, and symbolic exchange, sheds light not only on the elegy, but also on several as yet inadequately understood conventions of the pastoral eclogue, to which we may turn in passing. The pastoral eclogue, after all, traditionally stood at the point of entry to a poetic career, hence in some ways replaying an entry into language. And even a cursory look at the eclogues of Theocritus, for example, particularly the first and eighth, shows how carefully such poems move toward the kinds of achievement mentioned above. Schematically speaking, many eclogues are obsessed with establishing who sits where (thus figuring positionality), who is more powerful or skilful, who relates and defers to what predecessor, who owns what property, who goes first, who wins or inherits, and what is exchanged (the principle of exchange itself being one of the cardinal establishments of the oedipal stage and of the complete entry into language). Very often the relation between two singers comes to be mediated by a third party, usually a judge. So, too, there is the frequent concern with the very character of language and artifice, a concern with what marks off language from nature, despite the many wishful comparisons between them. Eclogues are often about the very entry from nature to culture, and they are rife with the kinds of contests, renunciations, and displacements that we have been witnessing above. Not fortuitously, then, from Theocritus to Yeats the eclogue and the elegy have been closely related—a relation we will study further when addressing other eclogiac aspects of the elegy itself.

The oedipal resolution also governs the creation of a superego; and here, too, we find an important relation to the work of mourning and the elegy. At the most obvious level, we recall Freud's suggestion that the superego is made up of the "illustrious dead," a sort of cultural reservoir, or rather cemetery, in which one may also inter one's renounced love-objects and in which the ruling monument is the internalized figure of the father. Since the father, as Freud suspected in *Totem and Taboo*, and as Lacan has stressed, intervenes and governs precisely as a *figure*, a totemic metaphor or name—the *Nom du Père*—any actual father thus has himself been displaced by a substitutive image with which the child seeks to identify. This displacement of the actual father by an idealized totemic figure involves an act very much like the child's castrative creation or adoption of the phallus, and we shall see how consistently such a totemic figure relates to the principal tropes of consolation.

While the argument seems once again to have skewed into exclusively male domain, and while Freud was notoriously discriminatory in his attitude toward the woman's achievement of a superego, I would claim that the woman's mourning *does* equally recapitulate not only her loss of the mother but also her internalization and identification with the idealized parental figure. And while that figure may be primarily female, it may in itself be sufficiently repressive or supervisory to serve as superego, or it may very well include traits of the renounced and controlling father figure, in triadic relation to which it has been established. The following lines from Emily Brontë's "Remembrance" sum up much of the argument thus far. Here the mourner repeats her separation from the mother but also adopts the role of the mother, a role not altogether unlike that of the intervening father figure in its stern prevention of an illegitimate and regressive desire:

Then did I check the tears of useless passion—
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine,
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.²¹

We said earlier that in both the oedipal resolution and the work of mourning an acceptance of mediation or substitution was the price of survival. We need to reinforce this claim and to suggest how the renunciation of the primary sexual impulse relates to the defense against death. In the oedipal stage, the father figure formally prevents

the child's regressive desire to remain in a state of undifferentiated union with the mother, or in the fantasia of the mirror stage. Since this primary desire is for the extinction of desire itself, and for a state preceding or abolishing genuine individuation, it is closely allied to the death wish, and it is surely this wish that the father's authority is in part designed to forestall. (We recall Hamlet's wish "that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!") It is interesting that Freud thought it "possible to regard the fear of death, like the fear of conscience, as a development of the fear of castration."²²

Yet another perspective reinforces our understanding of how a form of sexual renunciation relates to a defense against mortality. For it is through their genetic, reproductive power, associated as it is with sexual instinct, that men and women become aware of being mortal links in a potentially immortal chain. And it is just this procreative force that therefore seems to separate itself from them, to outlive and to mock their individual mortality. Lacan has written of "the pure life instinct that is to say immortal life, or irrepressible life . . . simplified, indestructible life. It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is submitted to the cycle of sexed reproduction."²³ Similarly, but from a more exclusively masculine perspective, Freud wrote, "The ejection of the sexual substance in the sexual act corresponds in a sense to the separation of soma and germ plasm" (for Freud, this latter was "immortal").²⁴

It is not surprising, therefore, that man's defense against his consciousness of mortality involves a movement against his sexual instinct. In fact, as late as the time of Aristotle, the Greeks identified the seminal fluid, which they took to be cerebrospinal in substance, with the immortal life-stuff, the *psyche*, or as Weismann and Freud called it, the "immortal germ-plasm." Consequently, castration was thought to defend the individual against mortality by conserving his *psyche*. We shall return to this idea in our discussion of the vegetation deities and of the already mentioned construction of the castrated figure for an immortalized but purely symbolic sexual power.

The work of mourning, too, is largely designed to defend the individual against death. As Brontë's lines, together with those of many elegists, confirm, it is not simply a matter of reconstructing one's barriers against an external menace. Once again, a forced renunciation prevents a regressive attachment to a prior love-object, a potential fixation on the part of the griever, whose desire in such cases

for literal identification with the dead is another force very much like that of the death wish. Melancholia usually involves a lasting return to the kind of regressive narcissism noticed before, often including an identification between the ego and the dead such that the melancholic tends toward self-destruction.²⁵ The healthy mourner, on the other hand, submits to a displacement of his prior attachments and to a disruption of his potential regression to dyadic fantasies, allowing his desires to be governed instead by a rule like that of the father's law of substitution. Only by repeating the child's acquiescence in this way can the mourner truly survive.

In both the oedipal resolution and the work of mourning, therefore, a father figure's castrative authority keeps us in life. His Law, the society's code, with its network of detours and substitutions, bars us from the fulfillment of a premature death *and* provides us with figures for what outlasts individual mortality.

We seem to have been on a long digression, straying far from the original discussion of Apollo and Pan. And yet we have only been elaborating the nature and implications of their stories in relation to the work of mourning and the oedipal resolution. In fact, it is as if Ovid has been waiting for us, or inviting us along this course of interpretation, for he directly follows the stories of Apollo and Pan with that of Phaeton, thereby rounding off the entire cluster of issues with this confrontation between a father and a son whose refusal of the oedipal detour brings about not merely his death but the most extensive display of grief in the entire poem.²⁶

Reading this triptych, itself reinforced throughout the *Metamorphoses*, one recognizes that primary desire never attains its literal objective except in death, or in a deathlike loss of identity. The only object that such a desire can possess in life will be a sign or substitute for what it cannot have. In the cases of Pan and Apollo, desire and its object ironically unite only as metamorphs or metaphors of themselves. Indeed, we now may regard the very pursuits of Daphne and Syrinx as having been substitutive in the first place, and we understand why the nymphs themselves should have been so liable to subsequent transformation. Each substitution seems to repeat a prior change, just as each loss recapitulates a prior loss and each turn to consolation repeats an earlier deflection of desire. Our experiences of

The English Elegy

loss fold upon themselves in gathers, creating the highly stratified "occasion" that each elegy "begin[s] again" or enters "yet once more":

And let us, Polydore, though now our voices
Have got the mannish crack, sing him to th' ground,
As once to our mother, use like note and words,
Save that Euriphile must be Fidele.²⁷

In an example that crystallizes much of our discussion, Shakespeare's Guiderius and Arviragus (under the disguising names Polydore and Cadwal) thus mourn the supposedly dead Fidele in the same language in which they once mourned their mother, Euriphile. It is the nature of this same language, the specific forms of an elegy's "note and words," to which we must now turn.

The Conventions

Since we have been stressing the ways in which the mourner or elegist must submit to the mediating fabric of language, a tissue of substitutions that may cover a preceding lack, few readers would need to be reminded how the word *text* refers back to a woven fabric rather than to an intrinsically more solid substance. Nor would they need to recall Freud's rather fanciful version of the invention of writing as an instance of hair-braiding. But it is worth noting the significant frequency with which the elegy has employed crucial images of weaving, of creating a fabric in the place of a void. We have already noted Apollo's laurel wreath and Pan's cut and bound reeds. The boy on the carved bowl in Theocritus's "First Idyl" plaits a cage of asphodel; the elegist in Virgil's "Eclogue X" weaves a basket while he sings; the mourning Camus in "Lycidas" wears a carefully embroidered hem "inwrought with figures dim"; Tennyson, in section 66 of *In Memoriam*, compares himself to a blind old man winding the curls of children's hair, or playing with threads; and summing up many examples, the figure of "peace after death" in Stevens's elegy for Henry Church is described as

An immaculate personage in nothingness,
With the whole spirit sparkling in its cloth,

Generations of the imagination piled
In the manner of its stitchings, of its thread.
In the weaving round the wonder of its need.²⁸

To speak of weaving a consolation recalls the actual weaving of burial clothes and shroud, and this emphasizes how mourning is an action, a process of work. In the remainder of this chapter, we shall study ways in which certain conventions of the elegy, related as they are to a variety of ritualistic social and psychological actions, reflect and carry on such work.

Probably the greatest influence on the form of the elegy has been the rituals associated with the death and rebirth of vegetation gods; and features of this influence are to be found even in those elegies that are not strictly pastoral. An obvious influence of such rites is the residually ceremonial structure of the elegy. The form has a measured pace and direction and develops the effect not only of an event but of a performance. The performance is in fact foregrounded by the genre's staging devices, a convention that draws attention to the mourner or cast of mourners.

This ceremonious self-dramatization and its framing devices can become fairly sophisticated, as in "Lycidas" or "Adonais" or as in the uses of irony in modern elegies. But even in its simplest forms—the dirge of Bion for Adonis or the elegiac eclogues of Theocritus and Moschus—one recognizes how this aspect serves not only to increase our sense of performance but also to assert and enhance the active responses of the living. The emphasis on the drama, or "doing," of the elegy is thus part of the crucial self-privileging of the survivors, as well as a way of keeping them in motion, ensuring a sense of progress and egress, of traversing some distance. For a stationary poet that distance may be figurative and purely psychological; but it is crucial to any successful mourning.

Indeed, few elegies or acts of mourning succeed without seeming to place the dead, and death itself, at some cleared distance from the living. Hence, in part, the sense of distance marked by the processions in elegies or by such related items as the catalogued offering of flowers. These offerings, apart from their figurative meanings and their function of obeisance, also add to the temporal or spatial respite within the rites, or within the poem itself; and the flowers, like the poetic language to which they are so often compared, serve not only as offerings or as gestures for respite but also as demarcations separating the living from the dead. The original function of a funeral hearse was, in fact, to serve as the coffin's cover or frame—a structure on which such demarcative offerings could be affixed. "Bouquets" of ele-

gies were pinned or thrown on the hearse of Sir Philip Sidney, for example, and numerous succeeding elegies have found ways to "strew the laureate hearse," if only figuratively, with flowers or rather fictions designed "to interpose a little ease." In less idealizing terms, even a poet as recent as James Wright has pointed to the archaic, demarcative strategy still at work in our elegiac devotions by describing epitaphs as "deliberate scrawls to guard us from the dead."²⁹

2) As for the content and direction of its ritual movement, the elegy follows the ancient rites in the basic passage through grief or darkness to consolation and renewal. Strangely enough, the Greek terms for these two phases of the ceremonies have made their way, not into literary criticism, but into science: as the cathode, or way (*bodos*) down (*cata*), and the anode, or way up. On the one hand these phases mimed the death and return of the vegetation god, while on the other they came to represent an initiate's descent to and ascent from a crisis of mysterious revelation.

The vegetation god, whose death and rebirth governed the phases of the rites (which would often occur in ceremonies set months apart), was a figure or personification serving several functions. On the one hand, such a figure reduces multiplicity to apparent unity, allowing the devotees or survivors to focus and, by simplification, to intensify their grief or gratitude regarding an otherwise manifold and ungraspable world of nature. What is more important, however, the creation of a human or human-divine rather than a merely elemental or vegetative figure for nature reveals much of the underlying motive for appearing to mourn nature's seasonal "death" in the first place. Why, after all, should man so bitterly lament the passing of a season that he knows will return unless it is his own unreturning nature that he mourns? And why should he represent nature by a human form unless he wants in this instance not only to mourn his own image but also to identify that image with nature's powers of regeneration? The trope is designed not so much to humanize nature, although this is partly the case, as to naturalize man.

The figure of the god has a further effect: it appears to reverse man's submission to nature or its changing seasons. Instead of grieving over the inhuman operation of nature or time, a setting and process on which he is unavoidably dependent, man creates a fiction whereby nature and its changes, the occasions of his grief, appear to depend on him. The withering vegetation is now no more the *cause* of human

grief but rather the mourner or even the effect of a human-divine loss—the death of such figures as Adonis, Thammuz, Persephone, or Dionysus. Thus the so-called pathetic fallacy of nature's lament, one of the prominent elegiac conventions so frequently criticized for artifice and contrivance, actually has a naturalistic basis in the notation of seasonal change.

We may understand this reversal more fully by returning briefly to the child's *fort-da* game. The game's rhythm of loss and retrieval corresponds roughly to the two phases of the archaic rituals. But more importantly, a similar psychological reversal of dependence is achieved. Freud supposed that the child not only masters the disappearance of the mother but psychologically comes to cause it in representational form, by discarding the surrogate figure of the reel. Similarly, by the sacrifice or mimed death of the personification of nature, man "causes" nature's death, or at least brings on her deathlike mourning. As in the case of the child, man reverses his passive relation to the mother or matrix, perhaps even avenging himself against her and his situation.

From this point of view, the elegy's elaborate observations of nature's decline are not the fallacious products of man's self-pity but rather the expression of his attempted mastery of and vengeance against nature, or more precisely change. This may seem overstated, and indeed there are other powerful determinants of this convention, but the motives of mastery and revenge are surely present. They rise to the surface most explicitly in the many elegies in which man either exhorts nature to lament or even *curses* it: "Let all things be changed, and let the pine tree bear pears, since Daphnis dies, and let the stag drag down the dogs, and let the screech owl from the mountains contend with nightingales. . . ."³⁰

If pursued, this attention to elegiac cursing would lead to a further discussion of the relation between grief and vengeful anger, a discussion reserved for the third chapter, on revenge tragedies, and for the studies of several elegies in particular. But while we are on the subject of anger and cursing, we should examine the related convention of elegiac questioning.

Since the first question with which Thyrsis opened his lament for Daphnis, in Theocritus's "First Idyl," the convention of questions, sometimes private and gnomic but more often in a sharply inter-

rogative mode, addressed to a particular auditor, has echoed throughout the history of the elegy. Why should this be so? As with the other conventions, the determinants are multiple, and their specific applications will appear in later chapters. But some generalized answers can be made now.

One of the dangers besetting a mourner is the imprisonment of his affective energies, the locking up within himself of impulses previously directed toward or attached to the deceased. Just as the ancient vegetation rites sought to unlock the frozen or withered energies of nature, so, too, the mourner must prevent a congealing of his own impulses. One obvious function of elegiac questioning is to set free the energy locked in grief or rage and to organize its movement in the form of a question that is not merely an expression of ignorance but a voicing of protest.

More significantly, when the question is addressed to someone else, the mourner succeeds in shifting his focus from the lost object or from himself and turns outward to the world. If tinged with anger, as they often are, such questions actually carry that anger away from its possible attachment to the self—an attachment that, if unbroken, would enmesh the survivor in melancholia. By elegiac questions which often impugn others, the mourner may stave off that self-directed anger. He may thereby also deflect the closely related element of mourning—guilt—which if unalleviated would drag him toward melancholy.³¹ The so frequent, formulaic *Where were you?* may thus mask the more dangerous *Where was I?* And the repetitive, incantatory nature of so much of this questioning emphasizes the possibly exorcistic or expiatory element of the ritual.

A further function of the elegiac question is to create the illusion that some force or agent might have prevented the death. Originally, such agents would have been the protective nymphs or gods, the parent deities, or, as in "Lycidas," "the Muse herself." Of course, there never effectively have been such guardians against mortality. But the question's creation of such a fictive addressee fosters the illusion that such a guardian was temporarily absent rather than permanently non-existent. Now the question *Where were you?* tropes not only such questions as *Where are you (the deceased)?* and *Where was I?* but also *Why do you (the supposed guardians) not exist?* Among the questions behind the ceremonious screen of questions, therefore, also lies the naked *Why will no-one or nothing save us from death?*³²

Elegiac questioning, like the *fort-da* game and like the ritual origins of the genre, is marked by a significant use of repetition. Before returning to explore the figure of the vegetation deity, we should try to interpret why the elegy itself should be so conventionally repetitive. Such repetition takes several forms, and once again there are many determinants at work.

Often, elegies are presented as being repetitions in themselves. For example, even the lament within Theocritus's "First Idyl," the poem commonly regarded as initiating the genre, has, we are told, been sung by Thyrsis on earlier occasions. And Thyrsis's song contains within itself a refrain whose most frequent variant is "Begin, Muses, begin again the pastoral song" (my emphasis). We observed earlier how each loss recapitulates a prior loss. And we spoke of the elegy's re-enactment of an "entry" into a preexisting language and code. These are only partial reasons for the repetitious character of so many elegies and for the way so many seem to "begin again" or to commence with a "yet once more."

Repetition creates a sense of continuity, of an unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the extreme discontinuity of death. Time itself is thereby structured to appear as a familiar, filled-in medium rather than as an open-ended source of possible catastrophe. Repetition is, moreover, one of the psychological responses to trauma. The psyche repeats the shocking event, much as the elegy recounts and reiterates the fact of death: "I weep for Adonis; lovely Adonis is dead. Dead is lovely Adonis; the Loves join in weeping."³³ By such repetitions, the mind seeks retroactively to create the kind of protective barrier that, had it been present at the actual event, might have prevented or softened the disruptive shock that initially caused the trauma.³⁴

At the same time, the repetition of words and refrains and the creation of a certain rhythm of lament have the effect of controlling the expression of grief while also keeping that expression in motion. It is as if the grief might be gradually conjured forth and exorcised. This returns us to the idea of ceremony, and to the idea that repetition may itself be used to create the sense of ceremony. Certainly, by confessing its repetitive nature at large, the elegy takes comfort from its self-insertion into a longstanding convention of grief. And by repeating the form of the vegetation rites, for example, an individual elegy may borrow the ritual context of consolation. The particular lament is assim-

ilated to a comforting commonality of grief, and the object of sorrow becomes identified with the oft-sung deity who returns each year.

Thus Moschus adopts the formulaic song for Adonis and applies it to his lament for Bion, and more than twenty centuries later, Shelley returns to the same form (and the same repetitions) in his elegy for Keats. The unique death is absorbed into a natural cycle of repeated occasions, and the very expression of mourning is naturalized as though it too were but a seasonal event. The end of Bion's lament for Adonis finally seeks to restrain the grieving Aphrodite by reminding her that this is an annual ceremony of mourning, that Time has not been arrested by this death, and that she, as a survivor, must move on in time: "Cease thy lamentations this day, Cytherea; refrain from beating thy breast. Thou must weep for him again; thou must bewail him again in another year."³⁵ One thinks ahead to Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd": "I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring."

But there are still more determinants for the repetitions found in elegies. One such cause is the highly important phase of mourning in which the griever must be convinced of the actual fact of loss. The powerful impulse to refuse such knowledge may, if uncorrected, lead to the condition of melancholy. According to Freud, "Melancholy is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss."³⁶ In order for this resistance to be broken, the mind must be repeatedly confronted with the fact until the recognition has been achieved. Only once the loss is recognized can the griever continue the work of mourning by withdrawing his attachment from the dead. Examples of such uses of repetition are found in many elegies. Bion's lines quoted above are an obvious case, and he pursues them with Cytherea's lament ("Alas for Cytherea, lovely Adonis is dead") which in turn is repeated by Echo ("And Echo returned the cry, 'Lovely Adonis is dead'") and then again by the refrain, which repeats the opening line of the poem. Ronsard employs the same Echo motif ("Echo is not silent, but within her rocks redoubling her feigned voice, through pity for me is repeating my lament"), as does Bryskett in his elegy for Sidney.³⁷

The echo particularly suits this recognitional function of repetition, for it makes the voicing of loss seem to come from beyond the self, from the objective world of fact. Also, the echo would seem to

work as a kind of trial, in which the mourner brings his loss into language, testing how it feels to speak *and bear* of it in words. Our earlier discussion of the mourner's replayed entry into language reinforces our sense of how the echo might represent the elegist's particular sensitivity to the fact that the language he uses is and is not his own. Here again we touch on the eclogic nature of elegies, and we anticipate the numerous moments in which elegists seem to submit, by quotation or translation, to the somehow echoing language of dead poets.³⁸

Other obvious examples of the repetitive testing or proving of reality are Spenser's lines in the "November" eclogue ("For dead shee is, that myrth thee made of yore. / Dido my deare alas is dead, / Dead and lyeth wrapt in lead") and the line that this prefigures in "Lycidas" ("For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime").³⁹ In her study of ancient Greek ritual laments, Margaret Alexiou shows how reiterated statements of death were an integral part of such laments, and she instances how "in Sophokles' *Trachiniai*, the news of Deianeira's death is not told as a simple statement of fact, but revealed gradually, point by point, in a prolonged series of statement and counter-statement, question and answer."⁴⁰ Perhaps more interesting, however, are the cases in which the crucial preliminary work of recognition and the repetitions it demands become not merely a verbal litany but an actual narrative structure, as in "The Book of the Duchess" and "Daphnida." In each of these poems, a state of melancholy leads to a recognition that emerges from an act of narrative repetition.

One final interpretation of the elegiac convention of repetition must be suggested. This applies principally to the custom of repeating the name of the dead, a custom extending once again from the ancient vegetation cults. Alexiou writes: "And one element of the primitive lament which was never forgotten or ignored, even in the most sophisticated literary compositions, was the refrain calling the dying man or god by name. This invocation was frequently expressed by the verb *anakaleishtha* (to call upon, invoke). . . . Its function was to raise the spirit of the dead from the grave."⁴¹ Alexiou goes on to reveal how the verb for the refrain was adapted to denote "the stone on which Demeter is said to have sat when she invoked Persephone. The ritual enactment of this *anáklisis* was continued by the women of Megara until Pausania's day." It is interesting that the word *anáklisis*, literally "a leaning upon," has entered English usage as a psychoanalytic term

denoting the choice of an attachment made on the basis of its resemblance to a previous, usually parental, attachment. We may almost call the repetition of the lost love-object's name a form of verbal "propping." The survivor leans upon the name, which takes on, by dint of repetition, a kind of substantiality, allowing it not only to refer to but almost to replace the dead. This virtual reification by means of repetition is described by Wordsworth in the note to "The Thorn" mentioned above:

During such efforts there will be a craving in the mind, and as long as it is unsatisfied the speaker will cling to the same words, or words of the same character. There are also various other reasons why repetition and apparent tautology are frequently beauties of the highest kind. Among the chief of these reasons is the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion.⁴²

Wordsworth's disclosure and employment of the primitive use of repetition as a *figure of thought* is characteristic of his intention to recapture the radical nature of poetry. The anaclitic use of this figure of thought, involving the name of the dead, may still be found in elegies as recent as those reiterative laments by Berryman for Delmore Schwartz:

Delmore, Delmore,
.....
Delmore, Delmore,
.....
His throat ached, and he could sing no more.
All ears are closed
across the heights where Delmore and Gertrude sprang
so long ago, in the goodness of which it was composed.
Delmore, Delmore!⁴³

It is as though the history of the genre were, at least in this particular element, bent back to touch its origin; at those moments, we almost see Demeter on her stone.

With the mention of Demeter and her invocation of Persephone we should return to the figure of the vegetation deity to notice several as yet unmentioned aspects of its function. The vegetation god is, after all, the predecessor of almost every elegized subject and provides a fundamental trope by which mortals create their images of immor-

tality. This is not a new field, having been studied by many scholars since the time of Frazer. Nevertheless, we can gain fresh insight by combining elements of our earlier psychoanalytic discussion with a concern for this specific tradition of elegiac mythology, thus developing interpretations that are, at most, latent beneath the figures and conventions that we otherwise take for granted. Among others, the following questions, for example, should be raised: Why is it that the death of the vegetation god is also a sexual martyrdom? How does this relate to the affirmation of immortality? What are the bases for our conventional images of return or resurrection? And finally, How have successive cultures adapted the function of the vegetation god to the needs of quite different societies and settings?

Persephone is raped or abducted by Death. Adonis is killed by a tusk wound in the groin. Atthis castrates himself and dies. Orpheus is torn apart and decapitated by women. Daphnis dies after being blinded by a jealous Aphrodite. The list could be extended, but already it is clear that these deities suffer a peculiarly sexual death. Our earlier discussion of mourning and symbolic castration is again relevant, but we need to focus now on related issues associated more specifically with the forebears and subsequent protagonists of the elegy.

The immortality suggested by nature's self-regenerative power rests on a principle of recurrent fertility. The personification of this principle attests to the comparable capacity in mankind—what we spoke of earlier as the so-called immortal germ plasm. Since individual humans are no more than mortal vehicles of this regenerative power, the particular human figure can represent the principle of sexuality only by appearing to undergo a succession of extinctions and rebirths. The vegetation deity, and especially his or her sexual power, must be made to disappear and return. Hence the specifically sexual or castrative aspects of the deaths.

An additional answer emerges when one recognizes that the vegetation deity, by merging with the matrix, fulfills the primary desire for a return to a state preceding individuation. As is made explicit in the relation of Adonis to Venus, or of Dionysus to Semele, or even in the filial bond preceding the abduction of Persephone from Demeter, this return is coterminous with an undeflected primary desire. It is therefore unavoidable that these representatives of undeterred desire should suffer particularly castrative fates. In a sense, they are punished for fulfilling their and our desire, and their periodic castrations and

deaths are the price by which we purchase our figure for what survives.⁴⁴

From either perspective, then, the figure for surviving sexuality, and hence for that aspect of humanity most comparable to Nature's immortality, requires a castrative moment for its construction. To put it simply, the figure for sexual power is only properly representative when separate from any particular body or, as in statues of Priapus, when the body is almost assimilated to the figure. Now however much the contents of this process of figuration may have been altered or supplied with different meanings, our dominant mode of consolation still depends on detaching from the deceased (or assimilating them to) a special potency or virtue that we regard as eternal. Within such alterations of meaning, however spiritualized, it is worth noting the persistence of the figure for fertility. Indeed, as we shall see, many of the tropes by which we signify immortality depend in large part on this figure, and upon the images originally associated with it. The nature of the power signified differs according to the survivors, for it depends upon the matrix of their needs. But whether such a matrix is that of nature itself, or that of spiritual belief, of fame, of justice, or of social order, the elegy works to create a figure by which that matrix can be refertilized. Perhaps needless to add, throughout the history of the elegy, from the time of Bion beyond that of Mallarmé, the matrices have always been inseparable from the implicit or often explicit matrix of language. Like the soil, the words of the tribe must be purified and resown.

How, then, has the essentially physical imagery associated with the function of the vegetation deity informed subsequent tropes for immortality? Just as the vegetation rites based a figure for perennial renewal upon the principle of fertility, as already mentioned, a Greek belief located part of the immortal attribute of mankind in a supposed cerebrospinal fluid. As R. B. Onians, Jacques Choron, and others have shown, this is where the psyche was alleged to reside, rather as Descartes "located" the soul in the pineal gland, or, more closely, as Weismann and Freud associated immortality with the germ plasm.⁴⁵ Gradually, however, as was true for the notions of emotional impulses and mental faculties, the concept of the soul was detached from its earlier, physical associations.⁴⁶

And yet, the associations persisted in the *imagery* for the soul, which, for all its subsequent spurning of the body, has never been

able to shake its dependence on images of physical properties, particularly those associated with fertility. Echoing ancient vegetation cults of *kalligenia*, or "fair birth," Christianity, for example, describes conversion as a "new birth," the fruit of an impregnation by the spirit of God. The ecstasy of Bernini's *Santa Teresa* returns us to the more explicitly sexual encounters of such predecessors as Danae, Leda, Io, or Europa with the supreme deity. One has only to reflect on the continued practice of the Eucharist, or even the custom of *eating* images of physical renewal during Easter, to realize the similarity between these contemporary rites and their originals. To take the wafer and the wine is to repeat, with a different interpretation, the rites of three millenia ago. Clearly, the significations of the figures have changed more than the figures themselves. It is this combination of change and permanence that must be analyzed.

In many of the earliest rites a youth, personifying the deity, would be dismembered, and his flesh and blood taken as nourishment by the community and by the soil. The figure for fertility would thus be literally ingested, a ritual counterpart to Freud's myth of the sons' ingestion of the dead father in a totem feast that Freud names the "first festival." Freud's myth also involves the reverence for an immortal figure representing the dead father, a figure that represents a power not only of fertility but also of sexual regulation. Just as Greek couples would go, at marriage, to invoke the blessings of the dead, so members of a tribe would refer and defer to the totem in their sexual choices. The totem thus became the symbolic tool for societal reproduction, not merely the emblem of sexual power itself. In this extension, one already sees how the figure may enlarge or alter its field of operation. Indeed, we have already explored some of this field in our discussion of how the figure of the father upholds the symbolic register.

The earliest rites probably provided a sense of merely germinal or genetic continuity, and they scarcely developed concepts of the soul or of spiritual immortality. These later concepts, on the other hand, developed partly out of reinterpretations of the early rites and figures. A consensus of scholars has supported Erwin Rohde's attribution of such revisions to the cults that descended southward into Greece from Thrace between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.⁴⁷ Among the more important of these, particularly in relation to the elegy, was the cult of Dionysus. In its simple form, this cult involved ecstatic dancing

(usually to flutes) and intoxication, together with the slaughter and consumption of an animal or human victim. But the individual participant passed beyond the mere ingestion of a symbol for the god to a frenzied *identification* with the god. The individual became a *Bakchoe*. This capacity for identification may have provided the wellspring for dramatic acting. Beyond this, however, it allowed mortal human beings to conceive of themselves as sharing an aspect of divinity.

It was Orphic and Pythagorean adaptation of the Dionysian cults that most fully advanced a concept of the immortal soul. This reform took place in a sophisticated, urban society rather than among rural communities, and it replaced the Bacchic frenzy with a contemplative and self-purificatory set of rites whereby the individual cultivated the aspect of himself most akin to the divinity. As is well known, this inward, mystical, and in a sense Protestant revision was a formative influence on both the beliefs and the dialogically self-purifying philosophical methods of Plato. So, too, these revisions profoundly affected the most widespread mystery cults of the Golden Age, the panhellenic Eleusinian mysteries. Largely by virtue of this new influence, the Eleusinian mysteries moved further away from their original connection to the Thesmophoria, the autumn sowing rites associated with Demeter and Persephone, and gravitated instead, though with the same deities, toward a ceremony prefiguring the death and rebirth of the *soul*. The recurrence of vegetation in this world was now made to signify the resurrection of the soul in the next, and the *sacra* handled by initiates functioned no longer merely as fertility charms but rather as mystical tokens endowing a guarantee of good fortune in the future life. "Blessed is the man who has beheld these holy acts; but he that is uninitiated and has no share in the holy ceremonies shall not enjoy a like fate after his death, in the gloomy darkness of Hades."⁴⁸

The *sacra* of such mystery cults nevertheless still recalled fertility emblems, and the Orphic theory of the soul's divine heritage made use of a modified legend regarding the phallic figure of Dionysus. Dionysus, son of Zeus, had been dismembered and devoured by the Titans, who in turn were destroyed by Zeus. Born from the soot of the Titans' remains, mankind inherited an element of ingested divinity. It was this element (replenished by ceremonial consumption of Dionysus, often in the form of a bull) that the devotee nursed like a spiritual "heart" within himself. After a life dedicated to refining the sacred legacy from its Titanic dross, the true initiate could greet the

ushers of the dead with such words as those inscribed upon an Orphic tablet: "I am the son of earth and starry heaven, and by birth I come from God: ye know this well yourselves."⁴⁹

Of course, the other ritually stressed feature of the legend is the supposition that one organ of Dionysus, the "heart," escaped the Titans and was carried out by Athene, who concealed it in a fruit-laden basket. The survival of this organ allegedly enabled the second birth of Dionysus (whence his name, "twice-born"), this time from Zeus's union with the mortal Semele. In the rites commemorating this survival or rebirth, the "heart," usually a carved piece of fig wood, would be carried away in a special basket and "revived" by a group of women. (A similar and, indeed, perhaps prior version of this ritual and its image was the cult celebrating Athene herself—Zeus's other progeny. In this case, an image of olive wood was the object of devotion, no doubt here representing a specifically feminine power. It is this cult that Amy Clampitt rescues in her already mentioned revision of the genre.)

The heart in the basket thus also represented the discovered infant god, Dionysus-Zagreus, also called *Liknites* ("of the basket"). One thinks of the discovery of the infant Moses in the basket, or of Christ in his manger among farm animals. Indeed, one of the miracles of Saint Francis is his supposed momentary bringing to life of the figurine of a child in a cradle. Closer at hand, however, one hears Ezra Pound's lines from the elegiac "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley": "Christ follows Dionysus, / Phallic and ambrosial / Made way for macerations"; or Yeats's recapture of the primitive resonance of early ritual:

I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side,
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away,
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,
As though God's death were but a play.⁵⁰

The presence of the singing Muses in Yeats's lines recalls one of the first allegorizations to which the figure of the surviving organ or power of the deity has been submitted. For apart from its adoption by those believers who took it to signify the immortal spirit, the

deity or its special attribute could be made to signify the immortal power of poetry. Rather than representing a restored world of nature, the group of women became Muses, constituting a poetic matrix to be refertilized by the potency of song. This allegorization is obvious in the case of Orpheus, whose severed organ is represented as a singing head, the "gory visage" of continuing song. So, too, the role of the young god Linus was transmuted from that of a springtime deity associated with new lambs (as Christ would be) to that of the inventor of song. Accordingly, his supposed fate changed from that of being devoured by wild dogs to that of being slain by a jealous rival musician, his father Apollo. Again, the mourners become not merely a group of women trying to allay famine but rather the Muses themselves.⁵¹

In this way we come back to Theocritus's "First Idyl," containing a lament for another vegetation deity elevated to poethood. Daphnis's castrative defeat lends a peculiar significance, as well as poignancy, to the relinquishment of his pipe, as he dies, to Pan: "Come, King, and bear away this honey-breathing pipe of hardened wax, a fair instrument, well curved to the lip; for I am now being dragged down to Hades by Love."⁵²

From the original vegetation deity, dismembered to yield a figure for eternal fertility, we have thus moved to the unfortunate lover-poet yielding up the figuratively erotic instrument of his art. We recall the tale of Pan himself and look ahead from Daphnis to so many of his successors, who, in elegies by Moschus, Virgil, Spenser, and Milton, share this especially tangled sexual and poetic fate. It is fascinating to recognize how the entanglement matches the psychological nexus noted earlier in the necessarily castrative assertions of consolation. If the mourned *subject* of the elegy is made to yield a pipe, a reborn flower, or even a stellar influence, the elegist's *own* transaction of loss and gain must, as we have seen, also work toward a trope for sexual power.

Hence a remarkable convergence upon the originally sexual figure of consolation, and all its allegorical variants. It is at the locus, so to speak, of this figure that the elegist erects or inherits his legacy from the dead. Indeed, the figure *is* his legacy. And once we have recognized the *disguises* that such a figure and its attendant imagery may assume, as well as the other virtues or potencies that they may signify, we can read a little more deeply into the underlying thrust of such

consolations as those in "Lycidas," "Adonais," or even in such apparently innocent elegies as those of Wordsworth for his brother John.

We have in fact now accumulated several perspectives from which to interpret the conventional elegiac images of consolation. We have, for example, already discussed the role of flowers both in terms of their ceremonial and interpositional function and in terms of their association with the vegetation deity. Further, we can recognize not only how the relation between cut and returning flowers reflects that between castration and the emblem of immortality but also how both these relations in turn reflect the very process of consolatory figuration. When Wordsworth fixes on the flower in a concluding section of the "Elegiac Verses" for his brother he uses a language that confirms a now familiar elegiac procedure. The poem moves, in short, from a failed urge to summon the powers of a bird's flight (the power that might have saved John) to the consolatory description of a flower that, though "meek," nevertheless "grows upon its native bed . . . cleaving to the ground . . . / With multitude of purple eyes, / Spangling a cushion green like moss."⁵³ It is this flower, figured beyond death, that Wordsworth hopes to see "in its pride" once he has "crossed the mountain." And it is after this surge of vigorous language that Wordsworth can speak of the power of his verse, as well as of letting a "monumental Stone / Stand—sacred as a shrine."

Thwarted in his desire to claim an unconditioned power that would forestall death, Wordsworth has had to accept the qualification of his desire, and it is only on the other side of the mountain, or indeed of death, that he can posit a consoling figure—one derived, as so often in Wordsworth's work, from a scarcely transformed sexual impulse toward the mother earth.⁵⁴ Ironically and yet necessarily, the establishment of the flower "in its pride" can only be posited in the unnatural world after death, once the mountain has been crossed. (Of course part of the function of the flower image is to mask the disjunction between this world and the next.) Finally, the clustered images of flowers, eyes, and spangles definitely do recall Milton's use of them in "Lycidas" and we are now perhaps more alert to the reason why such a cluster might, after two centuries, retain its hold on a poet so apparently scornful of conventional figures.

A similar reading is often required for a deeper appreciation of the images of light so crucial to elegies. As with the images of flowers,

5)
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images

there are several levels of meaning, and similar currents run beneath the obvious significance of this figure for an energy that conquers darkness and outlasts human mortality. As in the Phaeton legend, the sun can serve as the symbol for the power of the father. But interestingly enough, as Mircea Eliade has shown, the sky god himself is often perceived as a castrated deity, or as an old god deposed by a youthful usurper.⁵⁵ Eliade attributes such perceptions to a belief in the enforced cessation of an otherwise prolonged intercourse between the sky and the earth. In other words, the sky god was emasculated and relegated to a remote height—a height thus ironically achieved by this very relegation. The figure of the sun thus functions like that of the phallus, and to lay claim figuratively (in contrast to Phaeton's literal attempt) to a solar or stellar light may thus be understood as another aspect of the mourner's characteristic resolution. Such a claim involves an attempted assumption of one's symbolic legacy and an attempt to assert a figure that, like the other consoling tropes of elegy, offers the most paradoxical blend of absence and presence, of weakness and strength.

Like that of the fertility god, the figure of the sun and the associated figures of light and of fire have undergone a history of resignification throughout the development of the elegy. In one of the earliest descriptions of mourning, that of Achilles after the death of Patroclus, wrath arouses Achilles from grief, and at that moment "Around his Brows a golden Cloud she [Pallas] spread / A Stream of Glory flam'd above his Head."⁵⁶ So intense was this light that it compared with beacon fires blazing forth at sunset, an artificial light emerging like a substitute for the sun. The subsequent variations of this fundamental image are too many to rehearse here, but we shall be pointing with much greater specificity to its survival in Milton's or Shelley's consolatory claims, no less than in the attenuated retrospective glimmerings of Hardy's elegies for his first wife. And whether the sun or the light signifies Achilles' angrily renewed martial strength (the light here associated, interestingly, with the female figure of Athene), or Milton's resurrective vision, or Hardy's memory, beneath this figure there plays a heritage of powerful contradictions associated with the original positing of any imagery of light on the far side of darkness, or of presence in the space of an absence.⁵⁷

Turning from the arch-figures of consolation, we should consider one last set of conventions, involving the use of division between or

within mourning voices. Margaret Alexiou discusses this use with regard to ancient Greek laments, showing how the practice influenced the Greek *threnos*, a formal chant performed by professional mourners, in conjunction with the *goos*, the less formal wailing of the bereaved. An antiphony would result, the voices of the bereaved coming to chime with the refrains of the paid singers. In the *Iliad* we read:

A melancholy Choir attend around
With plaintive Sighs, and Musick's solemn Sound:
Alternately they sing, alternate flow
Th'obedient Tears, melodious in their Woe.⁵⁸

The lament continues, structured by a series of solo plaints, each joined at its end by the chorus of mourners. Similarly, in the *Odyssey* the shade of Agamemnon tells of the Muses' antiphonal singing at the funeral of Achilles.

The divided voice structure of the lament entered drama as the *kommos*, defined by Aristotle as a "tragic lament in dialogue form between chorus and actors," while the lyric form apparently most suited for the antiphonal lament was the eclogue.⁵⁹ But even in elegies that are not strictly eclogues the ancient practice continues: in Bion's dirge for Adonis, "the Loves join in weeping" as the refrain sets up a choral antiphony to the speaker's lament, which itself includes a further voice, that of the grieving Aphrodite. And even in elegies that call themselves "monodies," such as "Lycidas," the voice of the elegist seems to work through several moments of extreme divisiveness or multiplicity.⁶⁰

How should we interpret this conventional fracturing or separation of voices? Three partial suggestions were made earlier. The first relates to the "splitting" and self-suppression that accompanied the self's first experiences of loss and substitution, its discovery of signs both for lost objects and for the self. The second is associated with the dramatizing strategy by which mourners not only lend ceremony to their rites but also intensify and indicate their own "work" as survivors. Thus the lament would have to include the semblance of another voice as stage director, introducing and spotlighting apparently other voices or choruses.

A third determinant lies in what we saw to be the confrontational structure required for the very recognition of loss. We recall how through a kind of repetitive dialogue the bereaved is forced to accept a

reality that he might otherwise refuse. Allied to this is the general function of controlling or criticizing the mourner. As Sidney wrote, in one of the early English definitions of the "lamenting Elegiac," the elegy "surely is to be praised, either for compassionate accompanying just causes of lamentation, or for rightly pointing out how weak be the passions of woefulness."⁶¹ As early as Theocritus's "First Idyl," the griever is addressed by voices urging him to temper his sorrow and to rejoin the community of the living, and the tradition is continued with variations through almost all the major elegies. In "Lycidas," the voices of address, internalized and dreamlike though they may be, are successors to an entire line of admonishing or sympathizing voices in the elegies of Theocritus, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and others.

A separation of voices thus reflects and carries forward the necessarily dialectical movement of the work of mourning, not merely in the process of recognition but for the entire project of withdrawal and reattachment of affections. If the mourner must break off and replace his attachments, the self that survives in this way has, in a sense, begun again, putting its former position behind it. An obvious instance of how the eclogue form may be used to provide this kind of division and progression is Virgil's "Eclogue V," in which the consoling voice of Menalcas soars beyond the disconsolate plaint of Mopsus. One finds a similar dynamic interplay of voices in the elegies of Petrarch, Sannazaro, and Spenser; but it is more subtly present in the self-surpassing turn of "Lycidas," or "Adonais," or in the Neoclassical elegies of Jonson and Dryden, where personal voice is distanced or assimilated to the apparent impersonality of inherited language.

The eclogue form has the further characteristic of lending itself to the presentation of a *contest*, and this, too, is closely related to mourning rites. The ancient funeral games here become transmuted to a poetry contest, but the original function survives. On one level, it provides a kind of distraction, a channeling of the energy of grief into a highly controlled and skilled exertion. The winner, too, becomes an attractive object onto which the mourners can temporarily transfer their attachments. What is more important, the winners exemplify and seem to immortalize the qualities of the deceased, or at least those virtues deemed important for the community's survival. The games thus take on the aspects of a contest for inheritance; we see this especially clearly in the elegiac eclogues where, beneath an apparently innocent singing match, a poet asserts his position as true heir to a poetic legacy.

Originally, as we have seen in the vegetation rites and in their spiritualized successors, the act of mourning quite simply *included* the act of inheritance, for the participant ingested the god or its symbol. (To take the wafer and wine is still an act of repeated inheritance.) The connection between mourning and inheritance has remained a close one throughout history. Most interesting for any reader of the elegy is the fact that in Greece the right to mourn was from earliest times legally connected to the right to inherit. There were, predictably enough, contests, even at the gravesite, over who should most legitimately mourn. The issue is central to *The Oresteia*, written at a time when inheritance laws in Greece were changing, and we shall return to it more fully in discussing *Hamlet*. But for the moment it is worth indicating its presence within the otherwise neutral-seeming elements of an aesthetic convention. Few elegies can be fully read without an appreciation of their frequently combative struggles for inheritance.

Furthermore, the ancient law prevented anyone from inheriting *unless* he mourned. Alexiou quotes Isaios: "Is it not a most unholy thing if a man, without having done any of the customary rites due to the dead, yet expects to take the inheritance of the dead man's property?"⁶² It is clear that since the time of Moschus's lament for Bion, many elegies pivot around the issue of poetic inheritance. In this case, the heir apparent must demonstrate a greater strength or proximity to the dead than any rival may claim, but he must also wrest his inheritance *from* the dead. More than a mere ingestion, some act of alteration or surpassal must be made, some device whereby the legacy may be seen to have entered a new successor. Auden's lines for Yeats, recalling, as we are now in a position to see, one of the most primitive images of inheritance, are especially true for elegists:

The words of the dead
Are modified in the guts of the living ⁶³

In its earliest conflictual structures, as also in successive adaptations of the eclogue form, the elegy clarifies and dramatizes this emergence of the true heir.

- mainder, clamoring in self-misrepresentative language for total self-recognition—neither the unconscious nor desire is totally reducible to language, nor can we slight their constant counterpressure within and against language. For a fuller account of the need / demand / desire sequence see Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. with notes and commentary by Anthony Wilden (New York: Dell, 1968), 185–96. See also Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 117 ff.; Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality* (New York: Norton, 1983), 6, 32.
4. For the major source of such prophecies see the conclusion of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), 386–87. Admittedly, Foucault is speaking of a certain view or manner of man, but his notion that "man had been a figure occurring between two modes of language" and his wager that altered arrangements of knowledge would leave man "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," have led many to define man perhaps too exclusively as a construct of discourse. Of course man is inevitably conditioned by language, but that conditioning should be seen as a continuous conflict, not as an unequivocally decided conquest that has left man utterly dependent on subsequent changes in an autonomous order of signs.
 5. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," in Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954; reprint ed., 1971), 473.
 6. Robert Hass, "Meditation at Lagunitas," *Praise* (New York: Ecco Press, 1979), 4.

Chapter I. Interpreting the Genre: The Elegy and the Work of Mourning

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: Norton, 1939), 27.

1. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), trans. Joan Riviere, in *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1963), 164–79.

Studies of the genre are few in number, and while some (particularly Smith's and Lambert's, cited below) are more interpretive than others, none shares the approach of the following study. Two early articles focus on the pastoral elegy in particular: James H. Hanford, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's 'Lycidas,'" *PMLA* 25 (1910), 403–47; and G. Norlin, "The Conventions of the Pastoral Elegy," *American Journal of Philology* (hereafter cited as *AJP*) 32 (1911), 294–312. More extensive, and unusual for its attention to historical context, is John Draper, *The Funeral Elegy and the Rise of English Romanticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1929). Thomas Perrin Harrison, Jr., has a brief introduction but many useful notes and cross references in *The Pastoral Elegy: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1939), translations by

Harry Joshua Leon. I shall use Harrison's edition repeatedly when citing early examples of the genre.

Focusing primarily on the seventeenth century, Ruth Wallerstein has made an excellent study of the changing norms within a sequence of elegies, *The Laureate Hearse*, pt. 1 of *Studies in Seventeenth Century Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950). Scott Elledge includes much of interest to any student of the genre in *Milton's "Lycidas": Edited to Serve as an Introduction to Criticism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). A wide-ranging study of "elegiac" poetry (rather than of elegies per se) is Abbie Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). Donald Mell concentrates on the Augustan period in *A Poetics of Augustan Elegy* (Amsterdam: Mouton, 1974). Ellen Lambert's fine study of the genre does interpret several aspects of its conventions, but her examples and applications are mainly within the European pastoral tradition from the Classical period to the Renaissance (*Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy from Theocritus to Milton* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976]). Overlapping more closely with my chosen period. Eric Smith in *By Mourning Tongues: Studies in the English Elegy* (Ipswich: Boydell Press) offers good readings of several elegies from "Lycidas" to *In Memoriam*. He, too, stresses the "dramatic" aspects of the genre, but his project does not move toward a psychoanalytic understanding of the mythology of the genre, and several of the elegy's conventions remain uninterpreted. Finally, a more specialized but excellent study of certain elegies written *for poets*—a subgenre he calls "Tombeau"—is found in the chapter entitled "Tombeau" in Lawrence I. Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

2. Maurice Bowra believes the word *elegy* to be related etymologically to an ancient name for the flute, a name that survives in the Armenian word for flute, *elegn*-. He favors this proposed derivation, itself doubtful, over that which relates the word to the Greek phrase *e e legoi*, "to speak well of." Bowra, *Early Greek Elegists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938). Yet another etymological theory, close to that of the *e e legoi*, involves the phrase *ai ai legoi*, linking the genre to the cry of grief over Hyacinth or that of Hercules over Linus (see, for example, Scaliger, *The Poetics* 1.1, quoted in Elledge, 107).
3. Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 104.
4. For a recent survey of these changes in the generic definitions see Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 156 ff. For accounts of the prosodic adaptations of elegiacs see Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode*, and John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 172-73, 200-202, 268-69.
5. The funerary function of the flute, as well as its legendary origins, is widespread, appearing also, for example, in the beliefs and practices of Brazilian Indians. In China, the New Music, of the fifth century B. C., was characterized by wind instruments replacing the earlier percussive music. Critics of the New Music protested against its enervating, decadent, and erotic qualities, claiming that it was more appropriate for mourning.

6. James Merrill, *Braving the Elements* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 72.
7. In the light of what follows, we should notice that Apollo's relation to Daphne is, from its very inception, punitive. Instigated by Cupid and executed by Daphne's father, it is as if the metamorphosis that follows were designed in part to reveal and to inflict on Apollo the nature of erotic desire as it is governed and deflected by the father.
8. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1916; reprint ed., 1960), 40–41. All further quotations from Ovid are from this edition.
9. By showing how Apollo's invention of the sign includes his projection of its future use, Ovid stresses the temporal disjunction at the core of the sign. Pan, too, will project the signifying function of his pipes into the future. For the relation between temporality and signification see Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 173–209.
10. Argos's fate is no less significant as a frame for the Syrinx episode. His failure to sustain an attentive regard for Mercury's order of signs leads to a literal decapitation; whereas by their submissive acceptance of a system of signs, Apollo and Pan suffer only mild, symbolic versions of this fate.

After Argos is beheaded, his blinded eyes are converted to the decorative motif on a peacock's feathers. While this conversion is itself highly elegiac (cf. "Those are pearls that were his eyes"), it exemplifies the displacement from a physical organ to an aesthetic object or sign to be displayed. As we shall see, few elegies fail to perform variants of such transformations.

11. Sigmund Freud, *Letters*, trans. Tania Stern and James Stern, ed. Ernst Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 386.
12. For an excellent discussion of Pan and the "functional interdependence between poetic power and erotic failure" see Harry Berger, Jr., "Orpheus, Pan, and the Poetics of Misogyny: Spenser's Critique of Pastoral Love and Art," *ELH* 50 no. 1 (Spring 1983), 27–60; see also Louis Adrian Montrose, "The perfect paterne of a Poete': The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepheardes Calender*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* (hereafter cited as *TSLL*) 21 (1979), 34–67.

One of the most persuasive *visual* testimonies to the phallic nature of the flute is Titian's *Allegory of the Three Ages of Life*. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. Cf. also Leo Frobenius's account of a Mande folktale, which begins:

A maiden refused to marry, refused to marry any one. This came to the ears of a man who liked her. Thereupon he changed himself into a flute, and laid himself, in the shape of a flute before the maiden's door. The maiden found the flute, picked it up, ran to her mother, and showed it to her. Her mother said: "What a lovely flute you have. No one in the village has so fine a flute." The maiden took the flute into the house and leaned it against the wall.

(Frobenius, *African Genesis* [Berkeley: Turtle Island Foundation, 1983], 174–75).

13. For fuller accounts of these stages see Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977). See also the works by Lacan, Rifflet-Lemaire, Coward and Ellis, and Mitchell and Rose, all cited in the Preface (n. 3). To these add John P. Muller and William Richardson, "Toward Reading Lacan: Pages for a Workbook," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 1, no. 3 (1978), 323–72.
14. For example, repetition, power reversal, and revenge.
15. For Freud's account of the *fort-da* game see his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1950). Lacan returns to this account often, but a principal reading is in "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, 30–113.
16. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 34.
17. Freud himself did not originally stress the element of castration in the oedipal drama. His gradual recognition of this component is described by Juliet Mitchell in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, *Feminine Sexuality* (New York: Norton, 1983), 12 ff.
18. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1975), 395.
19. Lacan calls the phallus "a ghost" in "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1978), 50. The quotation from Jacqueline Rose is from Mitchell and Rose, 40.
20. Anika Rifflet-Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 82.
21. *The Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*, ed. C. W. Hatfield (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 223.
22. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), trans. Joan Riviere, rev. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1960; Norton Library, 1962), 48.
23. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 198.
24. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 37.
25. See Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 168 ff.
26. Phaeton, seeking his identity in relation to his father, Phoebus, fails to accept the mediated nature of that relation and insists instead on becoming the father, to the extent of steering the sun. He wants exclusively the very thing that Phoebus would withhold, and he refuses an extensive list of offered substitutes. Phoebus's yielding brings on the death of his overreaching son, who thus joins the ranks of all those characters whose rejection of substitutes brings them to ruin. Phaeton is caught between the ungovernable nature of his own desire, represented by the unchecked horses, and the wrath of the absolute Father, Jove, whose thunderbolt finally annihilates Phaeton. We recall, too, the way in which the inconsolability of Phaeton's sisters and of his cousin turns them into poplars and a swan, respectively. Phoebus's own dark melancholy is itself only dispelled by the coaxing and threats of Jove. As we shall see, the fact that this scenario involves the sun, of all figures, is far from fortuitous.
27. Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* 4.2.235–38. This and subsequent quotations from

- Shakespeare are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
28. Wallace Stevens, "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Knopf, 1954; reprint ed., 1971), 434.
29. James Wright, "Devotions," in *Collected Poems* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972), 72.
30. Theocritus, "First Idyl," in Harrison, 28.
31. Freud discusses the survivor's guilt not only in "Mourning and Melancholia" but also in his earlier *Totem and Taboo* (1913), trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950), 60 ff. In the latter, Freud recognizes the role of guilt in the genesis of the "pathological form of mourning," later to be analyzed as melancholia.
32. One further determinant of elegiac questioning will be studied with specific reference to *In Memoriam*. This involves the mourner's attempt to repair a damaged narcissism. By means of repeated questions and apostrophes, the mourner tries to reposit the approving audience that he has suddenly lost.
33. Quoted from Harrison, 34.
34. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 28–63.
35. Harrison, 36.
36. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 166.
37. The quotation from Ronsard is from Harrison. Bryskett's elegy may be found in Edmund Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912; reprint ed., 1969), 550 ff.
38. Specifically, I am anticipating the discussions about Jonson and Dryden in chapter V. For the best discussion of the rhetorical use of the echo figure see John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).
39. Spenser, 461; Milton, *The Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press, 1957; reprint ed., 1975), 120.
40. Alexiou, 137.
41. *Ibid.*, 109.
42. William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904; reprint ed., 1973), 701.
43. John Berryman, Dream Song 147, *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), 76.
44. The vegetation deity thus exercises an obviously cathartic power; and this element relates closely to the cathartic or apotropaic gestures in several elegies. See, for example, the discussion of "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," in chapter X.
45. R. B. Onians, *Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Jacques Choron, *Western Attitudes to Death* (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1963).
46. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).
47. Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. G. Hillis (London: Routledge, 1925).

48. Homer's "Hymn to Demeter," quoted in *ibid.*, 219.
 49. By way of Pliny's description, a ritual like this may well have migrated to such imagined reconstructions of druidic practices as that found in Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*. There, too, the sacrifice of a bull is associated with the assumption of spiritual immortality:

On th'unhew'd Altar layd, put to the hallowed fires:
 And whilst in the sharpe flame the trembling flesh
 expires,
 As their strong furie mov'd (when all the rest
 adore)
 Pronouncing their desires the sacrifice before,
 Up to th'eternall heaven their bloodied hands did
 reare:
 And, whilst the murmuring woods even shuddred as
 with feare,
 Preacht to the beardlesse youth, the soules
 immortall state, . . .

(9. 421–27, in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. I. W. Hebel, 5 vols. [Oxford: Blackwell and Mott, 1931–41; corrected ed. 1961], 4:180).

50. Ezra Pound, *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952; reprint ed., 1973), 206; William Butler Yeats, "Two Songs from a Play," *The Poems*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 213.
 51. While the martyrs by *sparagmos* have been predominantly male, this need not be exclusively so. Nor need it be an exclusively male victim whose sacrificed physical power yields the figurative immortal capacity allegorized, for example, as that of poetry or song. One version of Echo's fate has her, like Linus, suffer the punishment inflicted by a rival musician, in this case Pan, whose envy we are told is sharpened by erotic frustration. As quoted by John Hollander in *The Figure of Echo* (8):

Pan sees that, and takes occasion to be angry at the maid, and to envy her music because he could not come at her beauty. Therefore he sends a madness among the shepherds . . . and they tore her all to pieces and flung about them all over the earth her yet singing limbs [*adonta ta melē*, punning on limbs and songs]. The Earth in observance of the Nymphs buried them all, preserving to them still their musical property, and they by an everlasting sentence and decree of the Muses breathe out a voice.

52. Harrison, 28.
 53. Wordsworth, 454.
 54. Compare the Spirit's lines in Wordsworth's "Invocation to the Earth," a poem included near the elegies for John, together with the other "Epitaphs and Elegiac Pieces":

'False parent of Mankind!
 Obdurate, proud, and blind,
 I sprinkle thee with soft celestial dews,

Thy lost, maternal heart to re-infuse!
Scattering this far-fetched moisture from my wings,
Upon the act a blessing I implore. . . .

(*ibid.*, 455).

55. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*. Vol. 1, trans. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
56. *Iliad* 18. 243–44, trans. Alexander Pope, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, 10 vols. Vol. 7, ed. Maynard Mack (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 334.
57. For a study of the solar figure in elegies see Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode*. And for a deconstructive reading of the metaphorical nature of our images for the sun and light see Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," *NLH* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1974).
58. *Iliad* 24. 900–903.
59. Alexiou, 13. Alexiou's reference is to Aristotle's *Poetics* 12. 1452b.
60. In the study of "Lycidas," I shall refer to this aspect of the poem, and to the dispute it has provoked among recent critics (See chap. IV, n. 8).
61. Sir Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 95.
62. Alexiou, 21.
63. W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927–1957* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966; reprint ed., 1969), 141.

Chapter II. Spenser: *The Shepherdes Calender* and "Astrophel"

1. Edmund Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912; reprint ed., 1969), 471. Subsequent quotations from Spenser are from this edition, henceforth referred to in both text and notes as *Works*.
2. For an account of the self-imprisoning effects in "Ye Goatherd Gods" see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, rev. ed. (New York: New Directions, 1947), 34–38.
3. Sir Philip Sidney, *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 81.
4. William A. Oram warns against too close an association of Alcyon with Gorges. He also argues persuasively that Alcyon is in part a fictional construct designed to portray and to exorcise the dangers of excessively self-absorbed grief. Oram admits, however, the poem's lack of a comforting resolution, and apart from the ignored words of Alcyon's dying Daphne, there is no articulated source of consolation in the poem (Oram, "Daphnaida and Spenser's Later Poetry," *Spenser Studies* 2 [1981], 141–58).
5. The illustrations to the eclogues present their own visual account of the pipe's career. It lies broken in "January" and "June," eclogues in which Colin himself is present; in "April" and "August" it is played, but by Hobbinol and Cuddie in Colin's behalf; in "October" Cuddie carries a worn panpipe in his hand, having