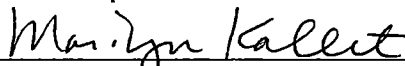


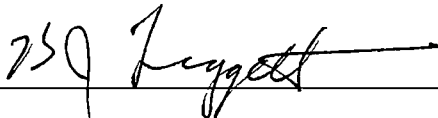
To the Graduate Council:

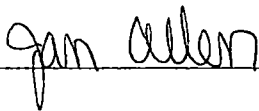
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jo Angela Edwins entitled "Working Against the Sadness: Personal Loss and Poetic Healing in the Poetry of Jane Kenyon, Donald Hall, Raymond Carver, and Tess Gallagher." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Marilyn Kallet, Major Professor

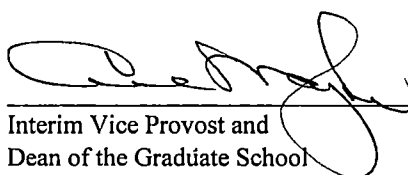
We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Interim Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

WORKING AGAINST THE SADNESS:
PERSONAL LOSS AND POETIC HEALING IN THE POETRY OF
JANE KENYON, DONALD HALL, RAYMOND CARVER, AND TESS GALLAGHER

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jo Angela Edwins
August 2001

Copyright © Jo Angela Edwins, 2001

All rights reserved.

Dedicated to the memory of
Beatrice Jane McCarty Edwins
(1926-1995)

*Your peonies lean their vast heads westward
as if they might topple. Some topple.*

Donald Hall, "Weeds and Peonies"

*The inflections of joy. The inflections of
suffering. And strangely
sometimes the mixing
of the two.*

Tess Gallagher, "Bonfire"

Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to you, you see. I wanted to tell you.

Raymond Carver, "For Tess"

So many people are deserving of much more than a verbal "thank you" for their rich and varied support of my work toward completion of this project that it is hard to know where to begin, and perhaps still harder to know where to end. I hope all who contributed to my life and work during my eight years of graduate study at the University of Tennessee recognize that their generosity will always be deeply appreciated.

Obviously I owe a great deal to the committee who worked directly with me in shaping the dissertation into its final form. My director, Marilyn Kallet, served not only as a careful and considerate first reader; she likewise offered much-needed encouragement in moments of near-desperate panic over stalled drafts and creeping deadlines. It was also Marilyn who paved the way for opportunities to meet and correspond with Tess Gallagher about the project. Marilyn's service as friend, mentor, and advocate throughout the past three years is beyond measure. Dr. B. J. Leggett offered clarity of vision in his timely readings of each chapter of this dissertation. He consistently amazed me with his quick and careful responses to my work, often returning lengthy chapters in less than a week. His diligence and encouragement kept me moving forward despite setbacks, and for that I am deeply grateful. Dr. Allen Dunn provided reminders of the broader contexts of my work and offered advice that will prove valuable when revising the dissertation for future publication opportunities. Dr. Jan Allen's kind words often proved a comfort and a motivator. To my entire committee I offer great thanks.

Deep appreciation is extended to Donald Hall and Tess Gallagher for their encouragement of this project. Several correspondences with each of these poets provided clarification of vision, and their kind words were a great comfort and an impetus to careful work in reading and interpreting their poetry and that of Jane Kenyon and Raymond Carver. Tess Gallagher proved particularly generous, allowing for a window of time in her busy schedule to meet with me for coffee during her spring 2000 visit to Louisville, Kentucky. My conversation with her was one of the most exciting and rewarding experiences of my graduate career, and for that opportunity I am enormously grateful. I also thank her for permission to quote

the entirety of Raymond Carver's "Hummingbird" (copyright © Raymond Carver 1989, Tess Gallagher 1996) in Chapter Four.

The staff at the James Thurber Special Collections branch of The Ohio State University Library was entirely kind and helpful during my May 2000 visit to study Raymond Carver's papers, housed there in the William Charvat collection. For two full days they put up with my requests for folder after folder of correspondences and manuscripts. Geoffrey Smith, Elva Griffith, and the many graduate students on staff there deserve the utmost appreciation. I would also like to thank Carol Sklenicka, a scholar currently researching a biography of Raymond Carver, for her helpful suggestions of source materials for this project. Reference librarians at the University of Tennessee's John C. Hodges Library deserve much more than a nod of thanks, especially Marie Garrett, who was often willing to drop whatever she was doing when I needed help tracking down obscure references that may otherwise have never been located.

Several University of Tennessee English Department professors who were not members of my committee served as fine advisors and supporters during my studies here. Dr. Mary Papke, Dr. Stan Garner, Dr. Nancy Goslee, Dr. Edward Bratton, and Dr. Allison Ensor served in various capacities as advisors and exam committee members during my master's and doctoral studies here, and I extend them great thanks. The people who have served as secretarial staff in the English Department during my studies here have consistently proved themselves to be a phenomenal group of workers, not to mention great friends. Words cannot begin to express my gratitude to Dinah Brock, long-time graduate secretary and current secretary to the Associate Head of the Department. She always knew what forms needed to be filed when and where, and whenever the road was difficult, she found a way to smooth the trail. Leanne Hinkle, who took over as graduate secretary, has also been extremely helpful as multiple deadlines approached. Lisa Lance, Judith Veals, Sheri Stephens, Linda Stooksbury, and Pam Whaley were always available and eager to help when asked, and the friendship and laughter offered by Laura Curd and Chana Bird kept me sane on the most overwhelming days of the process. Heather Doncaster, dissertation consultant in UT's Graduate School, also deserves many thanks for her help in formatting the final product.

The staff of the University of Tennessee's Arts and Sciences Advising Services, where I have worked since June 2000, has provided laughter and encouragement in seeing me through the bulk of the

writing stage of the dissertation. The professional staff led by Dr. Ruth Darling proved to be excellent motivators, and the group of students and support staff with whom I worked served as an invaluable network of friends and fellow sufferers; they all deserve a giant “thank you.”

My friends among the English Department graduate student ranks over the last eight years are indeed too numerous to name. Lest someone whose kindness is important to me be forgotten, I will not attempt to name them all, but will trust that those who joked, praised, criticized, cajoled, soothed and inspired when necessary know who they are. I must, however, thank Laura Rutland for providing a printer to print the final master copy of the dissertation. I must also extend a special thank you to my dear friend, Dr. Bill Larsen, who over the past seven years has supported and mentored me in countless invaluable ways. Much of what I know about the art of college-level instruction I owe to Bill, a genius at teaching, and his lasting friendship has kept me going despite the intense temptation at times to give up academia altogether. He deserves more thanks than I can offer, and I am deeply grateful for his influence.

This project grew out of my life-long love of poetry and, more specifically, the solace it provided me after the death of my mother, Beatrice Edwins, from lung cancer in 1995. I will never know or fully understand the many sacrifices she made on behalf of her family, especially her children. She gave up a great deal, both emotionally and materially, for each one of us, but she always encouraged us, never once questioning our choices, and for that I will be eternally grateful. I likewise owe tremendous thanks to my father, Joe O. Edwins, whose pride in his children’s accomplishments is practically palpable. In addition to my parents, my sister, Sandra M. Edwins, deserves the highest measure of thanks I can offer. An elementary school teacher, she taught me the greatest lesson of all—the value of helping others through the power of education. Financially, emotionally, spiritually, she has helped me in every way imaginable. She has been sister, teacher, best friend, and second mother in multiple ways, and I extend the greatest thanks to her for it all.

Finally, to all the students I have had or will have the privilege of teaching, I thank you directly here for reminding me why I chose to pursue a Ph.D. in the first place. You are the truest reason for it all.

Abstract

The poetry of Jane Kenyon, Donald Hall, Raymond Carver, and Tess Gallagher is examined in light of shared aspects of these poets' lives and work with a focus on the effects of romantic and professional partnership on poetry and, most importantly, the effects of long-term illness and the loss of a life partner on the poetry of both the dying member of the partnership and the surviving widowed poet. Kenyon and Hall were married for twenty-three years prior to Kenyon's death in 1995 from leukemia, and Carver and Gallagher were involved in a romantic partnership for ten years prior to Carver's death in 1988 from lung cancer. This project reads the most recent poetry of these writers in light of their shared experience with long-term illness and loss, using biographical detail as a backdrop for studying their poetry but focusing particularly on the conventions of elegy and recent breaks with those conventions in order to examine the poetic strategies employed by each writer to cope with illness and the loss of a life/writing partner.

A crucial organizing principle of these writers' poetry was their use of *paradox*, the juxtaposition of opposites developing from the simultaneous absence and presence of the dying individual, a phenomenon generated by the dying's gradual physical decline and the grief processes of survivors. *Paradox* also refers to the complex processes of the need to express inexpressible emotions related to loss and grief through the written word. Tension develops in these writers' poems between the verbal statement and the nonverbal gesture as the best means of expressing painful loss. All of the writers employ methods to ensure the survival of the dying partner's voice within the poetic utterances of the survivor. Also, several organizing myths outlined in recent studies of pathography, life writings focusing on the illness and death of the writer or a loved one, also apply to the poetry under consideration here, including vegetation myths, journey/quest myths, and battle myths. Ultimately, all four poets question the efficacy of poetic language in the wake of traumatic lived experience to communicate that experience and provide healing. Nevertheless, all four writers ultimately conclude that the poetic statement, however flawed, is for them the most effective means of verbally communicating the experience of terminal illness and death.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. GRIEF OBSERVED: ILLNESS, DEATH, AND THE FUNCTIONS OF POETRY.....	1
Psychological Concepts of Grief and Mourning.....	5
Writing Out the Hurt.....	11
Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall.....	20
Raymond Carver and Tess Gallagher.....	25
Moving Toward Human Usefulness.....	32
2. LIGHT AND CLAY: JANE KENYON'S POETRY OF LOSS.....	33
3. LEAPING AND FALLING: DONALD HALL'S POETRY OF LOSS.....	65
4. SLEEPING AND WAKING: RAYMOND CARVER'S POETRY OF LOSS.....	118
5. BODY AND MIST: TESS GALLAGHER'S POETRY OF LOSS.....	169
6. CONCLUSION: JOINING THE FABRIC.....	214
REFERENCES.....	225
VITA.....	234

Chapter One: Grief Observed: Illness, Death, and the Functions of Poetry

*Grief
is original, but it
repeats itself: there's nothing
more original that it can do.
Amy Clampitt, "The Dakota"*

If poetry can call our numbed emotions to life, its plain human usefulness needs no further demonstration.

Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Experience

In his 1997 book *Suffering and the Remedy of Art*, critic Harold Schweizer attempts what he acknowledges to be a virtually "impossible task" (14)—to establish a link between human suffering and artistic expression which pivots on the premise that "art is as autonomous, gratuitous, and irreducible to analysis as suffering" (2). Schweizer's argument suggests that suffering

although universal is nevertheless an elusive reality. How or what art can redeem or remedy, [sic] is difficult to determine. While suffering is a universal human predicament, it also remains the most unsharable, incommunicable mystery, the very epitome of secrecy and particularity. And while art may probe deeply into the mysteries of suffering, it also remains distant and aloof from it. (1)

Given Schweizer's thesis, the reasons behind his characterization of his argument as "impossible" are evident. Suffering, no matter the cause, is endured by the individual as indeed an *individual* experience, one which certainly any outsider and even a fellow sufferer would be presumptuous to claim as fully comprehensible to his own consciousness. Similarly, art (including, of course, poetry) is widely acknowledged as informed by but never fully apprehended by approaches to interpreting it. Thus Edward Hirsch insists in his 1999 book, *How to Read a Poem*, "I am convinced the kind of experience—the kind of knowledge—one gets from poetry cannot be duplicated elsewhere" (6), including, one would presume, critical interpretations of poetry. But the problem which Schweizer faces is how to explain experiences which are so overwhelming and transforming that they simultaneously demand and defy articulation. For Schweizer, the nature of individual works of art shares this quality of incommunicability with individual experiences of suffering. Similarly, among the "uses of poetry" which Denys Thompson itemizes in his 1978 book is its reciprocal capacity to maintain the "psychic health" (195) of the poet and likewise to offer the reader an avenue for "discovering truths about himself and about human experience" (198). Thompson

reiterates an observation which countless poets, theorists, and health professionals have suggested about the practical relationship between poetry and pain¹:

The crises and testing times of life are lightened by what the sufferer recalls from his reading; his pain or bereavement or disillusion is accompanied by solace and encouragement to go on living, and peace of mind may be achieved. (199)

While Thompson's assertion may strike some readers as an oversimplification, the long history of elegiac forms of poetry attests to poetry's ability to go beyond attempts to represent the experience of suffering and extend toward provision of comfort for the pained reader. Thus *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* notes that, although the elegy has roots in classical literature as any meditative poem concerned with abiding subjects such as love or death, since Milton's *Lycidas* (1637) the term *elegy* has been widely recognized as a poem whose concerns are two-fold: "lament for the dead and the search for consolation in the contemplation of some permanent principle" (*Princeton Encyclopedia* 324). Without singling out individual subgenres such as the elegy, Tess Gallagher argues in her 1984 essay "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief" that poetry especially (perhaps even exclusively) allows readers and writers to extend beyond "release from sufferings" to achieve a deeper understanding of loss which expresses both physical and psychological responses to bereavement (103). Gallagher asserts that, in a postmodern world which values quick recovery from the past in order to move through the present toward the short-term future, the experience and meaning of loss risk being erased by the relentless "now." Poetry, however, resists such tunnel vision, offering instead individualized spiritual release:

In such a [present-focused] world, poems allow a strictly private access to the grief-handling process, or, on another level, poems may bring one's loss into communion with other deaths and mythic elements which enlarge the view of the solitary death. It is as if the poem acted as a live-in church, and one might open the book of poems in order, through experiencing loss, to arrive at an approach to one's particular grief and thereby transform that grief. (104)

Gallagher glosses J. T. Fraser's *Of Passion, Time and Knowledge*, which uses the term "the business present" to refer to contemporary American society's obsession with instant remedy of complex problems

¹Writings concerning the healing capacity of poetry include Tess Gallagher's essay, "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief," discussed in this chapter; the third section of Hirsch's chapter "Three Initiations" in *How to Read a Poem*; Peter Sacks's *The English Elegy* and Jahan Ramazani's *The Poetry of Mourning*, also discussed later in this chapter; and Morris R. Morrison, ed. *Poetry as Therapy*. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1987.

and an often silent endorsement of the value of the present at the expense of the future and—particularly regarding grief and loss—the past (Gallagher 105-06). Even professional counselors, Gallagher insists, frequently subscribe to the quick-fix approach to coping with grief which contemporary American society endorses. Citing her own experience in the wake of her second marriage's disintegration, in which a marriage counselor expected her to dispense with tears after her first session, Gallagher suggests that too many mental health professionals expect speedy recoveries and become impatient with individuals whose recuperation from profound loss requires more time. Poetry thus becomes an important resource and refuge for those whose losses cannot be quickly and smoothly dealt with.

This project considers variations on a specific, emotionally intense form of elegiac poetry: poems written by professionally established poet couples to confront (especially in the cases of the terminally ill partners) their own eventual deaths and (in the cases of the surviving partners) to mourn the loss of a spouse who was him/herself also a professionally established poet. An additional similarity involves the fact that, in each couple's case, the loss resulted from the dying partner's long-term struggle with a deadly form of cancer. The life partners involved in this study—Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall as the first couple, Raymond Carver and Tess Gallagher as the second—proved themselves to be productive players in the American literary scene of the last half of the twentieth century. Carver died on 2 August 1988 after a ten-month battle with lung cancer, and Kenyon died on 22 April 1995 after a fifteen-month battle with leukemia. Gallagher and Hall, as of this writing, are still active forces in American literature. This project will aim to demonstrate the various poetic strategies attempted by each poet to articulate their experiences with illness and death and to effect emotional healing in the face of these phenomena, whether these confrontations are considered in the particular or in the abstract and whether they are endured by the individual writer or by the writer's spouse. What becomes evident in the writings of each poet is the importance of an often ambivalent but nonetheless abiding faith in the work of the written word as a means for enduring and recording the traumatic experiences of disease and death. This faith and its many tests appear as outgrowths of each poet's conscious recognition of the life partner's shared professional identity as a poet. This awareness in turn provokes among the survivors an attempt to adopt the identity of the lost loved one within their own poetic personae, as a means of both "keeping alive" an integral aspect of the lost loved one and

likewise enlarging and healing the survivor's wounded emotional self as it is revealed in the poetry.

Therefore, a significant portion of the poetry of all four writers takes on the form of a dialogue between the dying and the survivor, a dialogue which continues after the ill writer's death. Similarly, much of the poetry also hinges on what will be referred to throughout this project as *paradox*. This term applies to the juxtaposition of opposites developing from all four writers' confrontation with the simultaneous absence and presence of the dying individual's personality, generated by gradual physical death and the grief processes of the survivors. *Paradox* also refers to the complex, interrelated processes of the need to express inexpressible emotions related to loss and grief through the written word, which proves both uniquely fitted for and inadequate to such an enormous emotional and artistic task. Indeed, it is chiefly this quality of paradox which makes the grief poetry of each of these writers dynamic and worthy of study. These writers confirm Charles Simic's assessment of the place of paradox in poetry in his essay "The Trouble with Poetry":

It is the paradoxical quality of poetry, precisely, that gives poetry its flavor. Paradox is its secret spice. Without its numerous contradictions and its impertinence, poetry would be as bland as a Sunday sermon or the president's State of the Union address. It's due to its many delicious paradoxes that poetry has continuously defeated and outlived its sternest critics. ... Good poetry has never swerved from its purpose as an inexhaustible source of paradoxes about art and the human condition. (Simic, *Orphan Factory* 34-35)

It is important to emphasize that it is not the purpose of this project to draw hasty conclusions about the similarities or differences among the unique and personal experiences of each couple under consideration here; as both Schweizer's thesis and the Clampitt quotation introducing this chapter would indicate, profound personal loss accomplishes the unusual feat of both unifying and demarcating individual experience. While the available biographical detail about these couples' experiences with cancer and loss will serve as a necessary and valuable backdrop for this project, the central concern of this dissertation is not the poets' private experiences but rather the poetry that emerges from their experiences and what that poetry has to offer readers concerning poetry's contributions to the expression of grief and healing. As such, this project will be approached by means of a synthesis of critical perspectives, including not merely biography but also psychology/psychoanalysis and genre studies, wherever such approaches prove most fruitful toward illuminating the unifying argument. It bears repeating, however, that the focus of the project

will be on the poetry itself; as such, the conclusions drawn will derive primarily from close readings of the poems (all of which have yet to benefit from such an intense, formal analysis), readings filtered through critical perspectives that best illuminate the functions of the poems in light of the argument stated above.

Psychological Concepts of Grief and Mourning

Two foundational publications in the study of grief and mourning are Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and Erich Lindemann's 1944 article "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief." Freud's essay characterizes mourning as similar to melancholy or depression, identifying in both emotional experiences the same features, with one notable exception. Freud describes melancholy as consisting of

profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (244)

Freud concludes that a lowered self-esteem is the one factor absent in mourning; otherwise, he claims, "the features are the same" (244). Freud also emphasizes the painful nature of mourning, a process which unlike melancholy he does not consider to be a morbid pathological condition, unless its resolution is delayed by an inability of the mourner to withdraw libido from the lost love object.

Psychiatrist Erich Lindemann's article draws conclusions from a study of 101 individuals, including psychiatric patients who lost relatives during the patients' course of treatment, relatives of patients who died in the hospital, bereaved victims of a disastrous fire and their close relatives, and relatives of members of the armed forces who died in World War II (141). Lindemann isolates six characteristics which he found common to many grieving individuals: somatic distress, including disturbances in breathing patterns, complaints of exhaustion, and a loss of appetite; a preoccupation with the image of the lost loved one; feelings of guilt for failure to "do right" by the lost loved one; feelings of hostility which often surprised the bereaved; notable changes in routine patterns of activity, including restlessness and a "push of speech, especially when talking about the deceased"; and the "appearance of traits of the deceased in the behavior of the bereaved, especially symptoms shown during the last illness, or behavior which may have

been shown at the time of the tragedy" (142). Lindemann considers this last characteristic to indicate borderline pathological grief.

Both Freud and Lindemann provide foundations for the theory of "grief work" as a means for mourners to recover from their losses. Freud refers to the "work of mourning" (245), a process by which the bereaved, confronted with the reality of his or her loss, slowly comes to realize that the deceased no longer exists and begins to withdraw attachment from the lost loved one. Painful confrontation with the loss is critical to successful grief work, Freud insists: "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (245). Similarly, Lindemann defines grief work as "emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships" (143). It is worth noting that in both cases memories of the lost loved one are imagined in negative terms, as a captor who holds the mourner in bondage and causes pain at the slightest thought of the deceased. The poetry of concern in this project will seriously call into question that assumption, suggesting that memories of loved ones—often painful and occasionally unwelcome—frequently assist the mourner in recovering from his or her loss by allowing space for the presence of the lost loved one to remain an important part of the changed life of the survivor.

The grief work theory of loss and recovery is at times embraced and at times challenged by later grief researchers, as the continued controversy over one of the more popular variations on this concept demonstrates.² Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's 1969 publication *On Death and Dying* characterized grief as consisting of five stages that both the dying and the survivor typically endure: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although Kubler-Ross never actually advocated viewing the stages as rigidly sequential or as implying a rigidly specific time frame for healthy completion of grief work, many readers saw her formulations as a potentially limiting structure which imposed uniform expectations for

²For further calls to recognize the complications in defining and studying grief, see Margaret Stroebe's "Coping with Bereavement: A Review of the Grief Work Hypothesis" [*Omega* 26.1 (1992-93): 19-42]. See also Beth L. Rodgers and Kathleen V. Cowles ["The Concept of Grief: An Analysis of Classical and Contemporary Thought." *Death Studies* 15 (1991): 443-58] and Linda L. Viney ["The Personal Construct Theory of Death and Loss: Toward a More Individually Oriented Grief Therapy." *Death Studies* 15 (1991): 139-155].

"healthy" grief on all bereaved individuals, no matter the varied circumstances or personalities of those involved. As G. Thomas Couser cautions, "the effect of the theory of preordained stages can be to minimize or devalue individual variations and needs. The medical establishment responds to the paradigm, not the patient" (31). Aside from questions regarding the usefulness of Kubler-Ross's theory in health professionals' interactions with the bereaved, it contains several parallels to Freud's and Lindemann's conceptualizations of grief, and its contribution to the continued popularity of the grief work theory is unmistakable.

More recently, grief researchers have focused on the relative effectiveness of models of grief in explaining responses to the loss of a life partner. Among the most comprehensive of research reviews concerning such losses is Wolfgang and Margaret Stroebe's *Bereavement and Health: the Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss* (1987), which approaches an exploration of effects of partner loss on survivors from a social psychological perspective. Stroebe and Stroebe offer overviews of a variety of approaches to explaining psychologically the impact of loss on a surviving partner, including summaries of conclusions drawn from psychoanalytic theories, ethological theories, behavioral theories, cognitive theories, and stress-model theories. Stroebe and Stroebe emphasize the proscriptive dangers of theories about stages of grief; "Individuals vary greatly in their responses to loss not only in their general ability to cope, but also in mode of expression" (12), they insist, and grief researchers should be careful to avoid assuming too much since "there is not one simple process of recovery through which bereaved persons pass, with a pattern of symptoms that is invariant and that apply, in a fixed sequence, to all sufferers" (16). However, Stroebe and Stroebe acknowledge that grief can at times cause severe and unnecessary suffering to the survivor, and they argue that viewing grief as "phasic" can be helpful in diagnosing psychological problems resulting from delayed or absent grief. These researchers isolate four main phases of their own which, they suggest, can assist in diagnostic processes: (1) numbness, punctuated by occasional moments of anger or despair; (2) yearning and protest, including repeated preoccupation with the lost loved one and a simultaneous need both to search for him or her and to recognize that such a search will be fruitless; (3) despair, caused by full realization that the lost loved one will never be found, and subsequent depression; and (4) recovery and restitutions, an acceptance by the survivor of a change within him or herself and a

movement toward “coming to terms with the new identity, as widow(er)” (13-14). Stroebe and Stroebe claim that the final recovery phase “implies the relinquishing of all hope that the lost spouse can be recovered” and is hallmarked by the survivor’s “filling the roles and acquiring the skills previously undertaken by the spouse (or finding others to help in these respects) and resuming social life” (15). The phasic model acknowledges, however, that recovery can frequently be punctuated by a recurrence of earlier symptoms at, for example, important holidays or anniversaries, even well after the occurrence of the loss.

Stroebe and Stroebe’s concept of phases of grief obviously resonates with previous grief work theories and demonstrates that a great degree of overlap exists in twentieth-century Western views of processes of bereavement, grief and mourning. However, despite developing a diagnostic approach of their own which resembles Freud’s and Lindemann’s foundational theories, this research team has repeatedly called into question the universal applicability of theories of grief work which depend on the bereaved experiencing and confronting various cognitive responses to the loss (usually including some variation of denial, anger, a sense of the presence of the deceased, depression, and gradual acceptance). In a 1992 *Omega* article, Margaret Stroebe examined conjugal loss studies of Western populations and of non-Western populations in which traditional Western concepts of grief work would have violated their cultural norms. Stroebe concluded that the term “grief work” as a process is often confused with specific “symptoms” or phases of the process itself and is therefore too difficult and too subjective to apply to measuring “healthy” vs. “unhealthy” individual responses to loss (33). She offered her own definition of grief work as “a cognitive process involving confrontation with and restructuring of thoughts about the deceased, the loss experience, and the changed world within which the bereaved must now live” (33), as a means to help specify its distinction from a formulaic series of stages or “symptoms.” Still, as Margaret Stroebe herself acknowledged, grief processes and grief theorists are so individualized that any clear definition of the grief work concept is difficult and potentially reductive.

Even more to the point for the project at hand is the 1992 article “Broken Hearts or Broken Bonds: Love and Death in Historical Perspective,” which the Stroebe’s coauthored with Mary M. Gergen and Kenneth J. Gergen. The writers of this article position squarely within the “modernist worldview” the concept of grief as a process of the bereaved individual’s gradual decathexis from the lost loved one and

subsequent return to independent lifestyles (1205). The writers attempt to place this viewpoint within a larger historical context by considering nineteenth-century attitudes toward loss and grief as they are expressed in the poetry of the time period. The authors contend that nineteenth-century thought concerning grief was governed by the Romanticist belief that love should hold sway over all other human endeavors, including what was deemed “functional” or “useful” (1208). In contrast to the modernist viewpoint, the Romanticist would rarely make efforts to break bonds with the deceased because to do so would “not only define the relationship as superficial, but would deny as well one’s own sense of profundity and self-worth” (1208).³ The authors cite contemporary examples of behavior similar to attitudes identified with Romanticist notions of grief, including Mary Gergen’s concept of “social ghosts,”⁴ defined as “real or fictitious persons with whom individuals conduct imaginal interactions over time” or as “the cast of characters with whom we engage in imaginal dialogues” (Stroebe et al. 1210). Gergen’s concept resonates with Gallagher’s view of poetry as a means to make individual losses “mythic” and likewise applies to much elegiac poetry in general, as well as to the poetry of loss specific to this project.

Given one important difference between the couples to be considered in this study—the death of the female partner in one instance, the death of the male partner in the other—some words must be said about gender differences with relation to loss and mourning. Little has been written about psychological differences between men and women who have suffered the loss of a spouse, and much of what has been published rightly takes great care to avoid drawing hasty conclusions. Stroebe and Stroebe note that studies of widows and widowers compared with same-sex nonbereaved individuals suggest that “widowers are

³Here the Stroebees and Gergens cite Paul Rosenblatt’s 1983 book *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories*, in which Rosenblatt examined grief stories in fifty-six nineteenth-century diaries. These accounts demonstrated an effort on the writers’ parts to maintain ties with their lost loved ones by dreaming and daydreaming about them, working to fulfill the loved ones’ final wishes, and attempting to contact the souls of the dead via spiritualism. Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen and Stroebe emphasize that these activities, according to Rosenblatt, were not limited to set periods of “acceptable” mourning but often continued throughout the diarists’ lives. Clearly it is also worth noting that the need to record these efforts through the written word was an integral part of the diarists’ grief processes.

⁴The authors cite Mary Gergen’s theory of social ghosts from a paper she presented at the 95th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in New York in August 1987.

found to suffer greater detriments compared to married men than are widows compared with married women" (178). The "detriments" referred to include higher rates of psychiatric disorders, development of physical illness, and mortality, all of which plague widowed individuals more so than they do married, nonbereaved individuals (Stroebe and Stroebe 167). Stroebe and Stroebe suggest that Western culture allows for the acceptability of women's social support networks in the wake of loss but does not sanction similar support for men, and this difference in social support may account for the extra difficulty faced by widowers (179).

In "Masculinity and Loss," social work expert Neil Thompson likewise highlights the need for further research in the area of gender and mourning (86). Thompson claims that the notion that men are not expected to express emotions is oversimplified, pointing out that certain emotions such as anger, aggression, or joy in certain contexts (e.g., a sporting event) are socially sanctioned male emotions. However, the expression of many of the emotions associated with traditional concepts of successful grief work (e.g., public admission of feelings of depression, a lack of will, or a lack of strength) run counter to Western views of traditional masculinity (76). In other words, men are, somewhat paradoxically, allowed to *grieve* in Western culture, but they are not allowed to *mourn*, an aspect of grief which most grief work theorists consider essential to successful recovery from traumatic loss. Here Thompson implies a distinction that many recent writers on grief spell out more specifically, a distinction which will also apply to the present project.⁵ *Grief* is often defined as an emotional response to loss, *bereavement* as the situation of having lost someone or something important, and *mourning* as the expression of grief, heavily influenced by the cultural context of the loss. These distinctions, while at times subtle, are nonetheless important for clarifying communication concerning such a complex subject.

Anthropologist Jenny Hockey in her essay "Women in Grief: Cultural Representation and Social Practice" argues that historical and cultural contexts must always be recognized as an important factor in determining "normal" grief and mourning, noting that women in twentieth-century mainstream Western

⁵For a good overview of issues surrounding the vocabulary used in writings about loss, see chapter one of Stroebe, Stroebe and Hansson, *Handbook of Bereavement: Theory, Research, and Intervention* (New York: U of Cambridge P, 1993).

societies are often caught in a double-bind of cultural expectations. Women on the one hand are frequently depicted in art and the media as figures of “emotional expressivity” when confronted with severe personal loss (90). On the other hand, however, when women express profound private grief in public arenas (e.g., wailing uncontrollably or clinging to the coffin at funerals), they are often confronted by a “school-masterly reprimand” from predominantly male authority figures (e.g., doctors, funeral directors, clergy) who consciously or unconsciously see their role as managers of orderly mourning rituals, where most mourners expect distinct but seriously muted signs of a struggle to cope with loss (e.g., damp eyes, pale complexions, sighing, slight weight loss) (Hockey 105). This double-bind is expressed in much of Gallagher’s poetry written after Raymond Carver’s death and, coincidentally, became an issue in her own life, as she was at times criticized for demonstrating overtly in public her grief over Carver’s loss. As will be shown later, these contradictory cultural expectations of grieving spouses become an important part of the paradoxes that structure the poetry of the four authors under consideration here. The present project will suggest that the pervasiveness of the theme of identity transformation through loss—transformation which in all cases involves a fusion of the poetic personae of each couple and a poetic implementation of the paradox inherent in a recognition of death and loss as essential parts of life and growth—operates primarily as the writers’ attempt to satisfy the need to express what is, both culturally and existentially, largely inexpressible.

Again, it is worth emphasizing, as most contemporary experts on grief and mourning do, that the processes of dealing with loss resist easy formulation because of the highly individualized context that surrounds each individual’s grief experiences. Thus the following chapters will draw insights from many of the theories of grief and mourning outlined above but will work to maintain a recognition of each author’s—indeed, each poem’s—individual expression of grief, without drawing too many hasty and reductive conclusions. To further ground the readings, however, it would be worthwhile to take a closer look at writing as a reaction to cancer diagnoses and at poetry (especially recent poetry) as an expression of mortality and loss.

Writing Out the Hurt

It is, indeed, the poetry of illness, loss, and mourning that most eloquently explores the strengths and limitations of the pervasive concept of grief work, as this project will in part aim to demonstrate. What

service does writing poetry provide the dying and the bereaved? How is the work of professional writers transformed when the subject of their poetry becomes their own transformed lives in the midst of, and in the aftermath of, the personal tragedy of lengthy terminal illness and permanent loss? How are physical, emotional, and spiritual trials transformed into artistic experience? What does that artistic experience provide for the author and his/her audience?

Writing Out the Illness

Recent poetic chronicles of the effects of disease, medical experience, and personal grief include not only the works to be examined in this project but volumes of poetry as diverse and widely acclaimed as Sharon Olds's *The Father* (1992), Sandra Gilbert's *Ghost Volcano* (1995), and Mark Doty's *Sweet Machine* (1998). These poetry collections resemble--not in form but in purpose--what many literary critics have identified as a recently emerging subgenre of biography and autobiography, narratives of illness often called *pathography* or *autopathography*. This phenomenon is relatively new. As critic Anne Hunsaker Hawkins notes in *Reconstructing Illness* (1993), "book-length personal accounts of illness are uncommon before 1950 and rarely found before 1900" (3). Hawkins categorizes these narratives according to various Jungian-type "myths," which she defines as "embodied truths" that integrate an individual's various experiences under a single meaningful rubric, expand the individual experience toward more widespread implications, and communicate meaning analogically rather than explicitly or outwardly didactically (Hawkins 20-21). Among the most frequently used organizing myths which Hawkins identifies are the following: the battle myth (illness is an invader that must be fought), the journey myth (illness is a new and treacherous terrain that must be travelled through toward a safer destination), the death-and-rebirth myth (illness and attempts at recovery represent a death of a former self and a birth of a new self), and the "healthy-mindedness" myth (Hawkins notes that "healthy-mindedness" is "not obviously archetypal" and is not based on narrative as much as on the author's reliance on natural and mystical rather than technical or medical approaches to healing) (28-29). While the writings under consideration for the present project are not prose narratives and are not strictly biographical in nature, many of the organizing myths which Hawkins attributes to pathographical writings will demonstrate a close affinity to the mythical structures of the writings to be considered in the following chapters.

Esther Dreifuss-Kattan's 1990 book *Cancer Stories: Creativity and Self-Repair* examines multigeneric written and visual artwork by cancer patients who create artifacts meant to serve as their "mediating symbol of separation and togetherness, of dying and immortality" (130). Dreifuss-Kattan approaches her study of the works she cites from what she terms a "psychooncological" perspective, which considers "the psychological responses to the various cancer therapies and their consequences for the patient, the family, and the treatment team" and "deals with the threat of death and other fears that the patient experiences from the onset and throughout all the stages of the illness" (2). Although her concern with the writing is less literary than psychological (and at times becomes reductively so), Dreifuss-Kattan nonetheless highlights several useful purposes for writing which seem common to many cancer patient authors and which will apply well to many of the poems to be considered for this project. Those purposes include writing to offer patients control over some part of their lives (Dreifuss-Kattan 4); writing to preserve a part of the healthy self despite the threat of death (4); writing to create a "projection screen" for the emotions caused by illness and treatment (4-5); writing to provide the authors with a means to "objectify and externalize, and hence to communicate, the realities of illness" (5); writing to attach meaning to the otherwise senseless condition of mortality (5-6); writing to create a new identity for the authors as "spectators" of their own dramas, not merely as the dying actors of those dramas (6); and writing to provide a method for dealing with and perhaps overcoming the "universal terror of dying" (6-7). Without using the term *paradox*, Dreifuss-Kattan acknowledges its important role in the writings of cancer patients, who create literature frequently marked by a particular kind of contradiction, a "dialectic play of distance and intimacy that makes this kind of writing distinctive as a mode of self-knowledge" (6-7)—the "separate togetherness" that will prove an essential phenomenological theme of much of the poetry examined in this project. Dreifuss-Kattan likewise acknowledges the frequency of identity transformation as the organizing plot of cancer narratives, which "are often accounts of finding a new identity, of becoming a new person" because of the radical change in lifestyle imposed upon cancer patients by their illnesses and treatments (7). Although Dreifuss-Kattan's work appeared too early for her to consider any of the authors at the center of the present project, her insights will be valuably informative in examining their poetry as a response to their confrontation with terminal illness and grief.

Here a word must be said regarding a pivotal book about illness and its cultural and literary ramifications, Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978). Sontag's book, partly inspired by her own experience with breast cancer, argues that illness should not be conceptualized in terms of metaphor because to do so further mystifies disease and risks associating the patient in negative ways with the "evil" the illness comes to represent. Sontag highlights tuberculosis and cancer as two illnesses traditionally invested with metaphorical meanings that grew to overshadow the actual progress of the diseases and their effects on the human body. Sontag insists that cancer in particular resists artistic representation: "Cancer, as a disease that can strike anywhere, is a disease of the body. Far from revealing anything spiritual, it reveals that the body is, all too woefully, just the body" (18). Furthermore, she argues that "[c]ancer is a rare and still scandalous subject for poetry; and it seems unimaginable to aestheticize the disease" (20). Citing the traditional fiction that cancer results from an individual's excessive repression of passion, Sontag claims that cancer's devastating and unpredictable nature leaves people struggling to conceive of the illness in logical, cause-and-effect terms which too often result in blaming the victim for contracting the disease. Metaphor, she claims, invests the disease with further mystery and exacerbates the pain and misunderstanding that cancer patients suffer. Sontag declares, "Nothing is more punitive than to give a disease a meaning—that meaning being invariably a moralistic one" (58).

Sontag's concerns about the risks of conceiving of illness in metaphorical terms are understandable and well worth consideration. The frequently referenced battle metaphor for cancer, for instance, can place added pressure on patients to accept themselves as simultaneously the "enemy" (in that their bodies contain the cancer), the "battleground" (in that their bodies are the site of the struggle against the disease), and the "heroic warrior" (in that they are frequently called upon to maintain emotional strength in the face of painful illness and treatments). However, the risks of insisting that illness never be viewed or described in terms of metaphor seem at least equally dangerous. Banning all metaphoric language from the discussion of cancer would not only eradicate it as a real human subject of importance to authors concerned with the problems of the culture they inhabit; such an insistence would likewise render the experience of cancer the exclusive domain of clinicians concerned not with its emotional impact on cancer sufferers but merely with scientific descriptions of the disease. Taken to its fullest extent, removing metaphorical language from the

dialogue about cancer would exterminate the dialogue completely, as language itself operates via symbolic representation. As Anne Hunsaker Hawkins notes, Sontag's argument creates "an expectation that few of us could live up to. Metaphoric thinking is built into our very mental faculties" (23). Hawkins also notes that Sontag herself admits this problem in her extension of her thesis, the 1988 book *AIDS and Its Metaphors*: "Of course," Sontag says, "one cannot think without metaphors" (qtd. in Hawkins 23).

Certainly the poets to be considered in the present project do not view their experiences as reduced or distorted by writing about it poetically and metaphorically. On the contrary, the metaphorical language allows their unique experiences to be expressed in words which can connect with readers who may or may not have direct experience with their particular illnesses and losses. Especially for these four professional writers, metaphoric and symbolic language does not further traumatize the cancer patient and his or her loved ones; rather, such language provides an avenue for emotional healing which may not have been otherwise available.

Writing Out the Loss

As noted, the elegy as a poetic genre has at least since the seventeenth century been concerned primarily with grief and consolation occasioned by the death of a loved one. Originally, the word *elegy* referred not to a particular subject matter but to a particular poetic meter of Greek poetry, consisting of a hexameter followed by a pentameter and later known as the *elegiac distich* (*Princeton Encyclopedia* 321). The English elegy, however, never developed a fixed form, and elegies composed in English today are written in various poetic forms. Those forms may be driven by the character and story prevalent in narrative poetry or may be shaped by the brief yet intense emotion prevalent in lyric poetry. Most often, they combine elements of both types. All of the poets under consideration for this project write primarily in open form and vary from Kenyon's brief lyrics to Hall's longer, epic-like elegies built on short open-form stanzas, from Carver's lyric-narratives which primarily emphasize the narrative to Gallagher's lyric-narratives which primarily emphasize the lyrical.⁶

⁶It was Gallagher's essay "Again: Some Thoughts on the Narrative Impulse in Contemporary Poetry" which called for the invention of the term *lyric-narrative* to describe such a "hybridized" form (*A Concert of Tenses* 72).

All four writers also sometimes draw from and sometimes react against the various conventions traditionally associated with elegiac poetry. Peter M. Sacks's cornerstone study of the form, *The English Elegy* (1985), identified eleven conventions common to the elegy, from Edmund Spenser to the present day. Those conventions include contextualizing the poem within the pastoral elegy tradition, which usually concerns itself with ceremonial laments for important cultural figures linked with forces of fertility or poetic creativity; connecting death to the myth of the vegetation deity and its sexual imagery; using repetition and refrains; employing reiterated questions; venting periodically violent anger; exhibiting a procession of mourners; moving gradually from grief to consolation; evoking traditional resurrection images; dividing the voices of the mourners; employing imagery of contests, rewards, and inheritance; and highlighting to an unusual degree the self-conscious act of writing the elegy as a survivor's means to reassert his or her vitality (2). Sacks's approach to reading the elegy draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory, including Freud and Lacan. He constructs his study of the elegy by elaborating on a connection between the work of mourning and a resolution of the Oedipal complex, connecting loss by death to symbolic castration and the process of decathexis involved in grief work to the child's reattachment of libido to a substitute for the mother (8). Sacks's parallels are intriguing and open a variety of fruitful avenues for examining the sources and conventions of the elegy, although a significant shortcoming of Sacks's study is the fact that it bypasses, for the most part, some serious questions about gender, mourning, and writing by making use of such a phallogocentric paradigm.⁷

Despite this shortcoming, Sacks provides some valuable insights into the elegiac form. In addition to his identification of crucial conventions, Sacks makes a point that helps to define one of the most important characteristics of the paradox structuring much of the poetry to be considered in the present project: the elegist's struggle with the confines of language. Sacks's declaration that "much of the elegist's

⁷To be fair, Sacks admits this limitation, stating that "the difficulty in identifying with predominantly male symbols of consolation greatly complicates the woman's work of mourning" (13). Sacks also defends his approach by asserting his intent to "draw attention to the hiterto largely unasked question of how differently men and women mourn" but insisting also that, for his study, "it is the substantial overlap in men's and women's mourning that should be stressed" (13). Still, with the exception of brief consideration of poems by Dickinson, Plath, and Clampitt, the majority of his ten-chapter book is devoted to analyzing the poetry of male writers.

task lies in his reluctant resubmission to the constraints of language" (xiii) will prove particularly resonant in relation to the poetry of illness and grief written by professional poets in mourning over spouses who were themselves professional poets. Since the work of language in addition to a personal love relationship links the couples in the present study, the return to writing in the wake of personal tragedy (especially the return made by surviving spouses after the partners' deaths) becomes a version of what grief work theorists would regard as a search for the lost spouse further highlighted by the survivor's demonstration of traits associated with the lost spouse. However, in the cases of these poets, the search is inevitable, and certainly not pathological, because of each partner's shared dedication to and identification with the occupation of writing poetry. By gradually returning to poem-making in the wake of loss, each survivor aims paradoxically to keep active the voice of the lost loved one and to reshape his or her own voice to accommodate the new self emerging from the loss experience, a new self which shares with the previous self the role of poet.

Although Sacks's study focuses primarily on English elegies, his epilogue does take into account American contributions to the form, though he sees a critical difference between American and English usages of the elegiac tradition. Sacks claims that American elegies are characterized by a noteworthy "loss, rejection, or radically transformative borrowing of the traditional myths and contexts of the genre" (312). Sacks further insists that

[p]artly because of obvious geographical and ideological differences, but also because of a strong compulsion toward originality and privacy, American elegists could not easily situate their poems in the familiar pastoral settings or even within the familiar ritual procedures of the genre. American elegists have had to reinvent the forms (if not the functions) of elegiac mythology but also to establish their own literal and figurative settings. (313)

Sacks traces the roots of the idiosyncratic forms of American elegy to the American pioneer myth, with its focus on the future and on self-reliance in the face of adversity. Among the characteristics which Sacks identifies as unique to American elegy are the American elegist's tendency to focus on the mourner's isolation (313), the American elegy's "frighteningly raw" tone suggesting the mourner's struggle for mere survival (314), the American elegist's rebellion against submission to the authoritative fact of death (314), and the American elegist's tendency (e.g., Walt Whitman and Robert Lowell) to adopt for themselves a

child-like persona in their poems as a means of returning to the origins of loss (315). Sacks suggests that because of these various diversions from traditional elegiac forms, American writers of elegy are placed in a dangerous position which “render[s] the mourner especially susceptible to the appeal, not merely the threat, of death” (315). Resisting authority, an emphasis on the mourner’s isolation, and an urge to return to the origins of life leave American elegists with little consolation other than death, Sacks argues.

Again, while Sacks’s assessment of American forms of elegy has some validity (his use of Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” to illustrate his points invites a strong reading of the poem), his conceptualization nonetheless oversimplifies by attaching a brand to all American elegy that does not easily fit. This brand, it would seem, is partly generated by Sacks’s failure to consider the variety of American elegy in exemplifying his argument, including differences that would emerge from a closer examination of questions concerning gender and the elegiac voice.⁸ While Sacks’s assessments will not be the central focus of the present project, they will shed light on readings of the poems by the authors of concern here. Hall’s *Without*, for instance, exemplifies many of the elegiac conventions Sacks outlines, proving it less of a departure from the English tradition than Sacks’s argument would suggest but likewise aligning it, to some degree, to a male-focused paradigm of mourning. By contrast, Gallagher’s *Moon Crossing Bridge* does create radical transformations of elegiac conventions, but the volume does not end in despair or a lonely love affair with death, as Sacks might contend based on his theory. While problematic, Sacks’s insights into elegy are a valuable contribution to study of the form and will be frequently tested in relation to the poems under consideration in the following chapters.

In *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (1994), Jahan Ramazani picks up where Sacks left off by considering the various designs of the elegiac form as it appears in twentieth-century English and American poetry. Ramazani begins his study by asserting that the most crucial common characteristic of most twentieth-century elegies is their radical departure from the elegiac traditions identified by critics like Sacks. Again, paradox is especially critical to twentieth-century elegies, as

⁸Sacks does apply his ideas about American elegy to a reading of Amy Clampitt’s “A Procession at Candlemas,” but, as has been noted, he examines at length no other writing by American women elegists (and very few by American men) in illustration of his argument.

Ramazani insists that modern poets “conjoin the elegiac with the anti-elegiac, at once appropriating and resisting the traditional psychology, structure, and imagery of the genre” (1). Ramazani claims that the modern elegy adopts a much sharper edge than did its predecessors, manifesting itself as “anti-consolatory and anti-encomiastic, anti-Romantic and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary” (2). Chief among these characteristics is the elegist’s refusal to evoke consolation through poetry, a decision which Ramazani views as a sign of the prevalence of “melancholic” rather than “normal” mourning among modern literary artists (4-5). This condition emerges in part from the elegist’s guilt over what Ramazani labels the “economic problem of mourning”—poets’ recognition that they benefit aesthetically and perhaps economically from the death of individuals they held dear (6-7). Modern elegists also use their poems of mourning to react against a British and American culture that denies mourners time to grieve. In a statement that both echoes and qualifies one of Gallagher’s pivotal points in her “Reservoir” essay, Ramazani argues that

[m]odern elegies betray in their difficult, melancholic mourning the impossibility of preserving a pristine space apart, of grieving for the dead amid the speed and pressure of modern life [...] the embittered elegies of Hardy, Stevens, Owen, Plath, and others both react against and incorporate the suppression of mourning; they provide a special place for mourning yet mock and ironize it. (14)

Like Gallagher, Ramazani notes the poet’s frustration with the business-like schedule modern Western societies frequently place on mourners for recovery from their grief. But unlike Gallagher, Ramazani sees the modern elegist as both critical of such a formulaic attitude toward grieving and, consciously or unconsciously, complicit with that attitude.

The paradox that grounds Ramazani’s argument is further heightened at the conclusion of his book. In a brief chapter appropriately named “Coda,” Ramazani suggests that his earlier emphasis on the modern elegy’s refusal of consolation may have been premature. “This book began with a narrative—the modern elegy’s repudiation of the traditional elegy,” he declares, “but its qualifying subplot has become increasingly dominant—the persistence of the traditional elegy within the modern” (361). After devoting two chapters to analyzing elegies (chiefly those of Amy Clampitt and Seamus Heaney) that returned to traditional elegiac praise and reverence for the dead, Ramazani is forced to acknowledge the dynamic nature of elegiac poetry, a nature which resists easy compartmentalization. Ramazani offers his own

susceptibility to the “narratological imperatives of consolation” as a possible explanation for his conclusion’s departure from the goals stated in his introduction. Like the modern elegy, he suggests, any sustained reading of such a form finds itself vulnerable to the unpredictable rhythms of language in confrontation with life. Ramazani’s book illustrates a point that will be vital to the following chapters of the present project: because it most often grows out of actual, lived lives, the poetry of mortality and loss cannot help but contradict itself while simultaneously celebrating those contradictions and their capacity to represent the varied contours of those lives, however beautiful and however brief.

Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall

Donald Hall was born on 20 September 1928, in New Haven, Connecticut, the son of Donald Andrew Hall Sr. and Lucy Wells Hall. Hall has stated numerous times that he made the decision at age fourteen to become a poet, a decision influenced by the strong literary background of his family, including a mother who repeatedly read poems to him and a grandfather who recited poetry while working with Hall during summers at the Wells family farm in New Hampshire. At age sixteen Hall attended the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, where he met Robert Frost. While attending Harvard University as an undergraduate, Hall was taught by Archibald MacLeish and befriended several important emerging poets, including Robert Bly, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, and Frank O’Hara. Hall went on to Oxford University for two years after finishing his studies at Harvard in 1951, and while at Oxford he became the first American to win the Newdigate Prize for his poem “Exile.” After his time at Oxford, Hall returned to Harvard for three years as a member of the Society of Fellows. In 1957 he accepted a teaching position at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he remained until 1975. Hall published in the meantime a variety of books, including collections of poetry, collections of essays, children’s books, and anthologies he edited and co-edited. Well before he met Kenyon, he had won several additional noteworthy awards, including the 1955 Lamont Poetry Prize from the American Academy of Poets, the Poetry Society of America’s Edna St. Vincent Millay Award in 1956, and a National Book Award nomination in 1956, all for *Exiles and Marriages* (1955). Hall has proven himself an incredibly prolific poet; in addition to many more prose collections and children’s books, Hall as of this writing has published fifteen books of poetry since the appearance of *Exiles*

and *Marriages* and has won numerous additional honors, including two Guggenheim fellowships and a Pulitzer Prize nomination for his 1988 book-length poem *The One Day*.

It was during his years at the University of Michigan that Hall met Jane Kenyon. An Ann Arbor native, Kenyon was born on 23 May 1947, to Reuel Baldwin Kenyon, a jazz pianist, and Pauline Miller Kenyon, a former singer turned seamstress. At the University of Michigan Kenyon studied literature and creative writing, earning her B.A. in 1970 and her M.A. in 1972. Hall was Kenyon's poetry teacher at Michigan, where their romance developed after Hall's divorce from his first wife, Kirby Thompson, in 1969. Hall and Kenyon married in 1972, and in 1975 Kenyon convinced Hall to give up his professorship and purchase the ancestral Wells farm in New Hampshire, where the couple moved to pursue careers as full-time writers. In 1978, Alice James Books published Kenyon's first collection of poetry, *From Room to Room*, a gathering occasioned by her gradual transition to life among Hall's rich family past at the New Hampshire farm. After the couple's move to New Hampshire, Kenyon published with Graywolf Press three additional collections of original poems—*The Boat of Quiet Hours* (1986), *Let Evening Come* (1990), and *Constance* (1993)—and a 1985 translation (with Vera Dunham) of twenty poems by Anna Akhmatova.⁹ Kenyon's most famous volume, *Otherwise*, was published posthumously by Graywolf in 1996. Kenyon's awards include *Poetry* magazine's Frederick Bock Prize in 1993, the PEN/Voelcker Award, and the Award for Literary Achievement from the New Hampshire Writers and Publishers Project. Both Kenyon and Hall have served as poet laureates of New Hampshire.

One of the most poignant aspects of Kenyon and Hall's life together is the irony surrounding Kenyon's early death from cancer at age 47. Both Kenyon and Hall had bouts with cancer earlier in their lives: Kenyon had a cancerous salivary gland removed in 1984, and Hall underwent surgery to remove colon cancer in 1989. In 1992, doctors discovered that Hall's cancer had metastasized to his liver, and Hall

⁹Tess Gallagher, a driving force behind Graywolf Press, stated in a conversation with the author of this project that Graywolf's publication of Kenyon's later collections occurred after several other publication houses rejected the manuscript for *The Boat of Quiet Hours*. According to Gallagher, Donald Hall described Kenyon's frustration over the rejections to Gallagher and Carver during a visit the couple paid to Hall and Kenyon. Gallagher stated that she and Carver spent an entire night reading and discussing the manuscript for *The Boat of Quiet Hours*, and the next morning Gallagher and Carver expressed to Kenyon and Hall their commitment to seeing the manuscript through to publication, thus paving the way for Kenyon's association with Graywolf.

again underwent surgery, this time to remove two-thirds of his liver. Hall did not expect to survive for long; he told Bill Moyers in an interview later that year that "I'm already sixty-four, but my chances for living to seventy are not terribly good" (Moyers 153). Even entering the hospital for surgery, he took with him a manuscript "complete with notes for Jane about editing for posthumous publication" (*Life Work* 78). Kenyon's leukemia diagnosis was therefore all the more horrible given what the couple had recently confronted during Hall's illness. According to Hall's afterword to *Otherwise*, Kenyon was diagnosed with a virulent form of leukemia in January 1994, and, after chemotherapy brought on but could not maintain her remission, Kenyon flew to Seattle, Washington, where she underwent a bone marrow transplant in November. After her discharge from the Seattle hospital, Kenyon enjoyed a brief spell of improvement, but on 11 April 1995, doctors discovered her leukemia had returned. She died eleven days later in her New Hampshire home.

Chapter Two will examine Kenyon's poetry in light of the thesis of this project, focusing on the role of Kenyon's and Hall's identities as poets in the poetry of mourning which Kenyon produced. Much of Kenyon's poetry to be considered in this chapter will derive from *Otherwise*, often considered her final definitive collection of new and earlier poems, with concentration on her latest poems as well as poems from *Constance*, in which Kenyon's writings confront Hall's cancer treatments and fears of death in the wake of his liver surgery. It should be noted that according to the *Otherwise* afterword, Kenyon was able to complete only one poem ("Eating the Cookies") from start to finish following her initial leukemia diagnosis. However, much of her poetry adopts loss as its literary domain, describing the realities of loss and death imagistically. Kenyon wrote several poems contemplating illness and death, including poems exploring her personal battle with depression, her father's diagnosis and eventual death from cancer, and a noteworthy poem from *Let Evening Come*, "The Letter," contemplating coping strategies in the wake of loss and occasioned by news from Tess Gallagher that Raymond Carver's cancer had returned.

An important segment of Kenyon's poetry revolves around Hall's cancer treatments and recovery in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the examination of these poems will consequently be of primary concern in the following chapter. It is in these poems that the concepts of work, dialogue with the ill, and identity expansion to include the poetic self of the incapacitated loved one within the poetic self of the

expected survivor reveal themselves most fully. "Afternoon at MacDowell," "Chrysanthemums," and "Pharaoh" all confront the speaker's fears of losing a beloved partner and are clearly marked as poems rooted in autobiography. "Chrysanthemums" and "Pharaoh" both interact with Hall's self-elegiac poems in the 1993 volume *The Museum of Clear Ideas*. "Afternoon at MacDowell" finds the speaker enacting the paradox of the simultaneous inadequacy of and desperate need for poetic art as a consolatory force in the face of traumatic loss; she declares to her spouse "I believe in the miracles of art but what / prodigy will keep you safe beside me"—a question which would become Kenyon's literal epitaph and would be returned to her by Hall in the poetry of *Without*. The only poem begun after Kenyon's death and confronting directly her own illness—the roughly drafted "The Sick Wife," which Hall included as her last word in *Otherwise*—conveys the pathos of the vibrant poet's plight, as even the work of poetry, previously her refuge from despair, becomes too taxing a task for her to complete fully as a result of her illness.

Chapter Three of this project will examine Hall's later poetry of illness, death, and mourning in detail. Hall admitted to Bill Moyers that he "write[s] a lot of elegiac poetry" because poetry "enacts our own losses so that we can share the notion that we all lose—and hold each other's hands, as it were, in losing" (Moyers 148), an idea that echoes Gallagher's theory of the functions of poetry in "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief." David Hamilton notes in a 1989 article that the whole of Hall's oeuvre up to that point was structured on the concept of "'building a house'—for living, for poetry, but especially for dying" (269). Hall, an extremely prolific author, has been writing out the experience of loss for half a century, but it is the poetry in which he explores his own experiences as a cancer patient and mourns the sickness and death of Jane Kenyon that will be the focus for the third chapter. A few early poems (e.g., "My son, my executioner" and "The Day I Was Older") lay the foundations for this later work, but it is in the poems contained in *The Museum of Clear Ideas* and *The Old Life*, and especially the poetry that constitutes *Without*, where Hall's literary treatment of first his own cancer and then the illness and death of Jane Kenyon dominates.

In Hall's poetry confronting his own cancer, the poet's value of the work of language as an assertion of vitality magnifies. Many of these poems, less paradoxical than ironic, approach death often only half seriously, guarding against physical decline through dark humor. Not intended to deny death (Hall's entire poetic career seems virtually obsessed with the subject), the double-edged humor of many of these

poems nonetheless achieves a distance from the subject which prevents Hall's poems about his own death from becoming maudlin but also keeps the physical and emotional turmoil of death somewhat at arm's length via the intellectual device of poetic word play. This distance is erased in his 1998 collection *Without*, where Hall the poet and Hall the husband converge to mourn the sickness and death of wife and poet Jane Kenyon through highly realistic reportage poetry. While Hall could rarely confront fully the emotional and existential realities of his own absence from life in his earlier poetry contemplating his own illness and death, in the poetry of *Without* he is forced to portray in naturalistic detail the reality of Kenyon's eventual absence from his life after she is diagnosed with cancer and begins to die.

Donald Hall's poems in *Without* evince many of the characteristics of grief highlighted by Freud and Lindemann. Guilt, hostility, an unwillingness to pursue previous interests, exhaustion, concern with the image of the lost loved one, and adoption of the characteristics of the lost loved one all appear, in varying degrees, as characteristics of the speaker of *Without*. However, despite the speaker's repeated and often painful confrontation with his loss, the volume does not end with unequivocal healing, as the classic grief-work theorists would expect. The final poem in the text, "Weeds and Peonies," is highly ambivalent in its characterization of the speaker's reconciliation to his loss, and no obvious reattachment of emotions to new objects is demonstrated at any point in the collection. This ambivalent concluding gesture toward healing calls to mind Ramazani's arguments about the simultaneous need for and distrust of consolation as this theme is evinced in twentieth-century elegy. Sacks's connection of elegiac poetry (especially men's elegiac poetry) with the imagery of thwarted sexuality and fertility rituals also applies well to these poems, as Hall frequently figures his loss in terms of unfulfilled sexual longings for Kenyon. Similarly, the paradox of the poet's need to verbalize his loss while simultaneously questioning the efficacy of language in the face of traumatic personal loss threads throughout the volume, most poignantly in poems such as "Air Shatters in the Car's Small Room" and the title poem "Without." What *Without* demonstrates most clearly, however, is the individual process of grief and healing, a process that cannot easily be formulated and applied universally, nor can it easily be fully expressed.

Raymond Carver and Tess Gallagher

Raymond Carver was born 25 May 1938 in Clatskanie, Oregon, to Cleve Raymond (C.R.) Carver and Ella Beatrice Casey Carver. Carver's parents were Arkansas natives who moved to the American Northwest in search of employment. C.R. had worked in the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam before beginning a job at a sawmill in Clatskanie, and in 1941 he moved his family to Yakima, Washington, where he worked at the mill. Carver's father often responded to financial and family frustrations by drinking heavily, a problem which his son would likewise develop as an adult. Nevertheless, Carver frequently described his childhood in Yakima as generally uneventful, marked chiefly by developing passions for fishing, listening to his father's stories, and reading and writing adventure tales on his own.

In June 1957, Carver married his high school girlfriend, sixteen-year-old Mary Ann Burk, who had recently become pregnant with Carver's child. In December their daughter, Christine, was born, followed in October 1958 by a son, Vance. Carver was faced with the responsibility of supporting a family of four at the age of 20, and thus began a series of menial jobs which left Carver fearing that his life would always remain "a small-change thing for the most part, chaotic, and without much light showing through" ("Fires" 33). Out of his experience of having little time left for writing after work and child-rearing grew Carver's affinity for—and talent in—composing short stories and poems. Because of his responsibilities, Carver chose to "limit" himself to writings which could be drafted "in one sitting, two sittings at the most" (35), leaving him some time to devote to perfecting his work through revision. Despite his busy life, Carver was committed to receiving a college education. To that end, in 1958 he enrolled in Chico State College in California, where he first studied creative writing under John Gardner. Although Gardner was to remain a huge influence on Carver's development as a writer, the search for employment would force Carver's family to move to Eureka, California, in 1960, where Carver transferred to Humboldt State College, the school from which he would graduate in 1963 and the place where he studied under Richard Day. Day encouraged him to attend the famous Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, leading Carver and his family to move to Iowa City in 1963. Financial pressures would prevent Carver from completing his second year at Iowa, and in 1964 he and his family moved to Sacramento.

Although financial security continued to elude the Carvers, Raymond Carver's dedication to his writing was beginning to show definite results. By the end of 1970 he had published two small collections of poetry—*Near Klamath* (1968) and *Winter Insomnia* (1970)—and his short story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" was included in *Best American Short Stories, 1967* (the collection of stories for which this was the title piece would be published in 1976). He also received a National Endowment for the Arts Discovery Award in 1970. However, as Carver's literary ascendancy in the early 1970s began to reward him with teaching jobs at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and at various University of California campuses, he found himself sinking under the alcoholism that had already begun to limit his ability to write and would eventually nearly kill him. Carver's heavy drinking was acutely self-destructive, resulting in violent arguments with loved ones, most frequently his wife, Maryann, who often shared his binges. Carver has admitted in several interviews that he hit bottom in 1976-77, when he was hospitalized several times for acute alcoholism. Finally, on 2 June 1977 Carver quit drinking for good on a day which he came to regard as a second birthday, the "line of demarcation" in his life (Weber 43).

It was also in 1977 that Carver permanently separated from Maryann (they divorced in 1982) and met the poet Tess Gallagher at a writer's conference in Dallas, Texas. Gallagher had already established herself as an accomplished poet; by 1977 she had published two volumes of poetry, *Stepping Outside* (1974) and her important early collection, *Instructions to the Double* (1976). Like Carver, Gallagher was born to working-class parents, Leslie O. and Georgia Morris Bond, in Port Angeles, Washington, on 21 July 1943. During her youth, Gallagher often helped her father in his work as a logger and assisted her parents in raising her four younger siblings. Like Carver, Gallagher grew up in a household haunted by her father's alcoholism; she has described her childhood as "terrorized" by her father's drinking ("My Father's Love Letters" 4). After Gallagher entered the University of Washington in hopes of eventually becoming a journalist, she took a poetry writing class with Theodore Roethke, an experience which would inspire her to pursue poetry as her chief vocation and avocation in life. Gallagher interrupted her studies in 1963 to marry Lawrence Gallagher, a sculptor. The collapse of her first marriage in 1968 found expression in many of the poems collected in *Instructions to the Double*. It was in that same year that Gallagher graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Washington (she would go on to receive her M.A. from Washington in

1970 and an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1974). She would eventually teach literature and writing at a variety of schools, including Saint Lawrence University, Kirkland College, the University of Montana, and the University of Arizona-Tucson. In May 1973 Gallagher married the poet Michael Burkard. The couple divorced in 1977, and it was her experience in psychological counseling to help her cope with the marriage's dissolution that became the foundation for her essay, "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief."

Although Carver and Gallagher met in Dallas in 1977, it was not until they crossed paths again in 1978, this time during a writer's conference at the University of Texas-El Paso, that the two realized they shared a common background and similar interests. On New Year's Day 1979, Carver and Gallagher began living together, and their romance survived to become a source of strength for both in the nearly ten years they would share together before Carver's death in 1988. During that time, their professional lives as well as their personal relationship flourished. Both would continue to teach writing and literature, most notably at Syracuse University. Gallagher, who published *Under Stars* and the original *Portable Kisses* collection in 1978, would go on to publish two more volumes of poetry (*Willingly*, 1984; *Amplitude: New and Selected Poems*, 1987), a collection of short stories (*The Lover of Horses*, 1986), and a collection of critical writings and interviews (*A Concert of Tenses*, 1986) during their time together. Carver would publish three important additional collections of short stories (*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, 1981; *Cathedral*, 1983, nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize; *Where I'm Calling From: New and Selected Stories*, 1988), two volumes of poetry (*Where Water Comes Together With Other Water*, 1985; *Ultramarine*, 1986), and a multi-genre collection of essays, poems and stories (*Fires*, 1983). Gallagher and Carver collaborated on *Dostoevsky: A Screenplay*, published in 1985.

In 1983, Raymond Carver received the prestigious Mildred and Harold Strauss Livings Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. The award carried a tax-free stipend of \$35,000 a year. Carver immediately resigned his professorship at Syracuse and soon moved into Gallagher's home in Port Angeles to devote himself full-time to his writing. It was in Port Angeles that Carver was to write the bulk of his published poetry, which made up his final three collections. Gallagher, the first female creative writer to achieve tenure in Syracuse's English department, kept her teaching job,

though in 1984 she made arrangements to teach only one semester a year in order to spend more time with Carver.

In September 1987, Carver, a long-time heavy smoker, began coughing up blood. Diagnosed with lung cancer, he underwent surgery in October to remove two-thirds of his left lung. High hopes for recovery were unfortunately short-lived, as a brain tumor was discovered in March 1988. Radiation treatments reduced the tumor, but two months later lung cancer reappeared, shortly after Carver was inducted into the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In a rush to make the most of the time left to them, Carver and Gallagher traveled to Reno, Nevada, where they were married on 17 June 1988. After a brief Alaskan fishing trip in July, the couple settled back in Port Angeles in their newly purchased Ridge House, within walking distance of Gallagher's Sky House. Working in close collaboration, the couple rushed to compile for publication the poems that would eventually make up Carver's last volume of poetry, *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Raymond Carver died in Ridge House on 2 August 1988.

Gallagher's "Reservoir" essay is careful not to single out grief as resulting exclusively from the death of a loved one, including in her definition all experiences which cause significant "diminishments of being" (103). Among such events would doubtless be included the diagnosis of terminal illness and the effects of subsequent treatments on the sick individual. Gallagher's essay proved sadly prophetic, as Raymond Carver's diagnosis would follow the original publication of her essay by only three years. The couple, joined both personally and professionally for almost ten years before his death, would each eventually confront through the writing of poetry the severe physical and psychological threats posed by Carver's disease. Carver's poems written after his diagnosis (as well as several written and published earlier) were arranged by him and Gallagher to create the *New Path* collection, published posthumously in 1989. In 1992, Gallagher published *Moon Crossing Bridge*, a volume of poetry written in response to Carver's illness and death. *Moon Crossing Bridge* (along with many of the poems included in Gallagher's 1992 volume *Portable Kisses Expanded*) broadens outward from traditional concepts of elegiac poetry, extending beyond lament and consolation toward renewal and a marked reinvention of the poetic self as a result of the transformative experience of loss.

Chapter Four will for the most part concern Carver's poetry addressing his own illness and imminent death but will begin by considering select earlier poems which contextualize his later poems on the subject of loss and grief. These poems offer a portrait of Carver the poet/speaker describing death in realistic personal terms and connecting those descriptions to a more imaginative concept of death as a natural part of the life cycle. The paradox of Carver's poetical attitude towards death—as a concept that can both incite fear and invite creativity—dominates in these poems. *A New Path to the Waterfall*, by contrast, while certainly not devoid of expressions of anxiety in the face of death, suggests an acceptance of death's inevitability as far less frightening than sad, but nonetheless powerfully humanized by poetic expression. Moreover, the arts in general, and poetry in particular, become in these poems a possible means to achieve immortality paradoxically by positioning loss in the context of both personal and world-wide histories, though emphasis must be placed on the *possible* here (Carver, ever the realist, tempered the hopefulness evident in his later work with a definite awareness of the power of chance to alter the future, for good or for ill). Carver and Gallagher, both of whom had been reading Chekhov's *Ward No. 6* shortly after Carver's diagnosis, divided the *New Path* poems into six sections incorporating the voices of various writers concerned with suffering and death—writers including Tomas Tranströmer, Charles Wright, Robert Lowell, and Czesław Miłosz, but most predominantly Anton Chekhov. Carver and Gallagher thereby produced an effect that emphasized the inclusiveness of the subjects of terminal illness and death and of art as a source of some psychological comfort in coping with these experiences. Concerned at this point in their lives with the need to cross thresholds and blur boundaries, Carver and Gallagher did so generically in *A New Path*, where the poets positioned themselves firmly within an ancestry of artists who suffered and observed suffering by blending the ancestors' work with their own, even to the extent of transforming Chekhov's prose passages into the form of lyric poetry.

The poems in *A New Path to the Waterfall* also evince a poetic dialogue between the two writers/romantic partners, even in their compilation. Gallagher notes in the preface to this volume and in several interviews that one of her important contributions toward Carver's poetry collections involved her

assistance in arranging the poems in the order in which they finally appeared.¹⁰ Although several of the *Waterfall* poems were drafted the summer before Carver's diagnosis (and some had been previously published), all of the poems were arranged with the expectation that *Waterfall* would be Carver's last book, and although the final section of the six-part collection centers specifically on Carver's awareness of his illness and impending death, that awareness permeates the entire volume ("Another Mystery," "Nearly," "What the Doctor Said"). Many of the poems directly concern or directly address Tess Gallagher as lover, wife, survivor, and companion poet ("Hummingbird," "Proposal," "Cherish," "No Need"). Carver's final poem in the collection, "Late Fragment," resembles in its fragmentary nature Kenyon's drafted poem "The Sick Wife," but Carver's poem appears much more hopeful, insisting that the speaker got "what [he] wanted" from life, which was "[t]o call [him]self beloved, to feel [him]self / beloved on the earth." Just as a segment from Kenyon's "Afternoon at MacDowell" became her epitaph, so did Carver's "Late Fragment."

Chapter Five will examine Tess Gallagher's important poetic expressions of mourning in more detail. Again, this chapter will begin with earlier poems (many of them included in the *Amplitude* collection) which grapple with losses that prefigure Carver's illness and death. The bulk of this chapter, however, will be devoted to *Moon Crossing Bridge* and certain poems from *Portable Kisses Expanded*. Gallagher's *Moon Crossing Bridge* substantially reconfigures traditional psychological concepts of grief and expressions of mourning. "I gleam. I mourn.": so declares the speaker of "Yes," the first poem in the collection. Gallagher's persona envisions loss and grief as undoubtedly painful but essentially transformative forces which enrich the survivor's changeable self. Far from being considered pathological, the speaker's absorption of the characteristics of the lost loved one within her own being is envisioned as a remarkable step toward healing, and Gallagher's final poems in *Moon Crossing Bridge* aim to assert a spiritual interconnectedness of all life which renders boundaries traditionally associated with life and death virtually meaningless, at least in the realm of poetry. Gallagher has declared in various interviews that her

¹⁰Gallagher writes in her preface to *A New Path* that she arranged all of Carver's volumes of poetry and several collections of fiction for him prior to publication: "My perhaps primitive way of ordering a manuscript was to scatter the pages out on the living-room floor and crawl on my hands and knees among them, reading and sensing what should come next, moving by intuition and story and emotion" (xxii).

vision of mourning and healing as it is articulated in *Moon Crossing Bridge* is heavily influenced by Japanese concepts of death, which pivot on viewing the lost loved one as the spirit of a benevolent ancestor who remains with survivors throughout their lives.¹¹ The later poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge* suggest that, far from inhibiting the survivor's process of healing and her generation of new relationships, the survivor's continued spiritual connection with her lost loved one actually enables her to forge a new life with a new lover. Gallagher has also declared that, paradoxically, she likely could not have written the transgressive poetry of mourning appearing in *Moon Crossing Bridge* if Carver had still been her first editor, because the highly lyrical and intensely self-referential poetry which makes up the volume would have been checked by his encouragement to remain true in her poems to a more linear narrative impulse, which would have emphasized the literal at the expense of the fanciful, upon which much of *Moon Crossing Bridge* depends (Woodruff 69). It is interesting to note that several *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems either directly or indirectly respond to questions raised by Carver's *New Path* poems. Gallagher briefly noted in an interview with Gabrielle Idlet that she "often dream[s] that some day they'll appear together under a joint cover or something" (Idlet 38), an especially interesting idea as several *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems appear to describe different versions of events similar to those described in the *New Path* collection (e.g., "Anniversary" and "Proposal," "Red Poppy" and "No Need"). Much of this chapter will therefore explore these similarities and differences in relation to concepts of the elegy and of grief processes in the face of terminal illness and death.

As indicated earlier, equally important to Gallagher's poetry of mourning is the expression of the healing process and its relation to the positive transformative powers of loss. Many later *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems (e.g., "Kisses from the Inside," "If This New Love Ends") and several poems in *Portable Kisses Expanded* (e.g., "Black Violets," "Elegy with a Blue Pony") envision romantic love as remaining unconfined by physical borders and describes the deceased loved one as surviving not only within the spirit

¹¹For studies detailing conceptualizations of death and mourning in Japanese culture, see Joe Yamamoto, et al., "Mourning in Japan." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 125 (1969): 1660-1665; and Joe Yamamoto, "Cultural Factors in Loneliness, Death and Separation." *Medical Times* 98.7 (1970): 177-83.

of the widow but within the spirit of her new lover as well. Much of Chapter Five will focus on tracing Gallagher's vision of grief as ultimately enlarging the survivor through analysis of these poems.

Moving Toward Human Usefulness

The poetry of these four writers—again paradoxically—both confirms and challenges Schweizer's assertions about art and suffering.¹² Clearly, as many of the poems yet to be analyzed will demonstrate, language cannot fully access emotions as highly charged as those associated with the loss of a life partner. However, as communion and community are widely acknowledged as essential resources in coping with loss, efforts toward communication (including, of course, poetry) must be made, perhaps especially when those directly involved in these life partnerships devoted much of their lives to the practice of poetic expression and response. Perhaps the highly concentrated language of poetry approximates best the expression of such raw human emotion. Because of their continual efforts to transcribe their experiences in the form of poetry, each of these poets—whether physically living or deceased—has clearly earned the title of *survivor*.

¹²It should be noted that Schweizer, a professor at Bucknell University, knew both Carver and Gallagher and provided early editing for Gallagher's *Moon Crossing Bridge*.

Chapter Two

Light and Clay: Jane Kenyon's Poetry of Loss

*We are creation's
property, its particles, its clay
as we fall into this life,
agree or disagree.*

Jane Kenyon, "Winter Lambs"

*Things: simply lasting, then
failing to last: water, a blue heron's
eye, and the light passing
between them: into light all things
must fall, glad at last to have fallen.*

Jane Kenyon, "Things"

In her introduction to her book of translations, *Twenty Poems of Anna Akhmatova*, Jane Kenyon explains the challenges she and Vera Sandomirsky Dunham faced in faithfully rendering the Russian poet's work into English:

Because it is impossible to translate with fidelity to form *and* to image, I have sacrificed form for image. Image embodies feeling, and this embodiment is perhaps the greatest treasure of lyric poetry. In translating, I mean to place the integrity of the image over all other considerations. (5)

Kenyon's definition of her priorities in translating poetry applies as well to her priorities in composing it. The brief imagist lyric emerged as Kenyon's trademark, a subgenre that became for her a mode of poetic excellence. Kenyon, like Raymond Carver and countless other poets, would come to trust the rules for imagist poetry offered by Ezra Pound in "A Retrospect": to aim for "direct treatment" of the poetic subject, to strive for an economy of words, and to depend on the natural rhythms of free verse in opposition to traditional metered forms. Indeed, Kenyon's clearest outline of her poetic aesthetic—the notes for a 1991 lecture later published as "Everything I Know About Writing Poetry"—owes a strong debt to Pound's 1918 manifesto. In this lecture, Kenyon suggests that poets "[f]ind fresh language" and "[o]mit useless words," that they "[t]ell the whole truth" and "[t]ake chances in the interest of clarity of emotion," that they regularly revise and consistently apply the "'so what' test" to their product (*A Hundred White Daffodils* 140-41). First and foremost, however, Kenyon describes the need to write poetry as emerging from the "pressure of emotion, which many people prefer to ignore, but which, for you [the poet], is the very substance of your

work, your *clay*" (139). Ultimately, she states, poetry satisfies "the need to make sense of life" (139).

Kenyon asserts that "[w]e celebrate the world by writing about it," that poetry allows readers and writers to "connect with others, on a deep level, about inward things" (139).

Among the "inward things" that became Kenyon's central poetic concern is the obsession with mortality woven into the bulk of her work, an obsession she shares with countless writers, including those she cited as her biggest influences: Keats, Akhmatova, Bishop, Chekhov, and her husband, Donald Hall. Kenyon's poetry has received virtually no critical attention aside from reviews of her various poetic collections, but even in these reviews Kenyon's themes of the emotional impact of loss and the transitory nature of the material world are frequently reiterated. Reviewing *Otherwise* for *The New York Times*, Carol Muske declares that Kenyon, like Keats, cultivated "a feeling for how tiny and fleeting the poet appears in the landscape, yet how enormous the need for poetry, how universal its claims" (12). Acknowledging the influence on her poetry of her lifelong battle with depression, Wesley McNair identifies the force behind much of Kenyon's poetry as an integral "nameless hurt" that imbues Kenyon's lyrics with a "sorrow" that is their "truest note" ("Craft and Technique" 679). Similarly, Alfred Corn writes in his review of Kenyon's earlier volume, *Let Evening Come*, that the poetry of this collection is "unified around the themes of nightfall, the sense of endings, the death of family and friends" (27). Long before either Hall's or Kenyon's cancer diagnoses, the pull of life and death opposites, of celebration and mourning, characterized the majority of Kenyon's poetry.

Thus it should not be surprising that one of the chief existential paradoxes driving Kenyon's writing is her attempt to reconcile the sensual beauty of the material world (along with the sadness resulting from the recognition of its inevitable loss) with a struggle to achieve faith in the endurance of the spiritual. Charles Simic aptly describes this quality in a 1996 essay on Kenyon, in which he argues that "the paradox of Jane Kenyon's poetry and the source of her power as a poet" is her identity as "a deeply religious woman who speaks to the Lord, not of the immortal soul, but of the beauty of what passes away and is bound to be forgotten" ("Jane Kenyon" 73). Kenyon characteristically turns to the image, rendered intensely and lyrically, to reconcile death and life, the material and the spiritual. Kenyon, like each of the poets to be

surveyed in this project, found her purview in the ordinary's intersection with the extraordinary, in the everyday object's ability to communicate shared realities and intangible emotions.

Among the most important recurrent images in her poetry of loss and mortality is the image of clothing. Paradoxical by nature, clothing at once hides and reveals, holds in and keeps out, and, like life-and-death cycles and regeneration myth, changes with the seasons. In several Kenyon poems, clothing becomes a figure for an individual's identity—both physically (in that it is external, material, and subject to decay) and spiritually (in that its shape and style help to communicate the wearer's character or temperament). Particularly those poems concerning the illness and death of loved ones depend upon clothing imagery to represent the poet's attempts, in Kenyon's words, to "*body forth* [the poet's] feeling" ("Everything..." 139) to an audience that has likely shared experiences eliciting such feelings.

One such poem is "Coats," first collected in the 1993 volume *Constance*, which appeared a year after Donald Hall's surgery to remove the cancerous portions of his liver. The opening stanza of "Coats" plunges the reader into the intense emotion of the moment it describes:

I saw him leaving the hospital
with a woman's coat over his arm.
Clearly she would not need it.
The sunglasses he wore could not
conceal his wet face, his bafflement. (*Otherwise* 203)

"Coats" pivots on the presentation of images—the woman's coat draped over the man's arm, his sunglasses, his wet face, the tactile imagery of warmth and cold. It likewise depends upon the reconciliation of opposites—companionship and loneliness, the material aspect ("wet face") and the spiritual/emotional aspect ("bafflement") of the same instant, and the warmth and cold that describe the physical and emotional terrain of this particular experienced moment. Loss, grief, and loneliness obtain their objective correlatives in the scene the speaker describes,¹³ which continues in its second and final stanza as follows:

¹³Kenyon herself referred to many of her images by use of T. S. Eliot's objective correlative; she noted in a 1993 interview with David Bradt that "Coats" in particular captures her sense of Eliot's phrase as "embod[ying] what I'm feeling at the moment." She describes the poem's source as follows: "I'm going into Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital and a man is coming out of the hospital with a distraught look on his face, carrying a woman's coat over his arm. I see that, and I know what's happened. That poem threw itself at my feet: 'Write me! Write me!'.... Maybe he was taking his wife's coat to the cleaner. I doubt it; the emotional truth for me was that he had lost his wife" (Bradt 177).

As if in mockery the day was fair,
 and the air mild for December. All the same
 he had zipped his own coat and tied
 the hood under his chin, preparing
 for irremediable cold. (*Otherwise* 203)

The woman's coat, empty and unused in the wake of her death, contrasts with the man's coat, containing the whole of his physical and emotional weight and zipped tightly against the "irremediable cold" of partner loss, of—in Robert Frost's terms—"inner" rather than "outer weather." The coat, like the sunglasses he wears, is intended to hide and contain his emotion but paradoxically announces it. The emotional chill he feels after his wife's death is linked to the medical fact of her death through Kenyon's careful description of the cold as "irremediable"—a word which both suggests the manner of her death (an incurable condition) and the permanent fact of death as inescapable and irreversible. The permanence of the situation is further emphasized by the word "cold" itself, which concludes the stanza with a stressed word whose long vowel and abrupt consonants suggest the sharpness of the husband's loss. As private as the subject's grief is, his efforts (however unconscious) to keep them private become instead the hallmark of their existence, connecting his emotion to the shared human pathos of loss.

Several other Kenyon poems make use of clothing imagery to communicate loss and grief. The early lyric "Cleaning the Closet" describes the speaker's discovery of an old suit of her husband's hanging in a dusty closet. The poem addresses the husband as "you" and captures his loss and the transience of the material world via an evocative metaphorical description of the suit jacket:

dusty, after nine years,
 and hanger marks on the shoulders,
 sloping like the lines
 on a woman's stomach, after
 having a baby, or like the down-
 turned corners
 of your mouth, as you watch me
 fumble to put the suit
 back where it was. (*Otherwise* 39)

Noteworthy are the two similes Kenyon chooses to describe the sag of the jacket buried in a closet for nearly a decade. These similes—one suggestive of new life, another indicative of a long-mourned death—demonstrate Kenyon's use of paradox and evoke the myths of death and regeneration which (as Peter Sacks notes) are characteristic of elegy and (as Anne Hunsaker Hawkins notes) are frequently employed

organizing paradigms for pathographical writing. Important as well to this poem is its dependence on the couple's interaction for its final effect: the clumsy attempt to share the grief which, as Harold Schweizer points out in *Suffering and the Remedy of Art*, is essentially incommunicable and undefinable. By the end of the poem, the speaker appears to feel "caught in the act" of intruding on the partner's grief—even threatening to dispose of its material signifier in her function as a kind of spring cleaner, another image suggestive of regeneration myths. But the speaker ultimately does not—perhaps cannot—choose to dismiss her partner's grief as no longer useful because she senses that it is alien to her, beyond her domain. However, her partner's grief in the poem is, paradoxically, both separate from the speaker and a fresh part of her existence as his newly married wife; she has impinged on his grief, and that intrusion is as unerasable as it was unavoidable. Just as the partner returns the suit to the closet, the moment described in the poem will always remain a part of the inner recesses of the couple's life together. It is significant that "Cleaning the Closet" originally appeared in Kenyon's first collection of poems, *From Room to Room* (1978), pieces linked by the common theme of Kenyon's attempt to position herself comfortably amidst Hall's life and his past after their move into his ancestral farmhouse in New Hampshire. As Kenyon's speaker states at the end of another poem included in this first collection, "Maybe / I don't belong here. / Nothing tells me that I don't" ("Two Days Alone," *Otherwise* 28). The speaker of "Cleaning the Closet" struggles with the same question, chastened as she is at the end of that poem by "the down- / turned corners" of the husband's mouth, an image suggestive of anger, sadness, and pain.

Both "Coats" and "Cleaning the Closet" also approach one of the most important paradoxes to appear repeatedly in Kenyon's poetry of mortality—the questionable capabilities of language to access and articulate the consequences of loss. Although neither poem is an elegy in the strictest definition of the term since the speaker's personal loss is not placed in the foreground, these poems nonetheless evince what Sacks described as the elegist's "reluctant submission to language itself" (2) in the face of a loss experience. In all of her most accomplished poems of mourning, the inability of language to communicate adequately the essence of that experience becomes a vital issue for Kenyon. In neither "Coats" nor "Cleaning the Closet" does a word appear to pass between the observer and the observed; in both poems, nonverbal cues (the image) communicate far more than speech seems capable of doing. In this way, Kenyon's poetry

resembles Carver's poetry and short fiction, as both writers routinely—and paradoxically—make the struggle to articulate the inarticulate and inarticulable dominant themes of their texts. As Simic states in his essay on Kenyon,

Jane's poems measure the gap between language and what it presumes to name. That distance to her at times appears infinite, and that is the cause of her melancholy. She is the poet who opens her being toward everything that is unnameable and unknowable. Lyric poetry for her, to paraphrase Chekhov, is that illness for which many remedies are prescribed and for which there's no cure.
("Jane Kenyon" 73)

Two poems that demonstrate Kenyon's wrestling with language in the wake of loss are "No" (*Otherwise* 10) and "How Like the Sound" (*Otherwise* 14), both of which were new poems included in *Otherwise*. "No" describes the moments after the conclusion of a funeral for an unnamed woman, when the mourners undo their processional steps to the graveside and begin to disperse, returning to their individual lives.¹⁴ The poem begins in a collapse of language—"The last prayer had been said"—and the first stanza evokes imagery linking the funeral to vegetation myths, as the speaker compares the freshly-dug grave to "a harrowed field." Kenyon's speaker then describes an experience that begins singly ("I") and ends collectively ("us"/"we"), as at first the speaker and then all of the mourners hear a sound radiating from the cemetery:

And then I heard a noise that seemed
not to be human. It was more like wind
among leafless trees, or cattle lowing
in a distant barn. (*Otherwise* 10)

It is significant that the noise at first appears "not to be human," as human noises are inevitably associated with language, whose usefulness at this point appears to have expired with the finished prayer concluding the eulogy. It is also significant that the noise is associated with "wind / among leafless trees, or cattle lowing / in a distant barn." These two images position Kenyon's poem within the pastoral tradition, common both to her oeuvre and to elegiac poetry conventions. More importantly, they are suggestive at once of death and life, of the chilling and the comforting. While the leafless trees connote winter dormancy, the lowing cattle suggest a promise of the continuation of life. Thus the "noise" the speaker hears is

¹⁴Kenyon and Hall both experienced the death of Kenyon's mother, Pauline Miller Kenyon, and Hall's mother, Lucy Wells Hall, during the two years prior to Kenyon's death.

paradoxical in nature and difficult to interpret, at this point neither entirely threatening nor entirely comforting. However, the noise evolves into language as the speaker stands by her car, and she as well as other mourners linger to hear and attempt to understand:

the sound rose in pitch, then
cohered into language: *No, don't do this
to me! No, no...!* And each of us
stood where we were, unsure
whether to stay, or to leave her there. (*Otherwise* 10)

Finally the listeners are capable of assigning some meaning to the mystical noise; but rather than clarifying their understanding of the moment and suggesting how they should respond, the shaping of the message into language only confuses them further, makes the moment more agonizing than it might have been had the sound remained mysterious. The mourners are immobilized by the voice, whose pain is echoed by the long vowel sounds (*No, don't[...]* / *No, no...!*) spoken in desperation over the threat of permanent separation. At this point in the drama, language confuses rather than comforts the listeners. However, paradoxically, language becomes the means for the poet to translate the experience to others, presumably in an effort to communicate and comfort readers who have endured similar losses. "No" demonstrates the author's ambivalence toward the powers of language—her suspicion of its ineffectiveness in translating deeply felt experience and her simultaneous need to trust it as the medium of her art, the best avenue available to the poet for attempting effective translation of idea and emotion.

"How Like the Sound," another late poem, dramatically resembles the situation described in "Cleaning the Closet." Again, the speaker addresses her husband as "you," this time in the wake of his mother's death. Paradox and the primacy of nonverbal expression are announced in the poem's first four lines:

How like the sound of laughing weeping
is. I wasn't sure until I saw your face—
your eyes squeezed shut, and the big
hot tears spurting out. (*Otherwise* 14)

Laughter and weeping, both sounds that predate the verbal, are literally juxtaposed in the first line of the poem, demonstrating the difficulty the observer faces in recognizing and translating the mourner's grief. Ironically, in this poem, sound—even nonverbal sound—cannot be trusted to communicate accurately; the

poet (who regularly traffics in sound) requires visual evidence to interpret correctly the mourner's emotional reality. The "eyes squeezed shut" and the "big / hot tears spurting out" connote uncontrolled and uncontrollable emotion and recall the image of the mourning man in *Constance's* "Coats." The poem's second stanza begins by describing the mourner sitting "upright" in his mother's "tattered" recliner. This image is indicative of his attempt to identify with the lost loved one, to reclaim the mother as a part of his material reality, an aspect of grief which Erich Lindemann would suggest borders on the pathological but which more recently has been identified as common behavior among the bereaved.

The speaker then continues with her focus on the verbalizations of grief, continuing her description of the mourner through the final stanza as follows:

Not since childhood
had you wept this way, head back, throat

open like a hound. Of course the howling
had to stop. I saw you add *call realtor*
to your list before your red face
vanished behind the morning *Register*. (*Otherwise* 14)

The mourner's weeping causes the speaker to liken him at first to a child, then to an animal, both of which are associated with the preverbal. When the "howling" stops, the mourner's return to the world of words is inevitable but uneasy, calm and understated in comparison with the urgency of his earlier expression of grief. The expression of his loss diminishes to an item on a to-do list, whose business-like economy of words cannot begin to articulate the pain his red face reveals. The somber pun in the final line both puts an end to the poem's dramatic action and likewise characterizes the speaker/poet's job in paradoxical terms. As the mourner loses himself in the newspaper, so he likewise exits the scene of the poem by way of the screen of the poem—itsself a "register" of his mourning—once he returns to his daily routine, which includes (as Hall's certainly does) the work of the written word. Again paradoxically, the written word becomes both a refuge and an inadequate replacement for the mourner's pained emotional expression, as it contrasts sharply with the primal "howling" that conveyed his pain earlier in the poem. Although the poem implicitly questions the power of the written word to translate the mourner's experience, it nonetheless demonstrates how closely poetic language can in fact approximate expressing that experience. Kenyon subtly opens her poem with the sound of the word *howl* ("How like..."), and her repeated use of long vowel sounds (*How*,

sound, open, throat, hound, howling) represents as closely as possible the mournful noise of weeping.¹⁵

Thus "How Like the Sound" exemplifies the poet's paradoxical predicament: the need to use the power of poetry to bring lyrical language--itself imperfect--into service as the best means available for communicating, in Simic's words, the "experience of the naked moment" ("Jane Kenyon" 72).

Originally collected in *Let Evening Come* (1990), "The Letter" also simultaneously values and questions the usefulness of language as a medium for communicating the experience of grief. "The Letter," however, is also significant to this project because of its occasion--a poem written in part in reaction to Kenyon's receipt of a letter from Tess Gallagher informing her that Raymond Carver's cancer had returned. In fact, "The Letter" was included in William L. Stull and Maureen P. Carroll's valuable collection of friends' written remembrances of Carver, the 1993 volume *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography*. Although "The Letter" does not mention Gallagher or Carver by name, and although the bulk of the poem departs from the contents of the letter that inspired it, the attempt to capture the speaker's grief and link it with the grief of her friends gives the poem its force. The title of the poem refers both to the literal object that occasioned it and the most basic medium of the poet's art. The first stanza describes the contents of the letter the speaker receives:

Bad news arrives in her distinctive hand.
The cancer has returned, this time
to his brain. Surgery impossible,
treatments underway. Hair loss, bouts
of sleeplessness and agitation at night,
exhaustion during the day.... (*Otherwise* 133).

Kenyon's decision to place an ellipsis at the end of this stanza does not, as one reviewer of her poetry has suggested, "make her seem evasive or unwilling to trust a conclusion" (Gordon 30).¹⁶ Rather, its presence

¹⁵In her interview with Bill Moyers for *The Language of Life*, Kenyon described her reaction to learning of Donald Hall's cancer diagnosis as being marked at first by "disbelief. You know, Kubler-Ross's five steps. At first there was disbelief, then there was a lot of howling around here. [...] Not a Yankee trait, but there was a lot of howling around here" (Moyers 234). Other Kenyon poems to use the specific word *howl* to represent the sounding out of grief are "Reading Aloud to My Father" (*Otherwise* 22) and "Notes from the Other Side" (*Otherwise* 215).

¹⁶Gordon does not refer directly to "The Letter" in this portion of her review but considers this trait of Kenyon's poetry to be a general flaw of several poems collected in *Otherwise*. At times, as many reviewers in addition to Gordon have pointed out, Kenyon stops a poem too short to accomplish its apparent intended effect, but in other poems Kenyon's silences, gaps, and ellipses signify powerfully the

suggests a great deal about the grief at the center of the poem: the failure of the bare descriptions of the couple's experiences with terminal cancer to capture entirely the nightmare they are living, the speaker's shock at reading the devastating news, and the wish the speaker soon will act upon to escape her own fear and grief elicited by the letter.

The remainder of Kenyon's poem is dedicated to an act that recurs in much of the poetry featured in *Let Evening Come*—the speaker's attempt to escape the sorrows of the human world by taking nature walks with her dog. This symbolic act, as Alfred Corn notes, "comes to represent everything in her identity that is physical, spontaneous, untrammelled by tragic knowledge" (Corn 27). Despite Corn's emphasis on the physical, the nature walk appearing in "The Letter" is, characteristically, as much a spiritual journey as it is a geographical one. The pathetic fallacy here aptly serves to demonstrate the speaker's faith in the regenerative power of nature. In "The Letter," the speaker and her dog encounter a patch of land where a neighbor has been felling trees, and the scene begins to remind her that the life cycle which governs the health of her friends and herself governs the whole of nature. Although the speaker describes the "smell of lacerated earth / and pine" with some wistfulness, she recognizes in the following stanzas that "[t]he place will heal itself in time," at first growing "weeds—goldenrod, cinquefoil, moth / mullein," and later supporting "blackberries, sapling / pine, deciduous trees" (*Otherwise* 133-34). Again, Kenyon's speaker finds comfort in the mythical regenerative powers of nature, powers which do not depend on human vocabulary but are nonetheless translated to readers by means of such descriptive language.

"The Letter" concludes on a note of comfort, the speaker's decision to call her dog and return to the human world: "I summon him with a word, turn back, / and we go the long way home." The final two lines—placed in couplet form at the poem's conclusion—once again simultaneously praise the power and probe the limits of language meant to comfort in the wake of loss. It is the *word* which has the power to summon and to name, but that *word*'s strength as a human artifact is questionable in relation to nature's perpetual self-renewal. The word's ambiguous power is illustrated in this couplet through the pronoun *him*—which most likely refers literally to the speaker's dog but could also easily refer to the speaker's

importance of the inadequacies of language to the themes that permeate her poetry.

memory of her sick friend or, even more broadly, to the poem's reader. That such a small word contains such a multitude of meanings is both its strength and its weakness, and is emblematic of the strengths and weakness of poetry and language in general. Thus "The Letter" is much more than the prelude to an elegy for a sick friend (a friend who himself creates poetry to translate life into art); it is likewise an interrogation of the power of language to translate experience and heal emotional wounds.

Yet another poem to explore these same issues is "Work," also originally collected in *Let Evening Come*. Once again, part of the scene described in the poem resonates with those described in "Coats," "Cleaning the Closet," and "How Like the Sound." Yet this poem, even more directly than the others, foregrounds the *work* of writing as frequently employed to comfort bereaved readers and writers. Again, the scene opens in a pastoral setting, evocative both of Kenyon's environment in the farmlands of New Hampshire and of conventions of elegiac poetry, long associated with the pastoral tradition (Sacks 20-21). In this poem, Kenyon manages to equate the necessity of poetry with the labor of summer itinerant workers driving to town early one morning:

It has been light since four. In June
the birds find plenty to remark upon
at that hour. Pickup trucks, three men
to a cab, rush past burgeoning hay
and corn to summer constructions
up in town. (*Otherwise* 141)

The opening lines of the poem establish the speaker's/writer's work habits—up since four on a June morning and, like the birds, "remarking," recording her observations through poetry.¹⁷ The initial lines of the poem are suggestive of life and plenty—the "burgeoning hay / and corn," the men rushing to work, the "summer constructions" in town. These images of life, however, call to the speaker's mind the inevitability of their decline, and the poem concludes with her contemplation of a specific memory of death and loss:

Here, soon the mowing, raking
and baling will begin. And I must tell

¹⁷Here, Kenyon may be offering a veiled tribute to Hall, who has described in various interviews and most notably in *Life Work* his own work habits: a day starting at 4:30 a.m. and including writing work from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. Kenyon would leave Hall undisturbed during these times and work on her own poetry. Hall declares of Kenyon in *Life Work*, "We do not speak all morning, but her presence in her study, working as I work, means everything to my work" (43).

how, before the funeral all those years ago,
 we lay down briefly on your grandparents'
 bed, and that when you stood to put on
 your jacket, the change slipped
 from your pants pocket.

Some dropped on the chenille
 spread, and some hit the threadbare rug,
 and one coin rolled onto the wide pine
 floorboard under the dresser, hit
 the molding, teetered and fell silent
 like the rest. And oh, your sigh—
 the sigh you sighed then.... (*Otherwise* 141)

Again in "Work," Kenyon adopts a partner's observation of her husband's grief as her subject, and once more paradoxical opposites are central to the poem—the spiritual vs. the material, life vs. death, the powers and the inadequacies of language. With this paragraph break in mid-stanza, however, there comes a shift in tone. Mythic images of death appear with the poet's declaration that "soon, the mowing, raking / And baling will begin." These images impel the speaker to tell the couple's story, to set it into words: "And I must tell how," she declares. Again paradoxically, language is both necessary and inadequate to the task. The couple's intimate expression of togetherness in the face of ultimate separation from a loved one—lying together on the lost grandparents' bed—concludes with a small experience of loss that becomes emblematic of the husband's larger loss. That loss—the coin that rolled beneath the dresser, "teetered and fell silent / like the rest"—is signaled by silence and forces upon the husband a recognition of the irrevocable nature of his human loss. The silence evokes an uttered but pre-verbal response from the survivor, the "sigh" whose intensity Kenyon replicates through her speaker's own sigh ("oh") and through her repetition of the word "sigh" three times in two brief, concluding lines. Again, both for the husband described in the poem and the writer translating his grief, words become insufficient. For the poet, however, they are essential tools for telling her story, a task she cannot escape ("And I must tell"). As in "The Letter," the ellipsis Kenyon places at the end of "Work" reflects this ambivalence toward the power of language/literature in the face of loss. Like the emotions of the couple in "Work," the ellipsis cannot easily be verbalized; rather, it silently suggests the inarticulate emotion that would conclude the poem's story. The language trails away just as the "plot" behind the poem trails away, because ultimately it is what is felt, not what is acted or described, that becomes important to the speaker and her audience. Thus the poet who can only access experience

through language must acknowledge implicitly that the very language with which she works has only limited access to an experience so profound that, paradoxically, it demands articulation.

All of these issues reach their zenith in Kenyon's poems about Donald Hall's cancer treatment and recovery. Three poems in particular wrestle with this subject—"Afternoon at MacDowell" (*Otherwise* 18), "Chrysanthemums" (*Otherwise* 195-97) and "Pharaoh" (*Otherwise* 213).¹⁸ Among these three, a variety of themes and techniques associated with elegiac poetry and partner loss is exposed, and all of them prove important to setting the stage for Hall's dialogue with his lost wife in the poetry of *Without*. The efficacy of language and the literary arts as healing tools in the face of the potentially terminal illness of a life partner is a crucial foundational question for each of these poems. Dependence upon pastoral traditions and regeneration myths to organize the poetry and assist in coping with potential loss is also evinced in these three texts. Paradox, the reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable opposites, continues to serve as a pivotal organizational technique frequently associated with Kenyon's ambivalent attitude toward the powers of language to access and express profound emotional distress. Also crucial to these poems is the issue of "separate togetherness"—differing responses to a shared loss experience among the dying and their survivors, highlighted by Esther Dreifuss-Kattan as an important emotional response among the dying and the grieving toward the situation of physical loss.

"Separate togetherness" also well defines the work relationship between Kenyon and Hall, a relationship which Hall frequently described as "double solitude":

We were rather reclusive. We got together and had a wonderful time together, but we spent the day in the same house without a great deal of contact. Sometimes we would meet in the morning, coming in the middle from our two studies far apart, and get a cup of coffee. We wouldn't even speak. I would pat her on the butt, and we'd get back to work. (Cramer 498)

In an interview with Marian Blue, Hall and Kenyon described in detail their work habits and how dependent upon *and* independent of each other those habits were. Kenyon told Blue that she and Hall were "aware of each other's rhythms" (185) and could sense the other's struggle with poems that were taking time and effort to develop. However, both Kenyon and Hall emphasized their determination to avoid stepping across

¹⁸"Chrysanthemums" and "Pharaoh" were originally collected in *Constance* (1993), while "Afternoon at MacDowell" was originally collected posthumously in *Otherwise* (1996).

boundaries too hastily. Hall told Blue, "We take care not to intrude, as well. It's important to keep a separateness, a privacy, a bounds. If Jane is away and I have to go into her study for some reason, I would never read a manuscript on her desk" (185). Kenyon concurred, "No, he wouldn't; and I wouldn't either" (185). However, despite the insistence on distance in the early stages of the writers' composition processes, the couple became valuable to each other as critics once either of them sensed the need for a reader's input on a poem's progress. While Hall admitted that he or Kenyon occasionally became "testy" when the other expressed displeasure with a poem's progress, they both agreed that each of them became the other's first and most influential reader: in Hall's words, "Each of us will say, 'I'll think about this'; then we go off and do exactly what the other has suggested" (187). They also built both joint and separate networks of poets who commented on their work. Kenyon viewed her work as vastly different from Hall's writing, but she stated to Blue that "whatever it is that I know about writing poems, I have learned most of it from being with Don, moving to his ancestral farm, keeping my ears open when his peers came to visit" (190-91). Nevertheless, she insisted that "I've had to establish and learn to honor my own habits of work, my own pace, my own areas of interest and struggles" (191). Interestingly, when Kenyon had difficulty dealing with public perceptions and private fears that she was merely an apprentice to Hall early in her career, the couple could not criticize each other's work effectively, until they brought Gregory Orr into their circle as a third reader who mediated tensions resulting from the couple's differences in age and publication experience. By the time Kenyon and Hall were separated from Orr by the New Hampshire move, they were able to respond more objectively and less defensively to each other's criticisms. Significantly, Kenyon was able to develop a critical circle of her own including close friends Joyce Peseroff and Alice Mattison, whose advice she valued as much as Hall's and who became important consultants to Hall in the posthumous publication of *Otherwise* and *A Hundred White Daffodils*. This separation / togetherness work habit would come to resonate poignantly with the separation / togetherness issues to besiege the couple in the wake of their cancer diagnoses and Kenyon's death, as both times the threatened loss of a spouse was compounded by the threatened loss of a valued professional partnership.

Kenyon's poems on Hall's illness reflect the couple's emotions in the wake of their realizations of the potential consequences of partner loss. "Chrysanthemums," one of the longest poems Kenyon ever

wrote, documents Hall's 1992 diagnosis of cancer metastasized to his liver, his surgery to remove it and his subsequent hospital stay, and the couple's drive home after his release. The narrative supporting the poem is sustained by a series of vignettes that resonate with Anne Hunsaker Hawkins's concept of the death-and-rebirth myth for pathographical writing. Although Hawkins suggests that most death-and-rebirth structures for pathographical texts constitute a kind of "wish-fulfillment" that holds out the promise of immortality and wholeness for writers and their subjects (Hawkins 34), Kenyon's mortality poetry as a whole adopts a far less optimistic attitude toward the future than Hawkins sees as typical of this type of pathography. In the three poems about Hall's illness to be examined here, Kenyon—true to the paradoxical nature of much of her poetry on this subject—both clings to the hope for Hall's survival and remains cognizant of the transitory nature of every moment the couple shares. She poetically echoes Hall's assessment of his contradictory feelings in the wake of his diagnosis and treatment, described in *Life Work*:

Each day is a little longer and lighter, but there are setbacks: a night I cannot sleep; or a new pain in a new place, bringing back the fear of imminent death: I live at the point of anxiety, familiar enough, when a toe cramp fosters speculation about toe cancer. Every day is a seesaw of hope and despair. When I am sore and tired discouragement settles over me like smog over Los Angeles. I suppose I will get better; but then I will be sick again, then die. Once a day I weep and Jane joins me, hugging and weeping. Once a day she rubs down my thin slack body, willing health to it with her strong and benignant fingers.

(Hall, *Life Work* 89)

"Chrysanthemums" begins with a couple sitting in the husband's doctor's office hearing of his cancer's return. The speaker describes the news in terms connoting a fatalistic natural catastrophe: "The diagnosis fell on us," she explains. The doctor's words here are likened to solid objects capable of noisy violence toward images of innocence,¹⁹ as Kenyon compares the spoken diagnosis to a framed picture of a girl and her dog "suddenly fallen off the wall." Significantly, the spoken diagnosis paradoxically renders all speech inaccessible to the couple, as Kenyon's speaker next declares "We were speechless all the way home." The couple, whose identity is defined in large part by their vocation as writers, finds their world

¹⁹In an article on Kenyon for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Robin M. Latimer suggests that one of Kenyon's strengths as a poet lay in her capacity to infuse her work with images of "quiet violence" (173). Interestingly, the image of the falling picture frame in "Chrysanthemums" signifies emotional turmoil in terms of noise, while the aftermath of the initial emotional violence is represented by silence during the couple's drive home.

completely upset by the recurrence of the husband's cancer. At a loss for words, the speaker notices on their trip home that even "[t]he light seemed strange." The poets, who depend on their perception of emotion through images and their ability to translate those images into words, cannot trust themselves to either task in the wake of the doctor's diagnosis. His words have robbed the poets of their capacity to see and to speak.

In the next stanza, the husband is portrayed as a heroic figure committed to enduring despite the threat of death. On the heels of a "week of fear and purging" he prepares to enter the hospital with all the trappings of his profession: "Determined to work, he packed his / Dictaphone, a stack of letters, / and a roll of stamps." This description both mirrors the literal (Hall describes the same scenario in Part Two of *Life Work*) and underscores the poet's need to place faith in the act of communicating through language in the face of ultimate annihilation. The reference to Hall's attitudes toward his work roots the poem in the authors' lived reality and pays tribute to Hall by dialoguing with his own writing about his confrontation with cancer. In *Life Work*, written during the same time period as Hall's liver cancer operation, Hall describes his dependence on writing as a survival tool:

This morning, as I write this medical report for *Life Work*, I find that work remains the matter, not only in defiance of death but in plain sight of it. It absorbs me to write these pages; it absorbs me more nearly than anything else has done for the past week or ten days. Writing about cancer allows me to transcend my cancer by the syntax or rhetoric of dread and suffering. ... If work is no antidote to death, nor a denial of it, death is a powerful stimulus to work. *Get done what you can* [Hall's emphasis]. (*Life Work* 67-68)

Hall's passage recalls Esther Dreifuss-Kattan's assertion that art provides the artist confronted with terminal illness a "mediating symbol of separation and togetherness, of dying and immortality" (*Cancer Stories* 130). Dreifuss-Kattan explains what Hall's passage and Kenyon's poem demonstrate: the fact that expressing emotional struggles resulting from cancer diagnosis can serve a multitude of functions, including exerting some control over an uncertain future, adopting an active role in the face of the passivity necessarily imposed on the ill and the dying, and objectifying in order to communicate and render meaningful the apparent senselessness of death (Dreifuss-Kattan 4-7). Hall's impulse to "[g]et done what you can" foreshadows his and Kenyon's hurried assembly of *Otherwise* shortly before her death and, as will be explored in Chapters Four and Five of this project, will resonate profoundly with Raymond Carver and Tess

Gallagher's expressions of their own experience with Carver's cancer in their joint work on *A New Path to the Waterfall*.

In "Chrysanthemums," readers may discover the ways in which Kenyon's use of the separation/togetherness paradox will connect with the mythical death-and-rebirth paradigm that structures the poem. The lines following the description of the husband's preparation for his hospital stay represent the couple's metaphorical descent into the underworld of their ordeal. Immediately following the images of creativity emerging from the catalog of Hall's work supplies comes another list, much darker in tone, as the speaker declares, "At last the day / of scalpels, blood, and gauze arrived." Images of creativity are thus juxtaposed with images of injury and the threat of death, themselves paradoxical in nature because of their implementation as tools designed to help the cancer patient survive his disease. Continuing with the descent motif, Kenyon then describes moments which serve as Dreifuss-Kattan's "mediating symbols of separation and togetherness" and likewise are suggestive of Erich Lindemann's observation of a surviving loved one's adoption of characteristics of the dead or the dying. During her husband's surgery, the speaker is forced to confront not only his mortality but her own, as she literally as well as figuratively puts herself in his place: "Eyes closed, I lay on his tightly made / bed, waiting." She is, of course, literally waiting for news of her husband's condition after surgery, but she is likewise figuratively waiting for the inevitable, the death which will claim both husband and wife eventually. The agony of her wait is punctuated by a brief portion of an overheard conversation:

From the hallway I heard
an old man, whose nurse was helping him
to walk: "That Howard Johnson's. It's
nothing but the same thing over and over
again."

"That's right. It's nothing special." (*Otherwise* 195)

Again paradoxically, the slight conversation is important to the poem in part because of its apparent insignificance. Forced to consider the possibility of losing a life partner, the speaker is grappling with serious emotional trauma (continued "fear and purging"). However, strangers unaware of the speaker's personal struggle—and apparently distracted from their own—make small talk to pass the time. Again, language's power to relieve or reflect suffering at crucial lived moments is called into question, as the

poet/speaker remains silent, leaving her profound fear and grief unstated while the prose of hallway chat is given voice.

Still, Kenyon's faith in the need to "[o]mit useless words" and ensure that all her poetry survive the "so what" test ("Everything I Know..." 140-41) would make it unlikely that the words spoken between the old man and his nurse have *absolutely* no significance. Similarly, her search for objective correlatives to signify her thoughts and feelings might suggest that this *particular* overheard chat is included in "Chrysanthemums" for another reason. The old man's mention of Howard Johnson's underscores Kenyon's focus on the transitory. The reference to a fast-food and motel chain—complete with its connotations of the borrowed, the temporary, the anonymous, and the common ("nothing but the same thing over and over / again")—highlights Kenyon's concern in "Chrysanthemums" with the brevity of life and the inclusiveness of death. Speaker and husband, nurse and patient, must all eventually die; the conversation which the speaker overhears implicitly intensifies that reality for her.

In the following stanza, the speaker finds herself staring at "a wad of dust under the bed- / side stand"—another image traditionally evocative of death—when she hears attendants wheeling her husband down the hall to his room. The separation anxiety already troubling the speaker is exacerbated by the attendants' request that she leave the room while they move her husband onto his bed; the stanza ends with her recollection that "the door remained closed a long time." It is this moment that, for the speaker, represents the nadir of her experience. The closed door suggests finality, and the prospect of death at this point becomes almost tangible. It is significant that Kenyon does not portray in the next stanza the speaker's initial reactions upon returning to her husband's bedside, but instead begins with an understatement suggestive both of the passage of time and a sense of spiritual darkness. The phrase "Evening came..." simultaneously alludes to the Kenyon book that immediately preceded *Constance*—the generally hopeful and spiritually generous *Let Evening Come*—and indicates the low point, the conventional dark night of the soul, in which the speaker finds herself when confronted with her unconscious husband on the verge of life and death. The speaker sees her husband reduced to the merely material; she says she watched him as he "dozed, fitfully," while "still stupefied / by anesthetics," numbed past the capacity for intellectual or emotional action or reaction.

In a gesture typical of Hall, of Kenyon, and of the speakers of Kenyon's poetry, the "Chrysanthemums" speaker seeks solace in literature. Before continuing with the poem's analysis, however, it would be worthwhile to examine Kenyon's attitudes toward the powers and failures of literary art as a source of solace. In her 1993 interview with Bill Moyers, Kenyon spoke of the need for literature in general, and for the poetry of loss in particular, to comfort the bereaved. "It's odd but true that there really is consolation from sad poems, and it's hard to know how that happens," Kenyon says. "There's the pleasure of the thing itself, the pleasure of the poem, and somehow it works against the sadness" (Moyers 235). In a personal correspondence with the author of this project, Donald Hall confirmed that "[w]hen Jane was alive, and somebody dear to us died, she and I went to the poets. After she died I went to the poets again, including her own poems" (letter dated 2 August 1999). Similarly, Kenyon's response to an interviewer's question—"We assume that poetry matters. Why does it matter?"—explains the power she saw in poetry to heal and sustain:

It matters because it is consolation in times of trouble. Even when a poem addresses a painful subject, it still manages to be consoling, somehow, if it's a good poem. Poetry has an unearthly ability to turn suffering into beauty. When Don was recuperating I had Elizabeth Bishop's poems with me, and I would disappear into that book for minutes at a time, go into that world, and it was a safe place, a very interesting place. (Bradt 175)

Several Kenyon poems written in the wake of her father's illness and death also demonstrate this affinity for literature's consolatory power, but it is important to note that the poems much more than the interview statements suggest Kenyon's recognition of literature's limitations as well as its strengths in helping survivors to cope. Both "Reading Aloud to My Father" (*Otherwise* 22) and "Reading Late of the Death of Keats" (*Otherwise* 105) feature speakers confronting a loved one's terminal illness and attempting to find solace for themselves and for the dying in literature, in the first poem through Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* and in the second through an unspecified biography of Keats. In both poems, however, the speaker errs, choosing the book "haphazard / from the shelf" ("Reading Aloud...") or "pack[ing] the wrong book / in [her] haste" ("Reading Late..."). She discovers that both books' naturalistic assertions about life and death do not comfort as fully as she would wish, nor does she necessarily agree with the philosophies the writers espouse (she says in the first poem "I think / Nabokov had it wrong. This [world] is the abyss").

It is significant in these two poems that the speakers turn to biographical/autobiographical writings, since much of Kenyon's poetry derives from her literal experience. Still paradoxically, the language of biography, like all literary language, is imperfect in the face of lived experience. However, in Kenyon's view it still retains the "unearthly ability to turn suffering into beauty"; thus Kenyon's speakers repeatedly return to their bookshelves for comfort from emotional trauma, despite language and literature's limitations.

Indeed, the speaker of "Chrysanthemums" finds literature both a necessary and insufficient pastime as she awaits her husband's awakening from the anesthesia. The novel she has chosen—*Swann's Way*, from Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*—is structured like a memoir and dependent on the resonant theme of sleeping vs. waking, making it particularly applicable to the dramatic situation of "Chrysanthemums." However, the pull of the speaker's lived experience is strong, and she finds it difficult to concentrate on the novel. She declares, "I *tried* to read" (emphasis added) and admits that she cannot give the language of the novel her undivided attention:

And while I read, pausing again
and again to look at him, the smell
of chrysanthemums sent by friends
wavered from the sill, mixing
with the smells of drastic occasions
and disinfected sheets. (*Otherwise* 196)

Odette's chrysanthemums in Proust's book give way to the actual flowers sent by friends to console the speaker and her husband, and even their scent gives way to the "smells of drastic occasions / and disinfected sheets" that remind the speaker of her husband's grave condition. The lived experience overwhelms the artistic experience in the dramatic scene of the poem, but again paradoxically, the artistic experience is not useless or powerless; rather, it serves as a catalyst. Kenyon manages to transform her experience with Hall's illness into her own art, the poem "Chrysanthemums" itself. The language of literature cannot *fully* access the emotional conflicts arising from life-and-death situations. However, far from impotent in the face of such trauma, poetry offers Kenyon a beneficial way to ease the emotional pain.

It is the husband's physical pain that dominates the next stanza, further emphasizing the serious state of his medical condition. The husband, "too out of it / to press the bolus for medication," is still beyond communicating by words. The wife becomes nursemaid, expressing her feeling for her husband

through her periodic administration of morphine to keep him comfortable. She tells the reader that she created a "hive" consisting of "eight-minute cells / where he could sleep without pain, / or beyond caring about pain." In this stanza, the husband is still trapped in his own underworld of physical, mental, and emotional inertia. In the next stanza Kenyon says it was "days" before the husband began to recover, to arise from the underworld which his cancer had imposed on him. Early triumphs consist of "walking, shaving, sitting in a chair." In a phrase that could define the whole of Kenyon's poetic aesthetic, she signals the resurgence of hope in the aftermath of potential devastation: "The most ordinary gestures seemed / cause for celebration." Characteristically for Hall and Kenyon, the husband's regeneration is made complete by a return to the work of language and communication, however small and tentative the gestures. "Hazy with analgesics," the speaker says, "he read / the *Boston Globe*, and began to talk / on the telephone." Both husband and wife begin to trust their emotional and intellectual renewal in the wake of his cancer surgery, once he reclaims the work of language as part of his domain.

The final stanza of "Chrysanthemums" depicts the husband, "numbed up for the trip," being driven home by his wife. Significantly, it is the beauty of nature rather than the beauty of art that arrests both members of the couple as the poem closes:

He dozed in the car,
 woke, and looked with astonishment
 at the hills, gold and quince
 under October sun, a sight so
 overwhelming that we began to cry,
 he first, and then I. (*Otherwise* 197)

The closing image of the golden hills brings the poem full circle by connecting with the chrysanthemum image announced in the title and threaded throughout the poem. The choice to place the action in October (Hall's surgery actually took place in May) reinforces the concept of the transitory nature of life, inviting into the poem the connotations of impending death carried by the autumnal image of the October sun. Most significant to the poem's conclusion are, once again, the contradictions that drive it. Here husband and wife, both professional poets, are so "astonish[ed]" by the husband's brush with death and the natural beauty he has been spared to see that words fail them, and they are left only with the pre-verbal "cry" to express their profound emotion. Heightening this paradox is the fact that they are both crying separately together ("he

first, and then I”), a phenomenon that recalls Dreifuss-Kattan’s observation of the separation-togetherness conflict which many cancer patients confront in recognizing their imminent death and the resulting separation from their chief source of emotional comfort, their surviving community. It is likewise interesting to note that Kenyon concludes the free-verse poem with two lines approximating a rhyming couplet. Subtly suggestive of separate togetherness, the concluding rhyme also signifies a return to a version of ordered normality for the couple who have long been confronting the chaos of death. Thus another layer of paradox emerges, as the highly controlled poetic form of the rhyming couplet is made to contain the lines which relate to the reader the couple’s pre-verbal expression of “astonishment” and relief. “Chrysanthemums,” like virtually all of Kenyon’s poems of mortality, ends on an ambivalent note. This ambivalence illustrates Jahan Ramazani’s assertion that many twentieth-century elegies “achieve a unique balance...between consolatory and melancholic mourning” (*Poetry of Mourning* 361) and similarly recalls Hall’s assertion in *Life Work* that, in the wake of imminent death, “Every day is a seesaw of hope and despair.”

Kenyon’s “Pharaoh” revisits the issues examined in “Chrysanthemums,” again presenting the speaker grappling with her own mortality as she confronts her husband’s struggle to survive after cancer surgery. Kenyon stated in the Moyers interview that the poem emerged from experience, inspired by an “actual visual perception” in which Kenyon observed Hall

lying in bed with the covers over him and his feet were holding up the covers at the bottom. I could see the outline of his body dimly in the dark room. This was after he was home and recovering from his big surgery, and it suggested to me a pharaoh, a sarcophagus. (Moyers, *Language of Life* 235)

The pharaoh image is inherently paradoxical through its life-in-death resonances and will prove to be a significant image for other writers to be considered in this project, especially Tess Gallagher.²⁰ In this Kenyon poem, however, the image that gives the piece its title is not explicitly described until the final stanza of the poem. “Pharaoh” opens with a thinly veiled tribute to Hall evocative of his poem *Baseball*, published in the 1993 collection *The Museum of Clear Ideas* and comprised of several sections called

²⁰See the analysis in Chapter Five of this project of Gallagher’s “We’re All Pharaohs When We Die” from *Moon Crossing Bridge* (1992).

“innings,” each including Hall’s cancer as a significant theme.²¹ The speaker of “Pharaoh” begins with a quote from Yogi Berra, characteristically paradoxical: “‘The future ain’t what it used to be,’ / said the sage of the New York Yankees.” Kenyon, through Berra’s quote, intentionally conflates past and future. In doing so, she simultaneously evokes and calls into question cyclical myths of life and death. Similarly, she deflates the positive connotations of the word *future* by suggesting it is tired, uncertain, and far less hopeful than might typically be presumed. This multilayered use of paradox, announced in the first line of the poem, frames the story that follows, introduced by the speaker’s association of Berra’s large catcher’s hands with the “big hands” of the doctor illustrating the size of the husband’s tumor:

Big hands. Men with big hands
make things happen. The surgeon,
when I asked how big your tumor was,
held forth his substantial fist
with its globed class ring. (*Otherwise* 213)

This stanza likewise demonstrates the simultaneous trust and distrust the speaker places in language. Her sense of powerlessness in the wake of her husband’s devastating disease is communicated, interestingly enough, in physical terms, with emphasis on size and gender: “Men with big hands” are primarily the ones to “make things happen.” At this point, the speaker appears to question seriously the powers of poetry and art in the face of physical disease, a condition whose outcome will depend on the scientific, highly material skill of the surgeon to remove the husband’s cancer. It is thus fitting that the surgeon’s response to the speaker’s verbal question is itself nonverbal, the physically and emotionally powerful gesture of extending his “substantial fist” rendered virtually regal through the speaker’s reference to “its globed class ring.” Contributing to the speaker’s despair at this point is her perception that power and all of its traditional representatives—the physical strength of men, the political strength of the educated and the wealthy, the scientific strength of the physician—reside in the realm of the nonverbal and the material, a realm paradoxically separated from but described by the language of the poem. Nevertheless, the surgeon’s power in “Pharaoh” has yet to be proven, as the husband’s recovery is at this point not complete.

²¹ An analysis of portions of *Baseball* significant to this project will appear in Chapter Three. Hall’s devotion to baseball, particularly to the Boston Red Sox, frequently punctuates his writing, as well as Kenyon’s writing about him.

"Men"/humankind have only limited capacity to "make things happen." The speaker here is struggling to secure her faith in both science and art, the material and the spiritual, to help her and her husband to survive their ordeal.

As in "Chrysanthemums," the pivotal action over which "Pharaoh" hovers—the husband's surgery—is never approached in the poem. Instead, the speaker focuses on the couple's return home from the hospital *after* the husband's surgery, another gesture suggestive of language's limitations in accessing what is essentially both emotionally and physically traumatic. At this point, the emotional/spiritual landscape in which the couple lives has been disrupted by the husband's illness. The couple seems unable to communicate, and that lack of communication is depicted in terms of the physical: "Things are off: Touch rankles, food / is not good." Even flowers sent by friends as traditional symbols of hope and regeneration create the opposite of their intended effect on the frightened husband and wife, who find that "[e]ven the kindness of friends / turns burdensome; their flowers sadden / us, so many and so fair." The promising uplift symbolized by the hospital bouquets and the golden hills in "Chrysanthemums" is absent in "Pharaoh," where the regeneration in the presence of the husband's illness depresses rather than consoles.

The final stanza of "Pharaoh" introduces and develops the central trope of the poem. Although the pharaoh image connotes faith in an afterlife, the speaker's image of her husband as a pharaoh is far from unequivocally hopeful:

I woke in the night to see your
diminished bulk lying beside me—
you on your back, like a sarcophagus
as your feet held up the covers....
The things you might need in the next
life surrounded you—your comb and glasses,
water, a book, and a pen. (*Otherwise* 213)

Unlike the speaker of "Chrysanthemums," the speaker of "Pharaoh" finds herself in a literal and figurative dark night from which she never fully emerges in this poem. The husband, described as a "diminished bulk" and a "sarcophagus"²² with his "feet [holding] up the covers," is portrayed in purely physical terms for the

²²According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *sarcophagus* is derived from a Greek compound word, *sarkophagos*, meaning "flesh-eating" and further suggestive of the tension between the primarily physical/material realm of illness and death and the primarily emotional/intellectual realm of language and poetry.

first four lines of this stanza. It is not until the final three lines that the speaker imagines him in terms of mythic immortality, as a pharaoh who is assured of an afterlife evocative of his life on earth as her husband. But even such an afterlife acknowledges the physical-material/spiritual-intellectual duality of the human condition; as balanced with the tools of the writer's profession (book and pen) are the tools for daily physical existence typical of life on earth (a comb, glasses, and water). The speaker acknowledges the pull of physical/spiritual opposites in the final stanza, but her personal predicament is never fully resolved: even though poetry can provide her with a powerful record of experience and mode of self-expression, it cannot save her husband from the physical onslaught of cancer.

Kenyon further explores this quandary in her late poem, "Afternoon at MacDowell."

Perhaps more candidly than any other Kenyon poem, "Afternoon at MacDowell" articulates the speaker's anxiety that the work of poetry may not be a sufficient anodyne to the emotional and physical pain of illness, death, and grief. The poem opens with the following stanza:

On a windy summer day the well-dressed
trustees occupy the first row
under the yellow and white striped canopy.
Their drive for capital is over,
and for a while this refuge is secure. (*Otherwise* 18)

Significant to the material/spiritual dichotomy which Kenyon revisits in "Afternoon at MacDowell" is the dramatic situation that occasions the poem. The speaker's description of the fund-raising event which the couple attends is indicative of survival, at least of the philanthropists' cause ("for a while this refuge is secure"). Nevertheless, the final three stanzas of the poem indicate that, at least for the speaker and her husband (who is the poem's primary audience), survival is far from guaranteed:

Thin after your second surgery, you wear
the gray summer suit we bought eight
years ago for momentous occasions
in warm weather. My hands rest in my lap,
under the fine cotton shawl embroidered
with mirrors that we bargained for last fall
in Bombay, unaware of your sickness.

The legs of our chairs poke holes
in the lawn. The sun goes in and out
of the grand clouds, making the air alive
with golden light, and then, as if heaven's
spirits had fallen, everything's somber again.

After music and poetry we walk to the car.
 I believe in the miracles of art, but what
 prodigy will keep you safe beside me,
 fumbling with the radio while you drive
 to find late innings of a Red Sox game? (*Otherwise* 18)

Despite the opening stanza's focus on a "secure" refuge, the scene is powerfully evocative of a graveside funeral service, held outdoors beneath a canopy with attendants "well-dressed" in summer heat and seated in rows of folded chairs, which themselves reinforce the intransigence of the material world as they "poke holes / in the lawn" beneath the guests' weight. Kenyon's pathetic fallacy in the third stanza underscores the speaker's wavering emotions, as hope and despair are represented by the "sun go[ing] in and out / of the grand clouds," rendering the atmosphere itself ambivalent of mood, "alive / with golden light, and then, as if heaven's / spirits had fallen, everything's somber again." Kenyon's belief in the primacy of image is further revealed by the fact that clothing again proves an important figure for the material world, as the husband's eight-year-old "gray summer suit" purchased for "momentous occasions / in warm weather" is highly suggestive of formality and graveness of spirit. The image particularly resonates with the much earlier poem, "Cleaning the Closet," in which the shell of the husband's rarely-worn suit evokes the concept of the transience of the physical body. The speaker's own wardrobe—the "fine cotton shawl embroidered / with mirrors"—seems light in comparison with the suit's "momentous" appearance on the thin frame of the sick husband. The mirrored shawl also suggests mimesis, the ability of art to reflect rather than to transform lived experience, as is further illustrated by the speaker's closing question which immediately follows the "music and poetry" celebrating the trustee's material victory over the threat to their cause.

"Afternoon at MacDowell" gathers poignancy from the circumstances of Kenyon's cancer diagnosis and death, which would occur soon after its composition. Hall, as "unaware" of Kenyon's sickness at the time of this poem's composition as she was of his during their Bombay trip, would eventually lift two lines from the final stanza—"I believe in the miracles of art, but what / prodigy will keep you safe beside me"—to serve as Kenyon's epitaph. These lines would likewise be echoed in his dialogue with Kenyon in the poetry of *Without*. Indeed, these lines state most clearly Kenyon's ambivalent attitude toward the power of her art to assuage, or at least to forestall, profound grief. The first of the two lines appears to be a testament of faith in the capacity of literature and art, in Kenyon's words, to help individuals

to “endure [events] which are all but unendurable” (Moyers 238). However, the phrase might also be read as suggesting a darker possibility, especially in light of the following line. The speaker may be asking if miracles exist *only* in the realm of the artistic, the “artificial,” the world in which the artist has some control over the progress of the text. While this capacity of the artist to exert some control over her product can become an empowering force in the face of death—as Dreifuss-Kattan points out in *Cancer Stories* (4)—Kenyon’s speaker cannot dismiss the darker potentialities of the material world, in which her husband’s death may soon become a reality, despite her best artistic efforts. It is therefore not surprising that the poem ends with a question mark, as Kenyon felt her future with Hall, in the wake of his cancer surgery, was far from secure.

Kenyon’s use of the word “prodigy” in these lines is also particularly interesting. Derived from Latin *prodigium*, meaning “a thing said” or “omen,” *prodigy* fits precisely with Kenyon’s attempts to find solace in the work of language and with her fear that language may not prove suited to the task. Similarly, *prodigy* in contemporary usage most often denotes an individual with extraordinary, even superhuman, powers. It also connotes a talent blossoming early, as the common phrase “child prodigy” would suggest. However, the speaker and her husband, despite their own considerable artistic talents, find themselves in a position far from promising and far from superhuman—confused and terrified in confronting the physical threat of cancer. By asking the question that concludes the final stanza of “Afternoon at MacDowell,” the speaker implicitly wonders if *any* artistic, spiritual, or scientific act can save her husband’s life and spare her grief. Despite the profound comforting powers of literature, the threat of material loss and emotional diminishment remains.

“Eating the Cookies” (*Otherwise* 15) and the rough draft of “The Sick Wife” (*Otherwise* 221) are the only two poems written by Kenyon after her leukemia diagnosis. Although not apparently centered on either Kenyon’s or Hall’s illnesses, “Eating the Cookies” fits well within Kenyon’s group of mortality poems, concerned as it is with the aftermath of the death of Lucy Wells Hall. It also is suggestive of hope in the face of death, a hope grounded in religious faith, in the spiritual/material contradictions which surround Christian ceremony, and in the long-term staying power of poetry. “Eating the Cookies” fits well with other

Kenyon poems focused on religion.²³ Although the images on which it operates derive from Kenyon's Christian faith, the poem (as well as others like it in Kenyon's oeuvre) does not advocate Christian faith to its readers as much as it suggests a faith in the endurance of the spiritual dimension of loved ones who have died, regardless of their particular religious allegiances.

After their 1975 move to New Hampshire, Kenyon and Hall became active in the South Danbury Church, originally founded in 1867 by Danbury locals including Hall's ancestors. Despite Kenyon's reluctance to join the church, she found comfort in the spiritual and intellectual sermons of minister Jack Jensen, who punctuated his sermons with references to the Bible and to Rainer Maria Rilke alike. Slowly Kenyon, who had rebelled against her grandmother's stoic version of Christianity by avowing atheism in college, joined Hall in espousing a liberal humanist Christianity that led her to join the Danbury church, befriend Jack Jensen, and incorporate religious imagery into her poetry.²⁴ Donald Hall also describes in his introduction to *A Hundred White Daffodils* an experience which Kenyon had in 1980 while Hall was away from the New Hampshire farm. She told Hall after he returned that she had felt a benevolent presence lingering with her, a force which she associated with the spiritual and the immortal and which she identified as female. Hall recalls that, significantly, Kenyon "became speechless when she tried to name [the presence]" (x). Kenyon's experience began to influence much of her poetry concerning loss, death, and the possibility of an afterlife; it also resonates with Anne Hunsaker Hawkins assertion in *Reconstructing Illness* that pathographical writings often resemble seventeenth-century conversion narratives in their death-and-rebirth paradigms (Hawkins 31-32).

"Eating the Cookies" foregrounds the material/spiritual paradoxes of poetry, Christian ceremony, and illness and loss. The speaker describes her ordeal of cleaning out the house of a deceased female loved one as a series of tasks, for each of which she rewards herself by eating one cookie from the last batch sent to the deceased by a Maine cousin. The absence/presence paradox is highlighted in this poem by means of a

²³Most notable among these religious poems are "Let Evening Come" (*Otherwise* 176), "Briefly It Enters, and Briefly Speaks" (*Otherwise* 115), and "Notes from the Other Side" (*Otherwise* 215).

²⁴Kenyon describes this gradual spiritual and poetic transformation in her unfinished and untitled essay included in *A Hundred White Daffodils* as "Childhood, When You Are in It..." (61-69).

variety of images—the unworn clothes cleared from the closet and bureau, the “clattering hangers” and “empty” drawers left behind, and the slowly depleted tin of cookies. All of these objects bring the speaker’s loss into relief, as the items left behind after the woman’s death simultaneously increase and diminish in value in her absence. The final stanza amplifies the religious imagery already suggested throughout the poem, as the speaker conducts a private and apparently spontaneous communion service to commemorate her loss:

Finally the drawers were empty,
the bags full, and the largest cookie,
which I had saved for last, lay
solitary in the tin with a nimbus
of crumbs around it. There would be no more
parcels from Portland. I took it up
and sniffed it, and before eating it,
pressed it against my forehead, because
it seemed like the next thing to do. (*Otherwise* 15)

The speaker’s loss, spoken into being through the poem, is wordlessly honored by means of her final physically and intellectually symbolic act of pressing the cookie to her forehead before making the physical, emotional and spiritual gesture of eating the cookie. The moment that the speaker describes, like the dead woman’s house, is both “empty” and “full” of her presence. Erich Lindemann’s concept of the grieving survivor adapting to loss by adopting the characteristics of the lost loved one becomes spiritually enlarged and positively charged in these lines, as the speaker’s private Eucharist enacts a poetic transubstantiation of sorts. Both by sorting through her possessions and by eating the lost loved one’s cookies, the surviving speaker symbolically keeps a part of the deceased alive within herself and gives that life voice by poetically recording the world in which the dead woman lived and interacted. Through “Eating the Cookies,” Kenyon—again, already aware of her cancer—thus offers her survivors a poetic model for defying death and separation. This model will indeed become crucial to Hall’s poetry in *Without*, and will prove similar to the poetry produced by Carver and Gallagher in confrontation with Carver’s illness and death.

As has been mentioned, “The Sick Wife” is an incompletely revised poem first written less than two months before Kenyon’s death. Donald Hall describes the circumstances of its composition in his afterword to *Otherwise*:

She started ["The Sick Wife"] in March of 1995, back in New Hampshire [after her Seattle bone marrow operation] before the leukemia returned, but did not survive to finish it. On March 8th, with Jane slowly improving, I left her for eight hours. Our friend Mary Jane Ogmundsen stayed with her, and Jane dictated a draft of "The Sick Wife." Typed, it lay on the reading table beside her chair. On several occasions she dictated a revision, and a new draft replaced the old. She would have made more changes had she lived. (*Otherwise* 219-220)

Much less hopeful than "Eating the Cookies," "The Sick Wife" nonetheless shares with that poem a pronounced concern with the absence/presence paradox. The difficulty of communicating the experience of terminal illness resurfaces in "The Sick Wife," a theme underscored by the story Hall tells concerning its composition, focused as that story is on Kenyon's need to begin the poem in Hall's absence. The poem opens with the following two stanzas:

The sick wife stayed in the car
while he bought a few groceries.
Not yet fifty,
she had learned what it's like
not to be able to button a button.

It was the middle of the day--
and so only mothers with small children
or retired couples
stepped through the muddy parking lot. (*Otherwise* 221)

It is significant that Kenyon, who frequently depended on first-person speakers in her poems, chose to narrate the inaction of "The Sick Wife" in third person. The subject of the poem suffers emotionally in part because she is at worst ignored and at best acted upon by the world around her. The "I" she once was becomes silenced by her disease and its consequences, leaving only a distanced version of her self encased in her ailing body, too weak to do anything other than passively observe the active, healthier world around her. Kenyon likewise may have literally wished to distance herself from the image this poem creates of a dying woman overlooked by her potential audience and unable to share her story. This conflict between the writer's identification with her subject and her need to distance herself from that subject will resonate with the dissociative aspects of much of Raymond Carver's poetry. The final stanzas of "The Sick Wife" further highlight Kenyon's ambivalent attitude toward her subject by returning to her favored image of clothing as a marker for the material absence and presence of the dying:

Dry cleaning swung and gleamed on hangers
in the cars of the prosperous.

How easily they moved—
 with such freedom,
 even the old and relatively infirm.

The windows began to steam up.
 The cars on either side of her
 pulled away so briskly
 that it made her sick at heart. (*Otherwise* 221)

Although Kenyon may have revised the poem further had she lived (the final lines, for instance, do not carry her characteristic crispness of image), many of her key concerns from other poems of mortality and mourning reveal themselves in "The Sick Wife." Opposites unite throughout the poem—power and powerlessness, freedom and confinement, the young and the old. Clothing imagery and its material connotations drive the progress of the poem. The subject's poor health is demonstrated by the fact that "[n]ot yet fifty, / she had learned what it's like / not to be able to button a button." Like the husband's suit in "Cleaning the Closet" and the dead woman's clothes in "Eating the Cookies," the dry cleaning hung in nearby cars suggests emptiness and the ultimately hollow, corruptible nature of the physical world. Alone in the car, language as a communicative tool is useless to the sick wife, who finds herself increasingly isolated from the lively world around her. The images in the final stanza—the steamed-up windows and the cars driving "briskly" away from the scene which the wife cannot leave on her own—create a claustrophobic effect suggestive of the confines of the grave.

It is a further circumstantial paradox that Kenyon both was and was not the subject of "The Sick Wife," whose physical illness paralleled Kenyon's but whose near-absolute disability did not match the poet's drive to compose and revise poetry almost to the moment of her death. As Wesley McNair notes in "A Government of Two," by relating the poem's story from the third-person point of view, "Kenyon stands eerily outside of herself, observing not only the verse's moment but her own finite history" (70).

Indeed, one of the forces behind the effectiveness of Kenyon's poetry of mortality is its drive to illustrate her sometimes precarious position as a unifier of opposites not easily unified. Her poetry recording her anguished struggles with both her own and Donald Hall's life-threatening illnesses betrays simultaneous faith and doubt in the potentially healing powers of the natural/material world, the spiritual/Christian realm, the careful work of language and literature, and the primitive howl of pain. Gregory Orr, a longtime

colleague and friend of Kenyon and Hall, wrote in "Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry" that the best poetry balances the "limiting impulse" of story and structure with the "limitlessness" of music and imagination (*Poets Teaching Poets* 270). Kenyon's mortality poetry offers a variation on this theory as the rule governing her poetic aesthetic. The "limiting impulse" of the material world, the "clay" which can crumble under physical impairment, counteracts and is counteracted by the "limitlessness" of the world of the poetic act, the "light" which offers access to spiritual and emotional survival long after physical death. Kenyon's poetry illustrates what she declared in the title poem of her 1990 collection: "Let it come, as it will, and don't / be afraid. God does not leave us / comfortless, so let evening come."

Chapter Three

Leaping and Falling: Donald Hall's Poetry of Loss

*They are long dead; they survive, in the great day
that cancels the successiveness of creatures.*

Donald Hall, "Great Day in the Cow's House"

*Now I leap and fall, exultant, recovering
from death, on account of death, in accord with the dead,
the smell and taste of leaves again,
and the pleasure, the only long pleasure, of taking a place
in the story of leaves.*

Donald Hall, "Kicking the Leaves"

*When you require it,
this poem consoles—
the way a mountain
comforts by staying
as it was despite
earthquakes, Presidents,
divorces, and frosts.
Granite continues.*

Donald Hall, "This Poem"

At the core of Donald Hall's theories of poetry lies a faith in the beneficial force created by the pull of opposites. His influential 1973 essay "Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird: The Psychic Origins of Poetic Form" emphasizes this belief:

When a poet says he is doing north, look and see if he is not actually doing south. Chances are that his bent is so entirely south that he must swear total allegiance to north in order to include the globe. ...

Energy arises from conflict. Without conflict, no energy. Yin and yang. Dark and light. Pleasure and pain. No synthesis without thesis and antithesis. Conflict of course need not be binary but may include a number of terms. (118)

Similarly, in the 1981 essay "Notes on the Image: Body and Soul," he insists that

We make poetry of our conflicts, our warring opposites, although we do not always pretend to; and we may not even know we do. When William Carlos Williams wrote 'no ideas but in things,' I suppose that he was aware of the paradox; the statement disexemplifies itself, an idea made of no things at all. (310)

Indeed, contradiction of language and of situation shapes Hall's aesthetic. Even his earliest published poetry

(which he has recently described as “alien” to his current attitudes about poetic composition²⁵) is driven by a different form of contradiction, a New Critical passion for irony and self-conscious paradox cultivated by his graduate studies at Stanford University under Yvor Winters. Poetry included in his 1954 volume *Exiles and Marriages*, which won the Lamont Poetry Prize in 1955, reflects this influence, as is evidenced by a frequently anthologized poem from that collection, “My Son, My Executioner.”

Hall often cites this poem as exemplary of his early faith in a poetics that depends upon a highly intellectualized, crafted contradiction for its primary effect on the reader. The poem is written in a slant-rhymed ballad stanza form, which simultaneously suggests order and disorder, progress and disruption, as the speaker contemplates the significance of his son’s birth in terms of its indication of the parents’ aging process and their own mortality. This theme is developed through the use of a highly self-conscious form of paradox, as is demonstrated by the title of the poem and is particularly evident by the poet’s reference to his son at the start of the central stanza as “Sweet death.” The cyclical paradox of life and death is summed up in the final stanza:

We twenty-five and twenty-two,
Who seemed to live forever,
Observe enduring life in you
And start to die together. (*Old and New Poems* 19)

In the instant of a child’s birth, youth is transformed into maturity, growth into decline. A newborn, traditionally viewed as a cause for celebration, is contemplated in terms of his role as a *memento mori* for his young parents. Significant here is the role of couplehood in the poem. Again, Esther Dreifuss-Kattan’s concept of the separate togetherness that characterizes the experience of gradual death among the dying and their intimates is reflected in this poem’s closing statement, as the husband and wife appear to confront their mortality individually yet simultaneously upon the birth of their son. In ways, the son and the poem become one, as both are indicative of creative acts whose products will most likely grow to outlive those who created them. Dreifuss-Kattan’s reading of the dying’s created artifacts as a “mediating symbol of separation and togetherness, of dying and immortality” (*Cancer Stories* 130) well describes both the subject

²⁵See the article “Donald Hall on His Poetry: Looking for Noises” (*American Writing Today*, Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. Troy, N.Y.: Whitson Publishing, 1991. 366-75.) for Hall’s own brief but incisive description of the progression of his career as a poet.

of "My Son, My Executioner" and the poem itself. Nevertheless, this brief poem is more complicated than even Hall originally realized, as he admitted in his interview with Bill Moyers for *The Language of Life*. Here Hall describes the moment when he first acknowledged the unconscious paradox that gives the poem additional energy:

I worried about what my son would think of this particular poem when he grew up. When he was about fourteen he said to me, 'That wasn't really about you and me. That was about you and your father.' I think it was....perhaps I was worried about replacing him myself. A poem is so often, obviously and correctly, pointing south while at the same time something under it is going north. (Moyers 151)

Complicating the father's worry over his own eventual death and decline on the occasion of his son's birth is his own residual guilt in sensing his growth as a process coinciding with his father's aging process. One of the most important recurring themes in Hall's poetry is his complex emotional and poetical reactions to his father's early death from lung cancer. Despite the highly contrived poetic structure which alienated the mature Hall from poems like "My Son, My Executioner," this poem possesses an important thematic alliance with Hall's later writings exploring his paradoxical attitudes toward life and death.

Within a few years of the composition of "My Son, My Executioner," Hall transformed himself poetically under the influence of poets interested in Deep Image poetry, including, in addition to Hall, Robert Bly, James Wright, Louis Simpson, and W. S. Merwin. Deep Image poets eschewed the New Critical reliance on traditional poetic forms and sophisticated, ironic, impersonal poetic values in favor of an open-form expression of surrealistic, subjective experience (Haskell 139-40).²⁶ Within a few years, however, Hall was changing again:

In 1960, I met the English sculptor Henry Moore, when I interviewed him for a magazine. In the early 1960s, I spent much time with him and wrote a book about him. Several poems came directly out of his work. ... Moore told me, paraphrasing Rodin, "Never think of a surface except as the extension of volume." I wanted to write poetry with an articulated surface under which one could sense a volume of emotion pressing upwards. ("Looking for Noises" 370-71).

Thus Hall, always aware of the usefulness of reconciling opposites, found his own opposing poetic reference points harmonizing under the influence of an artist whose medium was distinctly nonverbal. Hall

²⁶Hall's important essays "Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird" and "The Vatic Voice" describe his theories of Deep Image poetry most fully. Both are included in his collection *Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird: Interviews, Essays, and Notes on Poetry, 1970-1976*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1978.

found himself capable of uniting in his poetry the "emotion provided by expressionist distortion" and the "resolutions of a constructed object" (371). He aimed to create a poetry that resembled Gregory Orr's ideal in "Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry," a poetry which fruitfully exploits "the stability and dynamic tension that comes of a marriage of contraries" by combining "a limiting impulse with an impulse that resists limitation" (Orr 270). As early as 1960, Hall had begun to write the poetry that would define his oeuvre, poetry built upon a twentieth-century American brand of *harmonia discors*.

It should not be surprising that a poet so attuned to the powers of paradox would find himself virtually obsessed with moments in which life and death intersect. As "My Son, My Executioner" demonstrates, Hall's focus on the predicament of mortality manifested itself long before his aesthetic fully matured. In the Moyers interview, Hall describes his somewhat melodramatic awakening to the realities of death as a boy:

When I was nine years old, maybe three of the Connecticut great-aunts and uncles died within a year of cancer, and I remember lying in bed saying a sentence over and over again to myself, "And now death has become a reality." I was a rather literary nine-year-old, I suppose, and vain, writing my own biography. "And for Hall, at the age of nine, death became a reality." But the feelings were real all the same. (Moyers 148)

If Hall's sensitivity to the reality of death was awakened early, it was seriously amplified by the early death of his father, at the age of fifty-two, from lung cancer in 1955. A multitude of the poems which Hall has published in his prolific life as a writer have confronted his father's death, directly or indirectly.²⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Hall's poetry about his father's life and death grows to resemble what Peter M. Sacks describes in *The English Elegy* as a "recapitulation" of the Oedipal resolution (Sacks 8). In struggling to write out his grief at the loss of his father, Hall likewise struggles simultaneously and paradoxically to identify with and distinguish himself from his father, to reconcile himself with his role as a poet earning a

²⁷Hall has confessed to mixed emotions regarding his relationship with his father. Donald Andrew Hall Sr. spent most of his adult life doing a job he despised, as a businessman working for his father in order to support his family rather than pursuing his dream of teaching at a preparatory school. Much of Hall's poetry expresses a simultaneous gratitude for his father's sacrifice and frustration with his father's inability to fight for his preferred way of life. His father's physical death becomes for Hall symbolic of the spiritual death he suffered under pressure, whether real or imagined, to prove a good material provider for his wife and son. See Liam Rector's "Donald Hall: An Interview by Liam Rector." [*The American Poetry Review*. January/February 1989, 39-46]).

living by doing the work he loves, something his father-teacher by temperament and businessman by necessity—could never do.

Understandably, it is in his poetry about his father's spiritual decline and physical death that Hall's obsession with mortality as a subject for poetry first achieves powerful articulation. Hall's focus on his father's death calls attention to that subject's importance as a means for exploring poetically the author's own mortality, as he often links his father's early death with his own aging process in a gesture evocative of the issues undergirding "My Son, My Executioner." A poem of particular significance here is "The Day I Was Older,"²⁸ which features a speaker reminded of his own imminent decline and death by the memory of his father's early demise. "The Day I Was Older" also sounds an ambivalent note of survival which depends upon the recognition that individual death, while individually tragic, is redeemed in part by its necessary role as part of the larger life cycle that governs all living things. While this poem, as well as several others, serve as a form of elegy for Donald Hall Sr., it also acts as a self-elegy for Donald Hall Jr. and points toward mechanisms for endurance that surviving loved ones who read the poem may employ to assuage the pain of loss.

"The Day I Was Older" is constructed of five individually titled ten-line stanzas whose central obsession is the passage of time and the transitory nature of all acts, including sexual/creative acts. It is an occasional poem called into being by the speaker's recognition that he has personally surpassed the age at which his own father died. The five sections—respectively titled "The Clock," "The News," "The Pond," "The Day," and "The Cup"—combine memories of the speaker's past with a record of his present and its implications for his future death, which the poem attempts to defy by means of its lasting power as an artifact. In this respect, the poem's central project resembles Tess Gallagher's theory in "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief" that "the time of the poem is multi-directional" because poetry "reaches richly into the past and forms linkages with the present and with other isolated pasts" (*A Concert of Tenses* 107). Simultaneously, Gallagher says, the poem "searches into the future" and "reminds us of longings" (107). By offering the story of the speaker's loss to new readers, the poet paradoxically immortalizes his loss and calls

²⁸The version of this poem to be analyzed here appeared in Hall's 1990 volume *Old and New Poems*.

the dead back to life. He likewise aims to ensure that his voice will be heard, by means of the poem, in a public forum long after he dies. Little wonder, then, that the opening stanza—appropriately titled “The Clock”—employs some of Hall’s favorite symbols for the complex tension between eradication and endurance:

The clock on the parlor wall, stout as a mariner’s clock,
disperses the day. All night it tolls the half-hour
and the hour’s number with resolute measure,
approaching the poles and crossing the equator
over fathoms of sleep. Warm
in the dark next to your breathing,
below the thousand favored stars, I feel
horns of gray water heave
underneath us, and the ship’s pistons
pound as the voyage continues over the limited sea. (*Old and New Poems* 186)

In the lines above, Hall unites several images important both to his poetic oeuvre and to traditional myths surrounding death and dying. The unifying image of the clock underscores the fact that it is the passage of time that obsesses the speaker to the point of sleeplessness, a condition which likewise serves as a subtle and perhaps unconscious effort to forestall death, given the symbolic links between sleep and death. The clock is by nature paradoxical, as it documents change without changing itself (“All night it tolls the half-hour / and the hour’s number with resolute measure”); in this respect, it echoes the function of the poem itself, unchangeably changing in its capacity as a record of life and death. The sea voyage trope likewise performs several crucial functions. First, it employs one of Hall’s chief mythic symbols of life and death cycles, the image of water. As Ralph J. Mills Jr. notes, Hall often uses water imagery to suggest a “cycle of recurrence and renewal” in poetry and in human existence (103). Similarly, in a 1982 interview with Marty Lammon, Robert Bly stated, “I know poems of [Hall’s] in which the whole [dying] process is described as a cycle; and it’s symbolized in the cycle of water” (Lammon 25). Second, the sea voyage recalls Anne Hunsaker Hawkins’s description of the journey motif as it appears in many pathographical writings. Hawkins observes that the journey motif figures individual confrontations with death as a “passage into the realm of the dead” (79) and can serve as “a construct for human mentation itself—the capacity of the exploring mind, especially the imagination, to transcend a given condition by achieving understanding and mastery over it” (80). The extent of imagination’s power to transform and transcend death is a vital central

issue in much of Hall's poetry, including "The Day I Was Older." Most importantly, the image of the couple arises in "The Clock" as an important force in the effort to defy the permanence of death. Reference to couples and couplehood appears in every stanza of "The Day I Was Older" with the important exception of "The Day," in which the speaker alone contemplates his father's death. In "The Clock" as well as in several other passages of the entire poem, couplehood is featured in terms of separate togetherness, as the strengths and limitations of the attempt to defy death through emotional and sexual connection are explored. Although the addressee in "The Clock" is never named, the passage implies that the speaker directs his words to a sleeping lover who breathes evenly next to him and whose effort to forestall death through creative/sexual acts are joined with his own. The speaker, however, acknowledges the inevitability of death, despite the couple's efforts, in the final lines of the stanza. The current of life and death which propels the couple through life towards death is powerful and ultimately unconquerable. Life is a "limited sea" whose borders cannot be expanded. Yet despite the inevitability of death, the speaker and his mate attempt to defy it, as is signaled by the long final line of "The Clock" ("and the ships pistons / pound as the voyage continues over the limited sea"). The poet, fully cognizant of the power of death, paradoxically defies it by acknowledging it cannot be vanquished. He pushes the poem to its limits and beyond in the stanza's final line, whose length and rolling rhythm suggest extension and the ebb and flow of ocean waves. Hall's speaker shakes his fist at all limits, especially the ultimate limit of death, by stretching his final words to the fullest and insisting that they be recorded for future readers.

As mentioned, the image of romantic couples permeates "The Day I Was Older." The second stanza, "The News," begins with a list of the speaker's daily morning chores (again suggestive of continuity as a record of change), the last of which involves "reading obituaries in the Boston *Globe* / for the mean age." The deaths of famous figures receive a perfunctory glance from the speaker, who gives his deepest attention to his memory of a lost loved one whose name appears on the same page:

—and I read
that Emily Farr is dead, after a long illness in Oregon.
Once in an old house we talked for an hour, while a coal fire
brightened in November twilight and wavered
our shadows high on the wall
until our eyes fixed on each other. Thirty years ago. (*Old and New Poems* 186)

The passage suggests that the speaker and Emily Farr were lovers thirty years earlier, lovers whose relationship sparked unexpectedly in a setting evocative of death and loss ("an old house," "November twilight"). The bittersweet tone of the passage is punctuated by the fragment that heavily concludes it. Not only do the three short words contain three heavy stresses, suggesting the spiritual weight of the speaker's loss, but they likewise underscore the theme of the entire poem, the anxious and inevitable passage of time. That the speaker recalls so vividly an event that took place thirty years earlier reminds him of his own mortality and the brevity of individual life in the larger stream of the life-and-death cycle.

The third and central stanza of the poem, "The Pond," most fully emphasizes the poem's primary oppositional pull, life represented as the sexual/creative act vs. the permanence of physical death. Again, Hall evokes water as a symbol of this conflict:

We lie by the pond on a late August afternoon
as a breeze from low hills in the west stiffens water
and agitates birch leaves yellowing above us.
You set down your book
and lift your eyes to white trunks tilting from shore.
A mink scuds through ferns; an acorn tumbles.
Soon we will turn to our daily business.
You do not know that I am watching, taking pleasure
in your breasts that rise and fall as you breathe.
Then I see mourners gathered by an open grave. (*Old and New Poems* 186-87)

The natural setting evokes both romanticism and cyclical images of life and death. The lovers find themselves on the threshold between youth and age, vitality and dormancy, indicated by the scene taking place on "a late August afternoon" decorated with falling acorns and yellowing birch leaves. The moment appears to stand still in time, holding death and life within itself in a tense balance. The organizing symbol of the poem and of the stanza--water--finds itself "stiffened" by the western breeze, an image suggestive simultaneously of sexual vitality and the coldness of death. In a gesture resonant with many of Kenyon's consolatory poems about loss, the speaker's mate "set[s] down" her book. Such an act hints that the written word is, again paradoxically, crucial to preserving life yet, in some indefinable respect, found wanting in staving off the realities of aging and death.²⁹ The lover instead turns toward contemplation of nature, the

²⁹See the analysis in Chapter Two of the present project of Kenyon's use of the act of reading and writing as an ambivalently useful method for forestalling despair in the face of traumatic personal loss.

“white trunks tilting from shore” which again are suggestive of both sexuality and death. Yet again, the couple’s “separate togetherness” is highlighted in the final lines of “The Pond,” which hint at imminent sexual/creative activity but likewise render the speaker and his lover in subject/object terms which build toward the ominous final line. Although the speaker and lover lie together beside the pond, the speaker becomes in the penultimate lines a surreptitious voyeur who assuages his fears of personal annihilation by taking pleasure in the innocent liveliness of his lover, in the simple act of her breathing as it is revealed through the “rise and fall” of her breasts. However, the speaker’s fear of death cannot be fully erased, even by these powerful signs of vitality, as the sexual image of the lover’s breasts suddenly conjures in the speaker’s mind a vision of death: “Then I see mourners gathered by an open grave.” At the end of “The Pond,” Hall’s readers are returned to the tension that drives “My Son, My Executioner,” in which the joys of sexuality and creativity are tempered heavily by the cognizance of impending death. Throughout “The Day I Was Older”—and especially in “The Pond”—Hall appears to exemplify Peter M. Sacks’s theory of the link between sexuality and loss in *The English Elegy*:

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. (Sacks 7)

For the speaker of “The Day I Was Older,” sexual pleasure cannot be fully realized without the simultaneous recognition that death grows increasingly imminent with the passage of each season.

As was noted earlier, “The Day” is the only section of “The Day I Was Older” in which romantic coupling and its relationship to death play no part. It is also the primary stanza in which the issue of the loss of Hall’s father is directly treated. Its naturalistic description of Donald Hall Sr.’s death also prefigures the detail with which Hall will describe the decline and death of Jane Kenyon in *Without*, as the first half of the stanza illustrates:

Last night at supertime I outlived my father, enduring
the year, month, day, hour, and moment
when he lay back on a hospital bed in the guest room
among cylinders of oxygen—mouth open, nostrils and pale
blue lips fixed unquivering. (*Old and New Poems* 187)

Time’s crucial role as a measure of individual life-and-death cycles is hammered home to the reader through

the second line's catalog of various units of time, suggesting the urgency of Hall Jr.'s memory and his perception of his own death as relentlessly approaching. The memory of the father is one of death-in-life, as the progress of his disease renders him ultimately passive; the poem in this respect resembles Kenyon's subject in her incomplete final poem "The Sick Wife."³⁰ His immobile figure on the hospital bed simultaneously evokes and counterpoints the image of the watched reclining lover in "The Pond," a situation which again suggests that all creative acts will ultimately result in death.

The remaining lines of "The Day" feature the speaker addressing his father directly in an attempt to dialogue with the dead that both reflects what Sacks labels as "the necessarily dialectical movement of the work of mourning" (36) and prefigures the epistolary poems directed to the late Jane Kenyon that constitute the second half of *Without*. Memories of the speaker's father are described largely in terms of the physical world:

Father of my name,
father of long fingers, I remember your dark hair
and your face almost unwrinkled. Now I have waked
more mornings to frost whitening the grass,
and the newspaper more times, and stood more times,
my hand on a doorknob without opening the door. (*Old and New Poems* 187)

The physical image of the father survives here in the emotional memory of the son and in the artistic record of the poem. The images of frost and the newspaper (linked as it was in "The News" to the obituary pages) reinforce the speaker's sense of his own aging and mortality. The final image of the speaker's hand resting immobile on the doorknob reinforces the threshold motif of the entire poem and intimates the speaker's feelings of fear and dread in the face of his own impending death. Evocative of Hall's comments in the Moyers interview regarding "My Son, My Executioner," "The Day I Was Older," especially at this point in the poem, accesses the speaker's fear of personal annihilation by means of portraying his grief at the loss of his father.

The closing stanza of "The Day I Was Older"—"The Cup"—unites its mythic elements to close the poem on a note of cautious optimism that finds solace for individual awareness of death in the speaker's knowledge that the larger life cycle can never be fully extinguished. The poem is an associative litany of

³⁰See Chapter Two of the present project for an analysis of this poem.

juxtaposed images of life and death, vitality and decline. A lover's swaying earrings recall August strolls among birches with an "old man," which recall robust noon walks amid "wheat and river cities," which suggest to the speaker his daughter in her crib, a kiss he offers his dying father, and finally the acorn falling beside the pond in the central stanza. At the close of the poem, the reader is directly addressed in a Whitmanesque gesture that serves to assert the persistence of life: "You listening here, you reading these words as I write them, / I offer this cup to you: Though we drink / from this cup every day, we will never drink it dry." The cup image acts as a mythical chalice that unites all generations and overshadows the finite day of an individual's death with the larger, continuous day of human life, which, the speaker assures himself, will never completely disappear.

Hall's obsession with his own impending death is poetically explored most fully in his 1993 collection *The Museum of Clear Ideas*. The book is divided into three sections—the long, self-contained first poem, "Another Elegy"; the series of poems mimicking the structure of a baseball game, "Baseball" (complete with "Extra Innings" at the end of the book); and a collection of verses patterned after Horace's *Odes*, titled "The Museum of Clear Ideas: Or Say, Horsecollar's Odes." Most significant to this project are the first two sections, to be analyzed in this chapter. Dedicated "for Jane," *The Museum of Clear Ideas* is Hall's last volume of poetry to be published prior to her death.³¹ It is in *The Museum of Clear Ideas* that Hall first treats directly his own diagnoses of colon and liver cancer and the subsequent efforts to save his life, as well as his amplified fears of death in the wake of the diagnoses. The book's first treatment of these issues appears in the opening poem, "Another Elegy."

"Another Elegy" is subtitled "In Memory of William Trout," a fictional poet whose life story represents an amalgam of tragicomic experience applicable to the lives of many American artist figures of the twentieth century. Its importance to Hall is evidenced by the fact that, when it was published in *Museum*

³¹Ironically, although Hall dedicated the book to Kenyon and counts it among his favorites, Kenyon's reaction to *Museum* was essentially negative. Hall describes to Jeffrey S. Cramer her first reading of the manuscript: "She was very tough and not at all given to holding back criticism. One night she was reading the manuscript.... Now, it's a book that lots of people like, and I like, but Jane didn't like it—and half way through reading it—she had seen parts of it all along, but she was reading right through it, and she was coming almost to the end of it—she was sitting on the sofa over there and I was sitting here and she looked up weeping, and saying, 'Perkins [Kenyon's nickname for Hall], I don't really like it,' and I wept and said, 'That's all right, that's all right'" (Cramer 502).

in 1993, it had undergone eleven years of revision and over 500 drafts (*Life Work* 20). Trout's name proves symbolic, as he acts as a flawed, twentieth-century Fisher King/messiah figure whose favorite forms of relaxation include drinking alcohol to excess and taking frequent fishing trips to his secluded Maine cabin. Hall's suggests an ambivalent attitude toward the importance of the life and death of poets as suitable subjects of poetry themselves. This ambivalence is dramatically emphasized in "Another Elegy," which repeatedly challenges its own quality as "history" and as poetry by questioning the qualifications of a figure like William Trout to serve as subject and maker of poems. Even the title of the poem suggests fatigued frustration with both subject and genre. In this respect, "Another Elegy" strongly resembles Jahan Ramazani's description of the modern elegy as a violently paradoxical entity, characterized as "anti-consolatory and anti-encomiastic, anti-Romantic and anti-Victorian, anti-conventional and sometimes even anti-literary" (Ramazani 2).

Just as "The Day I Was Older" resonates with Whitman's poetry celebrating death as an integral component of the life cycle, "Another Elegy" resonates generally with elegiac dependence on vegetation myths (Sacks 7) and specifically with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in its evocation of the Fisher King myth as an organizing principle. The opening lines of "Another Elegy" appear as Hall's own version of Eliot's 1922 declaration that "April is the cruellest month" because it stirs to life those things doomed to die:

It rained all night on the remaining elms. April soaked
through night loam into sleep. This morning, rain delays
above drenched earth. Whitethroated sparrows shake
wet from their feathers, singing in the oak, while fog
snags like lambswool on Kearsarge. The Blackwater River
runs high. The blacksnake bulges in his hole, resurrecting
from winter's coma.

Now green will start from stubble
and horned pout fatten. By the pond, pussywillows
will labor awake to trudge from darkness and cold
through April's creaking gate.

Bill Trout remains
fixed in a long box where we left him, a dozen years ago. (*Museum* 3)

Hall creates in his description of the early spring landscape a pathetic fallacy that simultaneously sets the elegiac tone of the poem and casts William Trout as a handicapped messiah figure. Although the landscape awakens slowly to life with the onset of another spring, Trout has yet to be resurrected; the speaker's first thought of him is as a dead body still "fixed in a long box where we left him, a dozen years ago." However,

even within this somber statement the paradox of Trout's existence is announced. Although the dead poet has not *literally* been resurrected, he is *literarily* immortal; both his poems and the elegy that commemorates his life's work exist in part to assure his immortality. In this poem, the artist figure in twentieth-century America is cast as the messiah, whose ability to transcend his own death is simultaneously and paradoxically questioned seriously and championed zealously. It is also significant that Hall chooses to explore these issues by writing an elegy for a fictitious poet published during Hall's own battle with potentially fatal cancer. Doing so emphasizes the fragility of human existence by marking the stark contrast between the individual life lived and the select details that accumulate, to some extent haphazardly, in the life story the individual leaves behind. As in Kenyon's poems, the question of language's ability/inability to communicate life and loss permeates "Another Elegy." Trout's role as hobbled Fisher King emphasizes this issue.

In the second section of "Another Elegy," the speaker describes a drunken summer gathering at William Trout's Maine cabin, an anecdote that underscores his imperfect messianic figuration and likewise draws on pastoral settings conventional to elegy (Sacks 7). While his friends carouse, Trout drinks and smokes relentlessly, quoting "Milton's syllables of lament" and proclaiming "Nazarene parables." Set slightly apart from his associates, Trout broods over impending losses that the naive frivolity of his guests prevents them from fully realizing:

We fished the river for horned pout,
 Bill standing with a joint by the dam, watching the warm
 water thick with fish, black bodies packed, flapping
 and contending to breathe. Dropping hooks without bait,
 we pulled up the horny, loricated fish, then flipped them
 on grass to shrivel as we watched and joked, old
 friends together. Continually sloshed, Bill proclaimed
 that life was shit, death was shit—even *shit* was *shit*. (*Museum* 3-4; Hall's emphasis)

Despite the speaker's momentary lapse into nostalgia ("we watched and joked, old / friends together"), the scene is characterized by emptiness and waste. The party fishes for fun rather than food, drawing to shore a harvest of fish so hungry or suicidal that they pounce on naked hooks and taking pleasure in watching the fish drown in a foreign atmosphere. Even the sounds of the passage echo the paradox of an ominous moment remembered fondly, as the fluid sounds of the second and third lines above ("watching the warm /

water thick with fish”) degenerate into harsh cacophony (“black bodies packed, flapping / and contending to breathe”). Of all the revelers, only William Trout in his wise-fool role as a drunken and thwarted fisher king recognizes the darkness shadowing the levity. The speaker of the elegy grants him the last word of the passage, as he draws a grimly funny moral from the experience: “life was shit, death was shit—even *shit* was *shit*.” Simultaneously astute and arrogant, Trout sees his own stagnation reflecting the waste of the world around him.

Near the center of “Another Elegy,” Hall articulates his attitudes toward work, art, and the fear of death in terms resembling his artistic memoir *Life Work*, also published in 1993. In *Life Work*, Hall declares that “the best day begins with waking early,” four or five in the morning, and completing early chores quickly before sitting at his desk and creating or revising poetry with an almost impish glee:

Then I lose myself. In the best part of the best day, *absorbedness* occupies me from footsole to skulltop. Hours or minutes or days—who cares?—lapse without signifying. When I have done as much as I can on the moment’s poem, I move to another. Depending on their lengths, I work on one poem or I work on five or ten. At any moment when a poem does not occupy me wholly, when I feel impatient or discouraged or tired, I drop it quickly; after a while—one hour, three hours?—I feel the poetry-juices drying out. (*Life Work* 41-42; Hall’s emphasis)

Similarly, in Section Four of “Another Elegy,” William Trout’s artistic efforts are described as follows:

Bill Trout
woke up, the best mornings of his life—without debilities
of hangover, without pills or panic—to practice joy
at four o’clock dawn: to test words, to break them down
and build again, patient to construct immovable objects
of art by the pains of intelligent attention—remaining
alert or awake to nightmare. (*Museum* 5)

The artist figure/Fisher King transcends his human frailties when working at his art; only then, the passage suggests, is he capable of achieving pure joy and dispensing truth. In the process, he creates poems paradoxically solid and airy, “immovable objects” no more tangible than nightmare. The poem becomes like the continuing granite Hall describes in “This Poem,” consoling by means of its imperturbability. Clearly Trout’s work routine parallels Hall’s own as described in *Life Work*, and the power Hall ascribes to Trout’s poetry at the end of this passage is, if somewhat immodestly, associated with the power Hall hopes his poetry will possess. But Hall, ever cognizant of the naturalistic, leveling force of death, goes on to imagine his own decline by imagining the physical withering of countless other formerly vibrant people,

including the fictional William Trout:

But the maker of bronzes
dies decapitated in the carwreck; the whitefaced mime
dozes tied to a wheelchair; the saint babbles and drools;
carcinoma refines chemist, farmer, wino, professor, poet,
imbecile, and banker into a passion of three nerves
and a feeding tube.

At the Bayside Hospital Bill's body
heaved as it worked for air; IVs dripped; bloody phlegm
boiled from the hole punched like a grommet in his throat. (*Museum 5*)

Hall confronts the possibility of his own impending death in ugly fashion from liver cancer by detailing various grotesque methods by which all human beings may lose their youthful power, dignity, and vitality. If the poems created by poets like William Trout are "immovable objects of art," the poets themselves are far from indestructible. That their poems may grant them a degree of immortality seems small consolation here, as the horrifically frank depictions of death in the previous passage illustrate.

Folded into the speaker/poet's mixed feelings toward Trout's life and death—and, by extension, his own—is the guilt he feels for using Trout's biography as a subject for his own art, crafted in part as an artifact for his own immortality. Section Five of "Another Elegy" acknowledges Ramazani's observation about one important complicating factor plaguing twentieth-century elegies: their writers' "guilty thought that they reap aesthetic profit from loss, that death is the fuel of poetic mourning," an idea that often leaves modern elegists "worrying that their poems depend on death and hence collude with it" (6). Section Five begins as follows:

Another fisherman writes me: "A man's death is his own;
you take Bill's death away, for public tears." I remember
Bill depressed, drinking double Manhattans straight up,
taunting himself: "Compassion's flack! Elmer Gantry of
Guggenheim grief!" In Coleridge's Notebooks,
he underlined: "Poetry—excites us to artificial feelings—
callous to real ones." (*Museum 6*)

The poet/"fisherman" who writes an elegy for another poet/Fisher King is chastised by a third poet/"fisherman" for making use of a life that did not belong to him. The elegist, however, seeks to justify his work, or at least mollify his guilt, by suggesting that his subject acknowledged the same tendency in his own work. Trout the inveterate poet goes so far as to decry his exploitative tendencies as a poet through poetic language, whose alliterative cacophony suggests the violence of his own emotions concerning

poetry's exploitative, even deceptive, potential ("Compassion's flack! Elmer Gantry / of Guggenheim grief!"). The speaker intimates that, like himself, Trout wondered if his grief poetry represented honest feeling or played falsely on readers' emotions for his own literary credit, as the Coleridge quote indicates. The irony underlying this entire passage is evident. William Trout the fictional poet symbolizes, as much as anyone, Hall himself; Hall is himself the person whose life he "exploits" for artistic gain, an irony underscored by the way in which Hall's invented speaker (yet another imitation of himself) justifies the practice of elegiac poetry by citing other poets (the fictional Trout and the nonfictional Coleridge) who acknowledged its risks for exploitation but nevertheless continued to indulge in the writing of elegies. This short passage at the start of Section Five is heavy with the angst-ridden fears of professional writers whose work inevitably reflects the lives and deaths they personally confront, their own as well as those of intimate others. The by-products of the writer's guilty conscience in relation to his subject matter is echoed in the couplet that begins Section Six, where Hall's speaker declares, "If ambition is innocent, nevertheless it impairs those / it possesses, not to mention their irretrievable children" (*Museum* 6).

Section Six examines aspects of William Trout's life which are intriguingly similar to details of Raymond Carver's life, especially his struggles with alcoholism and his artistic revivification in the wake of a fruitful second marriage. While it is unclear whether Hall had Carver particularly in mind while shaping this section, it is clear that Carver, Tess Gallagher, Hall, and Jane Kenyon were friends and mutually supportive colleagues who frequently corresponded during the 1980s, the decade during which "Another Elegy" underwent initial composition and dozens of revisions. Raymond Carver's papers, housed in Ohio State University's Charvat Collection, include several letters from Hall to Carver suggesting a close personal and professional relationship between the two writers, who frequently read and offered comments on each other's work during the drafting stages. One such letter from Hall to Carver, dated 30 August 1984, indicates that Carver did read a relatively early draft of the poem; in the letter, Hall notes that he had completed two hundred additional drafts of "Another Elegy" since Carver last saw it. Interestingly, even Hall's choice to figure Trout as an avid fisherman, doubtless an attempt to evoke vegetation myths of importance to elegiac poetry, coincidentally resonates with Carver's life and work, as one of his favorite recreations and artistic tropes involved the act of fishing. Section Six of "Another Elegy" describes William

Trout's personal struggles, reflected in and stemming from substance abuse, as follows:

In the interstices of alcohol and woe, Bill vibrated
 awake to a room that surged, shook, and altered shape.
 He secreted vowel-honey in images dangling from prepositions;
 he praised survival.

When he finished his sojourn
 at McLean, where Very and Lowell had paced before him;
 when Margaret left him, removing their daughter, and Bill
 declared bankruptcy; when he was unable for five years
 to take Communion—he drank two Guggenheims and snorted
 an NEA. He quoted Amos: "...as if a man fled from a lion
 and a bear met him." (*Museum* 7)

The parallels between Carver's life and the details in this passage are interesting—Carver repeatedly went through alcoholic detoxification before beginning long-term recovery, suffered through a difficult first marriage and separation, declared bankruptcy because of chronic money woes, and often wrote about the irony of bad luck such as that reflected in Hall's quote from Amos. Nevertheless, it is imperative that readers recognize that such coincidences are not important in and of themselves but acquire importance because of their articulation of the obsession that revealed itself repeatedly in the writings of both Carver and Hall: the desperation of daily struggles for all human beings, famed artists or not, and the threat of spiritual as well as physical death that haunts every action individuals take. The moments Hall describes in this passage represent for Trout the mythical hero a kind of descent into the underworld of his own physical compulsions and spiritual emptiness, a vacuum reflected by Trout's inability "for five years / to take Communion" and Hall's dramatic declaration that the artist, consumed by his own despair, "drank two Guggenheims and snorted / an NEA." Hall, who himself suffered through a painful break-up of his first marriage and a bout with alcohol in the 1960s, no doubt understood well the literal as well as figurative ramifications of such a description. Countless frustrated and afraid artists, enduring their own figurative descent, could identify with the behavioral patterns described in Section Six.

Nevertheless, Trout the hero proved strong and fortunate enough to undergo a resurrection from his alcoholic misery and artistic infertility, made possible in part by his marriage to a new, supportive wife,

a native of India named Reba.³² Hall's choice to introduce this force into "Another Elegy" appears somewhat conventional and sentimental, but it nonetheless resonates in ways with his own life. His announcement of the positive change in Trout's life—"Then in middle age / he fell in love again"—certainly applies to his own, and the beneficent force for Trout's revitalization which Hall attributes to Reba parallels what Hall perceived as Kenyon's positive influence on his own life in the wake of a painful divorce. Trout's redemptive relationship with Reba likewise parallels Gallagher's positive influence on Carver, her ability to assist him in "changing his luck" (Gallagher, *Carver Country* 17)—physically, emotionally, and artistically. Almost self-conscious of the sentimentality the poem suddenly skirts, Hall closes Section Six with a romantic portrait of a revitalized Trout capable at last of working productively again:

He listened again to Chaucer
and recited Spenser's refrain as he stood by the Thames,
holding his Hindu love by the hand; or walking arm in arm
by a lake where Wordsworth walked;
or, happy in Delhi,
reading the Gita, he breathed each morning India's fetid
exhausted air, filling his notebook in warm dawn
as parrots flashed and his throat opened with gold
vowels, line after beautiful line, all the last summer. (*Museum* 7)

In contrast to his old life, Trout's newfound paradise of literary activity is described in terms almost surreal in their richness and diversity. Trout's full resurrection is signified by his return to the work of writing. This freshly experienced period of wholeness and fruitfulness is reinforced through the sounds of the final two lines of the section, long vowels and liquid consonants ("throat opened with gold / vowels, line after beautiful line"). The passage is not without its problems, as Section Seven will subtly suggest. Trout's artistic resurrection—enabled as it is by Reba, who has little presence in Section Six or anywhere else in the poem as anyone other than a helper figure to Trout—can potentially be read as a product of sexual and cultural subordination. However, Hall likely did not intend his portrait of Trout's transformation to evoke images of selfish power plays, and the overall effect of the passage is one of healthy spiritual regeneration

³²In a footnote to *Museum*, Hall includes a fictionalized biographical entry about William Trout as it would appear in the fictionalized *Norton Anthology of Contemporary Verse*. In that "biography," Hall significantly portrays Reba as an artist figure herself, a "Bengali dancer" whose identity as an artist both attributes creative, healing qualities to her character and is suggestive of both Jane Kenyon's and Tess Gallagher's identities as artist figures.

that benefits not merely Trout but those who cared for the writer and his work as well.

Section Seven opens with a portrait of Trout working feverishly up to the moment of his death, the image of the tireless artist that Hall constantly strove to emulate. Again paradox dominates, as the sickly and speechless Trout offers his friend his final poetic voicings shortly before dying:

The week before he died he handed me a clutch of poems.
Speechless, syllables occluded in his throat, he raised
a yellow pad and wrote, "That's it." Eyes protruded
from bone sockets; neck cords strained; trunk heaved
as he looked for his love who gazed out the window
of the room, bare except for the crucifix, downward to the bay
and the brown edges of March. (*Museum* 8)

Once more, Hall's imagery depicts Trout as a messianic artist figure. Trout's message penciled on a legal pad acts as a twentieth-century version of Christ's declaration, "It is finished." Amplifying this portrayal is Hall's description of Trout's sick room as "bare except for the crucifix." The slow pace of the central lines of this passage underscores the heavy emotion surrounding the scene, and the naturalistic description of the dying Trout contrasts dramatically with the romantic description of his return to poetry after marriage at the conclusion of Section Six. The poet who once felt his "throat opened with gold / vowels, line after beautiful line," who even in drunken misery "secreted vowel-honey in images dangling from prepositions," finds himself silenced by death, "syllables occluded in his throat." Done with his writing, with his own life work, Trout's only remaining option is to die.

But the self-conscious poet speaker is not yet dead, and to assert his own vitality and allay his own fears of dying—a primary motivating force behind the writing of elegy, according to Sacks (19)—he continues Trout's elegy for another section and a half by contemplating the ways in which Trout's life and the survivor's elegy will mollify the loss. Section Six ends with the speaker questioning the veracity of his own artistic product by painting a portrait of Trout's later years as much less uniformly highbrow and productive than his earlier passages suggest. He asks himself "Do I tell lies?" and imagines Trout "deliver[ing] his imagination and study to Laverne / and Shirley, laughing when a laughtrack bullied him" in a desperate effort "not to drink" (*Museum* 8). The poet/speaker acknowledges his fictionalizing tendencies by an attempt to tell the "truth"—a thoroughly ironic attempt given the obvious fiction of the entire poem. The larger truths which Hall appears to suggest via his variously colored perceptions and descriptions of the

fictional poet's life and death involve a recognition of the multi-faceted complexities of life and death in general. Trout, neither entirely a devil nor entirely a messiah, is Hall's vision of Everyman. Art and the artist, while obviously powerful enough to invent stories of life and death, cannot forestall the loss of actual, lived lives, though often the mortal artist and his or her mortal audience may entertain such hopes in an effort to cope with personal loss. "Do I tell lies?" Hall asks. Indeed he does, as both he and his readers (or most of them) are well aware. But those lies are useful lies, serving, as Peter M. Sacks notes, to assuage "the subjective pathos that attends those absences which the use of language may seek to redress or appease" (xi).

The opening lines of Section Eight return "Another Elegy" to its beginnings and conclude the poem on a note of qualified hopefulness, although initial lines of the stanza remain wary of the possibility that death invites only desolation:

It is twelve Aprils since we buried him. Now dissertation-
salt preserves *The Collected Poems of William Trout*
like Lenin. Here is another elegy in the tradition
of mourning and envy, love and self-love—as another morning
delivers rain on the fishbone leaves of the rotted year. (*Museum* 8-9)

As in the poem's initial lines, evocative of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, April—traditional hallmark of spring—becomes instead a marker of Trout's death. That Trout's poems have been recognized as great and lasting among the academic elite—preserved in "dissertation-salt"—is not much of a comfort, as the "preservation" of the poems seems less a validation of their vitality than a mechanism to ensure their stagnation. The ambivalent attitude toward the dead and poems about the dead which Jahan Ramazani identifies as characteristic of twentieth-century elegy surfaces here, as the speaker acknowledges his poem to be merely "another elegy in the tradition / of mourning and envy, love and self-love." As much as the speaker may have counted William Trout a friend, he likewise counted the returns—esthetic and/or economic—his elegy for the lost poet (whose reputation, these lines suggest, exceeds that of the speaker) will likely glean for himself. A bit further in the passage, this conflict of motives and emotions is applied to Trout as well, when the speaker, in a tone simultaneously wry and empathetic, describes Trout's life work as "his lifelines that hooked and landed / himself and his own for his book." The irony—that Trout never literally existed as one individual but rather figuratively represents an amalgam of actual poets of Hall's

generation, including himself—further undercuts the mixed messages of the passage.

Still, the speaker is obsessed with the contrast between life lived and life fashioned into artistic product. As the poem's tone shifts to a qualified but amplified hopefulness, Trout is cast again as a messianic Fisher King whose life gives hope to his readers despite its particular unalleviated anguish and early conclusion:

But if a new fixed star
resurrects Bill's words who labored and excelled, not even
Chaucer's or Ovid's accomplishment—"Jove's woll me stellefyne"--
will revise electrodes, jail, and death at fifty. (*Museum* 9)

The speaker begins to question whether Trout's accomplishment in any way assuaged his own suffering, and, as Ramazani would deem fitting of twentieth-century elegy, the cyclical processes of nature undergirding the vegetation myth here fail to act as a comforting force, as they traditionally have done in elegiac poetry. Rather, they again suggest stagnation, an inability to escape life-and-death forces in which humans have little or no control. But hope arrives in the continuation of these lines which conclude the poem: "'unless,' / Bill dying, shriveled and absolved, wrote on a yellow / pad, 'Jesus who walked from the tomb has made a place.'" The conclusion of "Another Elegy" thus finds its hero debunking the writer's myth concerning his own messianic role and placing faith in a form of spirituality reaching beyond the natural world, here represented by Trout's tentative Christian faith—a poetic gesture doubtless emerging from Hall's own Christian faith.

The final lines of "Another Elegy" intimate that art emerges from the artist's suffering as a means to help comfort readers who suffer similarly. Art, however, can rarely cure the artist of his own physical and spiritual ills, though it may provide a mechanism for accessing the emotional responses caused by pain. In this respect, Hall's poem paradoxically echoes and questions Harold Schweizer's theory in *Suffering and the Remedy of Art* that "art is as autonomous, gratuitous, and irreducible to analysis as suffering" (2). It also echoes Hall's own words in an essay written, coincidentally, on T.S. Eliot. There Hall insists that

there are no scales on which to balance the wretchedness of human beings against the accomplishment of works of art. Art's triumph endures in a world separate from the old mire and fury. It is true that works of art conceived in personal wretchedness may console millions of human beings, remote from the artist or the artist's family; but, as the observation of a cause never justifies (or invalidates) a

result, so the success or failure of a result never invalidates (or justifies) a cause.
 ("Notes on T.S. Eliot," *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes* 96)

Inasmuch as the artist figure may create great art as a result of his suffering, that art hardly justifies suffering or consoles the artist in the wake of it, Hall argues. It is the audience who finds consolation, and for whom the artist works his greatest effects.

Following "Another Elegy" in *The Museum of Clear Ideas* is the long, sequential poem *Baseball*, comprised of nine sections called "innings"—themselves made up of nine, nine-line stanzas--and supplemented at the end of this volume with three "Extra Innings." *Baseball*, like the game after which it is patterned, is by turns serious and playful (though most often the latter), interspersing musings on the history and mythology of the game with observations on poetry, late twentieth-century American culture, and issues of life and death—with special attention to Hall's personal experiences in relation to that matter. The occasion for the poem (which relies only loosely on this organizing principle) is the speaker's attempt to explain the game of baseball to the late German collagist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). The speaker, who adopts a variety of names and attitudes throughout the course of the poem, acknowledges up front that his project is virtually impossible—significantly because of a darkly humorous language barrier which, paradoxically, ultimately does not derail him from his purpose:

1. I would like to explain baseball to
 Kurt Schwitters, Merz-poet and artist,

 2. But, as poets
 tell us, the man is dead, and I—call me
 K.C.—lack his German, much less
 death's German. (*Museum* 13)

From the start of the poem, the speaker recognizes that language, even poetic language, cannot fully communicate in the face of death—whether comically, as in this speaker's frivolous attempt to communicate with the dead, or seriously, as in the elegist's attempt to alleviate the pain of loss through the artistry of poetry. However, such an acknowledgment does not prevent the poet from continuing his project, because, in the act of attempting the nearly impossible, some measure of healing is achieved. It is worth reiterating that the poems in *Museum* were composed and revised during Hall's personal battle with cancer, and as s

such they act as versions of self-elegy, even when their most obvious themes do not directly address his own illness and fears of death.

To complement its carefully controlled structure patterned after the rules of the game, Hall thematically develops "Baseball" in an associative, stream-of-consciousness fashion that underscores its psychological and emotional weight, despite the preponderance of intellectual wit that significantly tempers the poem's pathos. The result is a fast-paced poem resembling both the collages created by Kurt Schwitters and the paradoxically joined yet disjointed pattern of actual experience. As Hall's speaker declares at the rough midpoint of the poem, "The madness method / of 'Baseball' gathers bits and pieces" (*Museum* 25). Once again, the most prominent recurring themes involve the paradoxical powers and limitations of language and art, the dying individual's attempt to stave off the onset of death by acting on the sexual/creative urge, and a reliance upon the natural cycle and myths of regeneration as loci of consolation in the face of illness and death.

In "The First Inning," Hall's speaker declares

As the poet says, "Words cannot tell,
cannot express... Words falter... Words are
inadequate to describe..." Poets
woo the unspeakable to their desks,
listening to radio baseball. (*Museum* 14-15)

The poet, whose passion involves finding words to express the inexpressible, admits the impossibility of perfecting the task but tries to do so despite the knowledge of that impossibility. The haphazard material of daily life—the sounds of "radio baseball"—are translated by the poet into the language of art, which manages to unite the ordinary and the extraordinary in the product of the poem, which may or may not access the experience it describes any better than a radio play-by-play. Hall's speaker throughout *Baseball* is skeptical of his readings of experience but knows he can depend only on his perceptions, and their translation into poetry, to methodize the madness of actual lives. Thus the speaker who declares in "The Fourth Inning" that "the truest poem exposes / itself in a fury of self-love / and flagellation" (23) is the same speaker who can insist in "The Third Inning" that

9. The leg is the dancer and the mouth
the sculptor. The tongue models vowels
or chisels consonants. Pause, pitch, pace,

length, and volume patine a surface
 of shapes that the mouth closes over.
 Behind our listening lips, working
 the throat's silent machine, one muscle
 shuts on/off/on/off: the motionless
 leg of the word that leaps in the world. (*Museum* 21)

While questioning the worth and the motives of even the most earnest poetry, Hall delights in the sensual pleasure of the art, pleasure which derives much of its power from paradox.³³ The rich alliteration and assonance evident in the passage from "The Third Inning" is further complicated by its contradictory imagery—the "listening lips," the "throat's silent machine," and the "motionless / leg of the word that leaps in the world." The art of poetry, linked here to the art of dance (as in Yeats's "Among School Children") and to the art of sculpture, is an art of touch as much as of sound, and it is through touch as much as through sound that the most inexpressible emotions are accessed through poetry, as later sections of *Baseball* will demonstrate.

Inasmuch as poetry is a sensual art to Hall, it is not surprising that his elegiac persona in *Baseball* illustrates Peter M. Sacks's argument in *The English Elegy* that elegists often confront their fear of death and grief for loss by asserting a highly sexualized version of their poetic selves (Sacks 7). The sexual impulse is linked with the creative act of writing the poem, and the speaker in *Baseball* frequently asserts his sexuality when death fears besiege him. Passages from "The Third Inning" (in which Hall refers to the speaker's wife as "Jennifer," Kenyon's middle name) best exemplify this pattern:

Jennifer and I make love at night;
 afterward, happiness continues,
 as if the radio, turned on low

3. at three A.M., told about baseball
 all night long in Japanese or Spanish,
 with crowd noises the same as Fenway.
 The next morning, as Jenny pauses
 by the kitchen sink and looks idly
 out the window, I gaze at her ass;
 then she squeezes an orange: Its bright
 gelatinous membranes rupture to
 fill her blue cup with sunny ichor.

³³This passage illustrates, both in argument and in texture, the central thesis of "Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird," referenced earlier in this chapter.

4. The ship made twenty-five knots into
 a fifty-knot wind over hot gulf
 water. I climbed to the topmost deck,
 tilting my weight into the hot wind,
 poising my heavy body into
 the wind's weight, pulling myself along
 rails with both hands to push against wind
 that scudded black clouds into blackness
 with the moon down and few stars showing.

5. Wind flattened my beard and my nostrils.
 Wind gathered my shout and shuffled it.
 It is ecstasy beyond pleasure
 to watch Jennifer squeeze orange juice. (*Museum* 19-20)

The speaker's pleasure at recalling a night of lovemaking is interrupted by a daydream of chaos, indicative of his fear of death and loss. The speaker is literally and figuratively at sea, caught in a dark night of the soul, almost starless, thoroughly helpless in section four and the start of section five. The speaker's terror reaches its nadir when he realizes he has lost the power of his voice to the air: "Wind gathered my shout and shuffled it." What rescues him from this fear of being swept into oblivion is the memory of what he witnessed in section three, the highly sexualized vision of his wife squeezing an orange. His word choices in section three—"Its bright / gelatinous membranes rupture to / fill her blue cup with sunny ichor"—create a euphony of sensual sound that verges on onomatopoeia, asserting life and liveliness in merely the description of what he sees. Still, as Sacks suggests, if the sensual and the sexual can momentarily rescue the elegist from horrified realizations of his own death, it also paradoxically asserts the inevitability of death because of its very physicality. If the elegist praises the physical to assure himself that his body has not yet begun to decay, he nevertheless acknowledges by doing so that his body is subject to decay, and inevitably cannot avoid succumbing to death.

As its overarching metaphors indicate, *Baseball* and its mortality themes pivot upon the speaker's faith in the order of the seasons and in the ultimate regeneration of the dying and the dead. In "The Ninth Inning," the speaker says

Do you start to feel,
 Kurt, as if you're getting it? I mean
 baseball, as in the generations
 of old players hanging on, the young

4. coming up from triple-A the first

of September, sitting on the bench
 or pinch-running, ready for winter's
 snow-plowing and cement-mixing, while
 older fellows work out in their gyms
 or cellars, like George "Shotgun" Shuba,
 who swung a bat against a tethered
 ball one thousand times a day, line drives
 underneath his suburban ranchhouse. (*Museum* 37-38)

As the baseball players adapt with the seasons, so the speaker attempts to change, preparing in the decline of winter for the revitalization of the spring. In this passage, Hall positions *Baseball* within a twentieth-century version of regeneration myth: players in winter "descend" to their cellars to prepare for their resurrection to the glory of the game in spring and summer. As playful as the metaphor is, it nevertheless offers *Baseball* its clearest articulation of the hope that sustains its speaker, the hope that spiritual and artistic effort can in some measure thwart physical decay.

Strangely enough in *Baseball*, Hall does not link these various themes directly to his personal struggles with cancer until the reader nears the poem's conclusion—the "Ninth Inning" and the "Extra Innings" section attached to the end of *Museum*, following *Horsecollar's Odes*. It is in these sections that Hall confronts most directly his most recent personal battles with illness—his mother's hospitalization for colon and heart disease, Jane Kenyon's operation to remove a cancerous salivary gland in 1987 (seven years before her leukemia diagnosis), and Hall's diagnosis of and treatment for colon cancer in 1989. His mother's illness receives a brief description toward the end of "The Ninth Inning":

At the Temple Medical Center
 in New Haven I wait. My mother
 at eighty-six goes through the upper
 and lower GI again. My mind
 jangles, thinking of my sick son in
 New York and his sick one-year-old girl. (*Museum* 39)

Here the speaker, obsessed with cycles of life and death, finds his worry over his mother's health transformed into worry over the health of his son and granddaughter, sick with a virus. Noticeably, he does not mention worry for his own health, but his role as the generational link between his mother and son suggests the unspoken fear he harbors, fear which will become realized with his own cancer diagnosis, which he treats in "The Eleventh Inning." This passage illustrates *Baseball's* connection with earlier Hall poetry such as "My Son, My Executioner" and "The Day I Was Older," in which the speaker's mortality is

brought to the forefront of his consciousness by his recognition that he, like both his elder and younger loved ones, is irrevocably mortal.

In "The Tenth Inning," Hall broaches the subject of Kenyon's treatment for glandular cancer. Several passages resonate with Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and return to the concerns she expressed in that poem regarding Hall's cancer surgery and her precarious position as outsider looking into the potentiality of death by watching her husband battle the deadly illness. In this part of *Baseball*, Hall is the observer, confronting the inevitability of both his own mortality and Kenyon's by watching her endure and recover from her treatment. Throughout *Baseball*, Hall refers to Kenyon by her middle name, Jennifer, in a gesture that simultaneously distances and personalizes the couple's predicament. The couple find themselves seeking comfort in daily routine as at least a distraction, perhaps even an invalidation, of death. Less consumed with joviality than earlier sections of *Baseball*, "Extra Innings" translates as fully as possible the fear possessing the speaker and his wife during their near-coincidental personal struggles to overcome cancer.

The third passage of "The Tenth Inning" begins the story of Kenyon's glandular cancer treatment in terms which clearly resonate with Kenyon's poems on Hall's illness:

3. After the bald surgeon making his rounds
removed the bandage from Jennifer's neck,
he pressed tiny band-aids over drainholes
side by side like snakefang punctures. As we
drove home we sat together in silence,
touching each other lightly, as if touch
were safety. Our ecstatic young dog leapt
to see her home—and pawed her incision
open. All night I reached in the darkness
to feel her familiar body again (*Museum* 103)

Once more, as in "Chrysanthemums," words become inadequate to the couple when faced with the possibility of permanent separation through death. The couple's silence recalls Kenyon's declaration in "Chrysanthemums" that the speaker and her husband were "speechless all the way home" from the doctor's office shortly after his cancer diagnosis (*Otherwise* 195). Touch becomes more vital to communication than speech, as the couple attempts to reassure each other of their mutual presence and support through physical rather than verbal gestures. The light touches during the car ride are amplified by the husband's tentative

nighttime gestures which hint of the erotic and emphasize again the life-affirming powers of the sexual urge in the face of death. The final lines also recall Kenyon's "Pharaoh," in which the speaker "woke in the night to see [her husband's] / diminished bulk" beside her (*Otherwise* 213), only Hall's lines bespeak a greater hopefulness that his spouse's physical presence is still spiritually vital, less dramatically threatened than the husband in "Pharaoh." The comfort the husband regains through his wife's physical presence is maintained into the morning through his pursuit of their typical routine:

All morning we sought comfort
in the blessedness of the resumed hour,
in the dear repetition of daily
gestures and tasks. We breathed calmly again
until like a sudden front from the north
we remembered the word cancer. (*Museum* 104)

Significantly, the couple's relaxation in the wake of their medical ordeal is shattered by "the word cancer," a verbal recognition that nearly erases the comfort brought on by the silent touches they had shared earlier. It is the "word" that arouses panic in the speaker and forces him to relive the rapid-paced sequence of terror at his wife's operation:

5. The drive to the hospital, admissions,
gown, bed, and a quick night's arduous sleep.
At six-thirty the following morning
I walked by her gurney to the metal
swoon of the elevator, then returned
to this house to await the surgeon's call.
In dread of consciousness I dozed beside
the telephone; I dreamt of a garden
where tomatoes sagged erupting black juice,
where squash lapsed softly drooling corrupt lymph

6. and seed, where Kentucky Wonders curled up,
cankered, and dropped from the derelict vine.
When the phone rang with the surgeon's message,
I would not have anyone else tell her;
I drove to the hospital to tell her
that the growth in her neck was malignant—
and that pathology's slow slides required
six days to deliver a prognosis
on the likelihood of metastasis
or probability of recurrence. (*Museum* 104)

The speaker's dream concocts a pathetic fallacy for his wife's illness and in horrifying terms portrays her death as the loss of a garden to disease, thus again employing seasonal imagery to figure the speaker's fear

of loss. Also important is the communication imagery evident in these passages. It is fitting that the speaker-poet takes it upon himself to inform his wife of her diagnosis, not only because of his role as beloved spouse but also because of their shared role as messengers who traffic in words, who value the act of telling and who weave that aspect of their personalities into their daily identities. The speaker's insistence that he "would not have anyone else tell her" recalls Kenyon's speaker's declaration in "Work" that her role as poet compelled her to share her own and her husband's grief to her poetic audience, because her identity as poet required it (*Otherwise* 141). In "The Tenth Inning," the speaker's message, like that in "Work," is both personal and public as it is expressed through Hall's poetry. By telling his poetic audience of how he told Jane Kenyon the results of her biopsy, Hall uses poetry both to claim their story as their own, seizing control over a helpless situation (see Dreifuss-Kattan 174), and to offer consolation to his readers who may find themselves in similar situations (see Sacks xi).

Later in "The Tenth Inning," Hall returns to the use of sexual imagery as a consoling force operating against the fear of death. In sections seven and eight, however, the speaker finds it difficult to transcend his fear of personal loss, despite the couple's lovemaking:

In my contracted heart Jennifer died
a thousand times. As I watched her alive,
I held her dying. Again and again,
I looked covertly at the small bandage
over the smooth skin I kissed so often

8. while we made love and I nuzzled her neck—
the skin swollen, with its row of stitches
like a zipper—and I trembled, dreading
that a black cell divided and split there.
In self-pity I watched the widower
weep by her grave; lamenting, lamented. (*Museum* 105)

Opposing forces drive the tension of these passages. The speaker views his wife as simultaneously representing life and death ("As I watched her alive, / I held her dying") This death is not merely her own, but his as well. The conflict exposed in earlier poems like "My Son, My Executioner"—in which Hall's speaker envisions in others' lives harbingers of his own death—takes an even more morbid turn here, as the speaker simultaneously fears his own loneliness and his own death in fearing the loss of his wife. He plainly admits his own self-absorption in the final two lines quoted above, where he characterizes the image of his

mourning self as “lamenting, lamented”—one who is doomed both to lose and to be lost.

Near the conclusion of “The Tenth Inning,” language is again emphasized as a paradoxical force which the speaker employs in an attempt to gain control of his own desperate situation but which, nevertheless, underlines the volatility of that situation. As Anne Hunsaker Hawkins notes in *Reconstructing Illness*, the highly specialized, clinical language of twentieth-century medical environments, dominated mostly by expression of scientific observation rather than by human communication, often leaves patients feeling further alienated than they may already feel because of their illness, which places them on the margins of late-twentieth-century Western life (Hawkins 11-13). In the final two sections of “The Tenth Inning,” Hall prefigures his use of clinical language in the poetry of *Without* to illustrate the sense of confusion faced by the ill and the dying, who find themselves translating the highly technical language of the hospital into the highly personal language of the home in order to process emotionally and intellectually their condition’s ramifications:

Pathology telephoned its words: “a
muco-epidermoid carcinoma,
the size of a grape, intermediate
in virulence, encapsulated in
the membrane of the salivary gland”--

10. with no likelihood of metastasis
and little for recurrence. Next morning,
we woke alert in the pink-and-green dawn,
aware of joy at waking for the first
morning in weeks, in blissful consciousness
cherishing the settlement of the day:
Routine was paradise—walking the dog,
newspaper, coffee, love, rye toast, work, grape
juice, the Yankees beaten three straight, Cleveland
coming to town for four, a big series. (*Museum* 105-106)

By claiming the clinical language—and, equally important, the indifferent clinical tone—of the medical report for the language of poetry, Hall asserts some measure of control over a linguistic authority whose effect, if not intent, is to deny the patient and her loved ones autonomy in the midst of an already shattering threat to their identities. The speaker demonstrates the couple’s tortured wait for news by delaying the most important aspect of the diagnosis until the start of section ten, which returns the message to the speaker, rather than to the pathologist, to convey in his own words. The poet then “translates” the human effects of

the clinician's diagnosis into a description of what the good news means to the couple, a resumption of daily routine. That resumption of routine again hints at Hall's dependence on cycles as affirmative of life; Kenyon's reprieve from death can only be celebrated properly by the couple's return to the life they shared together before that life was threatened by a cancer diagnosis.

The couple's bliss is short-lived, however; "The Eleventh Inning" introduces as its key subject Hall's 1989 diagnosis and treatment for colon cancer. Again, the darker side of the life cycle, the legacy of pain and death signaled at first by the illnesses of earlier generations, acts as Hall's entry point into this subject:

Two innings ago,
at the end of the ninth, I drove my mother
for the upper GI. We dreaded cancer;
but I felt fatigued all day, taking six naps,
and it was I who constructed a quiet
carcinoma at the top of my colon. (*Museum* 107)

The understated irony of the passage belies its seriousness, and the speaker this time links a harbinger of death with "quiet," the silence that defies the power of words to comfort and to heal. Hall goes on to describe the wordless recognition the dying have for each other and for the often unspoken anxieties they share:

The posthumous recognize each other at
store or postoffice: that one, with the pale shroud

3. wound invisibly around her body, who
exudes an aroma of continual
termination in a sickroom of terror
and gratitude. We nod at each other; we
acknowledge pain, baseball, lethargy, and cracks
in the bedroom ceiling. ... (*Museum* 107)

Again paradox gives the passage its energy, as poetic language is used to portray movingly the wordless communication taking place among those made most self-conscious of their impending deaths. Expression is both impossible to achieve and to avoid. All that need or can be done when the dying meet is to "nod at each other," to observe in another's particular and unique suffering a way of accessing and acknowledging one's own.

The power, and lack thereof, of the spoken word in confrontation with death is reiterated in Hall's

description of his official colon cancer diagnosis. That Hall even attempts to describe the diagnostic procedure in poetic language suggests the importance of the subject not merely to Hall but to the many readers who may have themselves experienced a similar ordeal; few things could seem less poetic than a colonoscopy, yet Hall describes the procedure's outcome with quietly horrific grace:

The doctor

6. with thick glasses and cheerful manner mumbled,
 "Fine, all clear," during the colonoscopy—
 then quieted. Withdrawing his instrument,
 solemn, he spoke with a summoned dignity,
 looking in my eyes: "You have colon cancer,"
 September 18, 1989, and
 we contracted a surgeon and a schedule.
 I still hear his clear inadmissible voice. (*Museum* 108)

Once more, the concept of death, of a threat to the speaker's physical existence, is first met with silence rather than speech. For as long as the procedure suggested health, the doctor could "mumble," could speak reassuring words that would prove meaningless and inaccurate when the speaker's actual condition was discovered. When the doctor speaks at last to explain his condition to the speaker, his words appear artificially conveyed, crafted to be delivered with "summoned dignity" that befits the occasion but nonetheless fails to penetrate to the speaker at the time. What the speaker most remembers is not the words of the doctor but the sound of his "clear inadmissible voice"; Hall's choice of the word *inadmissible* here well communicates the fact that what the doctor told his patient could not be communicated, could not be processed, at the time the message was delivered, because words lost meaning in the midst of the speaker's fear and shock. Again the paradox of the power/powerlessness of words asserts itself.

In sections seven, eight, and nine of "The Eleventh Inning," Hall grapples with his own impending death through his confrontation with the dying of a close family friend, Jack Jensen, the learned minister of South Danbury Church, of which Hall and Kenyon were members. Jensen died of cancer in 1990, and Hall in "The Eleventh Inning" recalls his own fears of personal extinction while standing at the bedside of his friend. Hall describes Jensen smiling at his visitors between episodes of sleep, "showing affection by smiling / because he could no longer speak" (*Museum* 109). Once more, words fail both poet and scholar when confronted with permanent personal loss to death, and physical gestures become the only viable

means of expression between friends, a situation further exemplified in the following passage:

As I held
his cold hand, I felt my own hand turning cold.
My pulse slowed and energy flowed from my hand
into his hand, under blue skin to his heart;
my breath turned shallow and my dying body,
in pain of cold and good estate, drained itself
into his body. ... (*Museum* 109)

The friendship bond, affirmed here by touch rather than words, does not come without a price. As in many earlier Hall poems, the speaker discovers his fear of his own mortality interfering with his ability to communicate his love for his friend. Jensen's touch feels practically vampiric to Hall, who sees in his friend's pitiful decline a precursor of his own death. The section continues as follows:

Frightened, watching my grave
open and suggest that I might enter it,

9. as if an owed death assumed me to itself,
I withdrew my hand. I warmed my aching hand
in my other hand still warm, and paced outside
his room on squares of the hospital hallway
while my friend in his pale skin snored into death.
We lay on the same bed, but I stepped away
from Jack in my fear. I prayed for forgiveness,
and next morning ate peanut butter again
for breakfast, read the *Globe*, and wrote at my desk.
When wrinkled flesh warmed itself again, I made
love with Jennifer in her grieving body. (*Museum* 109)

Even the physical gesture becomes limited for the speaker who assumes himself dying while watching his close friend die under similar circumstances. Hall finds himself at this point in a liminal space between life and death, figured in the passage above by the speaker's lonely pacing of the hospital hall outside his friend's room and by his hands, one warm and one cold after touching Jack Jensen's dying body. The speaker's guilt for his inability to support his friend as fully as he would wish manifests itself in his prayer for forgiveness, which worked well enough to validate the life remaining to him. This life is once again signaled by the speaker's return to daily routine, the comfort of taking part in the life cycle that surrounds him. Once more, the sexual/creative acts of writing and lovemaking are linked forces employed to stave off the fear of imminent death. The speaker's mate finds herself "grieving"—for her dying friend, for her husband, and for herself in her loss of two people she loves. This passage illustrates Sacks's point that the

grieving elegist often discovers that "our consoling images are most often figures for an immortal but metaphorized sexual force" (7), and that returning to the language of poetry in the wake of loss is both inevitable and difficult.

The final section of "The Eleventh Inning" presents the speaker in slow recovery from his operation to remove the cancerous portion of his colon. Significantly, it is also the first part of *Baseball* to address the Jennifer figure directly as "you," foregrounding the couple's dependence on each other. Once more, the speaker finds solace in a return to cyclical routine and in the sexual/creative act:

11. When you drove me back home from the hospital,
 you had strung tiny lights over the painted
 Victorian bed. I slept. For the Series,
 we moved a recliner in front of the box.
 Over the weeks as I grew stronger, as pain
 diminished, brother dread kept vigil by me.
 But slowly the day returned; my skin returned
 to rub against your skin and we touched again
 in the complacency of the ecstatic
 day's routine, inhabiting this clapboard,
 quotidian, rare, sensible paradise. (*Museum* 110)

Hall here has arisen from the underworld of his operation to reclaim his "sensible paradise," overcoming "brother dread" which, as he likewise described in *Life Work*, lurked in the background of his recovery period. Once again, touch signifies an affirmation of life and in this case allows Hall to work and love again despite his brush with death. Regeneration has begun, and what is left to Hall from his ordeal is the need to write about it and communicate his experience to others faced with similar fears.

"The Twelfth Inning" develops this sense of renewed hope and brings *Baseball* and its "Extra Innings" to a close. In the following passage, all of the speaker's recent anxieties are bundled into a portion of a stanza dominated by a tone of acceptance of mortality and a celebration of the potentiality of the present moment:

On Jennifer's neck it is impossible to
 detect the scars of her cancer: virgin again.
 K.C. monitors a possible recurrence
 by checking the level of his blood's CEA
 each quarter, raising anxiety to lose it
 for three more months of Jennifer's shorts, poetry,
 and baseball. My father is thirty-five years dead,
 buried on Christmas Eve. For twenty years his death
 provoked the choices of my life. (*Museum* 113)

The joys and limitations of the sexual/creative act, of artistic language, of seasonal cycles—"Jennifer's shorts, poetry, / and baseball"—represent the speaker's urge toward life in the face of imminent death. The final lines of the passage above suggest in muted terms the extent to which the fear of death has long been a threateningly palpable presence in the speaker's life. Although, he suggests, it took him twenty years to realize and overcome the emotional impact of his father's death on his life, he will not waste time with worry over the possible recurrence of his own cancer. Instead, he vows to take pleasure in the time he has at hand while acknowledging the struggle required to keep the fear of death at bay. Thus the ambivalence of the final section of "The Twelfth Inning" is understandable:

12. In September the Red Sox lose games in the ninth.
The season ends. Even if you win the Series,
the season ends, O, and games dwindle to Florida's
Instructional League where outfielders without wheels
learn to be catchers. From Florida north will truck
oranges that Jennifer squeezes in the cold
light of a low sun. I wear my yellow sweater;
we eat scrambled eggs from blue and white dishes, her
hair's kerchief is yellow. We gather yellow days
inning by inning with care to appear careless,
thinking again how Carlton Fisk ended Game Six
in the twelfth inning with a poke over the wall. (*Museum* 115)

Life and death unite in the final stanza in imagery simultaneously suggestive of both. The yellows that dominate the stanza indicate both vivacity and age, especially considering the "yellow days" the aging couple spends taking "care to appear careless," working to suppress aggressive dread of death, which can arrive as suddenly as a game-winning home run. Hall's speaker asserts the simple but far from simplistic paradox, that life and death cannot exist without each other. It is in this uneasy consolation that the speaker and his wife must take comfort.

After his 1991 operation for liver cancer, Hall chose to extend *Baseball* in a sense, by including "The Thirteenth Inning" in his 1996 collection of poetry, *The Old Life*. Indicative of the return to chaos and panic which Hall and Kenyon endured after his liver cancer diagnosis and treatment, "The Thirteenth Inning"—while structured in similar associative fashion to the other "Inning" poems—actually contains fourteen sections, plus a prose-poetry interruptive sequence that Hall refers to as a "rain delay." Similarly, as the poem's conclusion is continually delayed, so Hall manages to delay dealing finally and completely

with his own death, which his medical treatment and his will to live also literally forestall. Fittingly, Hall also incorporates references to William Trout, whose death as described in "Another Elegy" might, Hall feared, resemble his own. Hall also makes proclamations on the nature of suffering which recall Schweizer's argument in *Suffering and the Remedy of Art*. In the fifth section Hall declares, "Like euphoria but / more frequent and more ineluctable, suffering / is universal and incomparable" (*The Old Life* 17), and in the seventh section he insists, "Suffering is the privacy that accompanies / us on our cold excursion; even if it becomes / public, we examine its degree in solitude" (18). The paradox of pain and loss is that those experiences are both unsharable and shared, and it is the paradox of the poet's situation that he or she must make the effort to communicate those experiences that can never be entirely communicated.

"The Thirteenth Inning" is, consequently, darker than many previous sections of *Baseball*, as Hall in grappling with his cancer for a second time sees less available opportunity for survival. Still, many of the same poetic strategies to defy death are exhibited in the poem, if tempered in tone. In section four, for example, Hall recalls how two of his grandchildren were born at the time of his liver surgery, suggesting an affirmation of faith in the regenerative capabilities of the life cycle and in the sexual/creative act as a device for assuring a measure of immortality despite the individual's inevitable mortal state. The sexual/creative act as a method for delaying death is further emphasized in sections five and six, where Hall most obviously links himself as writer and subject with his poetic alter-ego William Trout:

Dr. Sutton performed
resection. Morphine in ICU, five minutes sleep
alternating with five minutes writhing, tubes twisted
like spider legs. I remembered my friend William Trout
and Reba, who crawled into his deathbed carefully

6.
to administer her warm body. For "writhing" read
"writing" throughout, as Hanuman and Ganesh appeared
bringing floral pots and intravenous nirvana. (*The Old Life* 17)

Here couplehood, if no antidote for death, at least mollifies its pain, as the partner's "warm body" is "administered" to the ill lover like medication. The speaker in recovery endures a series of ascents and descents to and from consciousness, microcosmic evocations of the death and resurrection of the hero, whose drama is highlighted by the additional ministrations of nurses who, like priests, bring "floral pots and

intravenous nirvana." This drama is highlighted by Hall's instruction to the reader, "For 'writhing' read / 'writing' throughout." Here Hall most directly links the process of recovery to the process of writing about the ordeal, recalling Dreifuss-Kattan's assertion in *Cancer Stories* that writing about the illness allows cancer patients an opportunity to maintain a portion of control over their radically altered lives, to "objectify and externalize, and hence to communicate," the actual ordeal of their illness, and to attach some meaning to the otherwise senseless condition of human mortality (Dreifuss-Kattan 5). When Hall describes himself during recovery in the tenth section as "[u]nable to speak for respiring," the motivation behind writing a poem about his illness is clear: the artifact serves as a reinforcement of his identity as poet, and his lively power developed through that identity is reasserted in defiance of the silence threatened by weakness, illness, and death.

The eleventh section offers a matter-of-fact description of Hall's post-surgical chemotherapy treatment which again transforms clinical language, a central part of twentieth-century culture, into poetic language. To the industrious poet, the enforced inactivity occasioned by his illness and recovery is nightmarish, and the image of the speaker rendered immobile while "Leukovorin drips into [his] wrist-back for two hours" sharply contrasts with the image of the poet in Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and in earlier passages of *Baseball*, the determined maker who enters the hospital for colon cancer surgery with letters and manuscripts on which to work. The twelfth section of "The Thirteenth Inning" further illustrates the poet's physical and spiritual fatigue in the wake of his ordeal, comparing him in pointed ways to both his dying eighty-nine-year-old mother and his long-dead father:

At my mother's house on Ardmore Street I take four naps
a day as we set her up again, at eighty-nine,
returning from another journey when she turned blue
while paramedics siren'd her to Yale-New Haven.
Jennifer freezes soup, rubs me down daily, and sees
a man at the corner of her eye who vanishes.
She recognizes the face of my father, who died
thirty-seven years ago in this airless guest room
where we sleep for a week. She says: "He looks after you."
Does he look *for* me? Today I am a dozen years
older than my father ever became. I recall
nineteen fifty-five when the Dodgers beat the Yankees
four out of seven, and my namesake died on this bed. (*The Old Life* 22-23)

This passage resonates with Anne Hunsaker Hawkins's description of the journey motif as a common

organizational paradigm for pathographical writing (*Reconstructing Illness* 78). Just as the mother's near-death experience is figured as a journey, so is the speaker's long experience with life and death suggestive in subtle ways of a journey which has brought him full circle to die, in his imagination, in the same room where his father died thirty-seven years earlier. The speaker is caught in a paradoxical bind, a quest intertwining both his struggle to survive his cancer and his conviction that death is imminent—a conviction that results in a quest for the father figured again in paradoxical terms as the father's quest for the son ("Does he look *for* me?"). The healthy, vigorous son who watched in agony as his father died from lung cancer has, at this point of the poem, unexpectedly taken his father's place. Jennifer, who was earlier the patient for whom the speaker offered recuperative care, is transformed here into the caregiver, whose touch is now as necessary to the speaker as his was to her during her recovery from glandular cancer treatments. The speaker's imagined vision of himself in her eyes ("a man at the corner of her eye who vanishes") powerfully resembles the portrait of Hall that Kenyon paints in *Constance's* "Pharaoh": a "diminished bulk, lying beside me— / you on your back, like a sarcophagus / as your feet held up the covers..." (*Otherwise* 213). Indeed, the twelfth section of "The Thirteenth Inning" well exemplifies Hawkins's description of journey-motif pathography in *Reconstructing Illness*:

The bed itself becomes a "sickbed," perhaps even a "deathbed"; the spouse or parent or adult child turns into a caregiver; the whole rhythm, pattern, and purpose of life drastically alters; even the body—that most intimate and familiar of the worlds in which we live—is transformed. Illness is like the hero's call to adventure, only this is a call that cannot be refused: whether they want to or not, the sick become denizens of a strange land. (78)

At last Hall concludes *Baseball* and its "Extra Innings" poems with the fourteenth section of "The Thirteenth Inning," in which he imagines the cynical side of his speaker's voice (referred to in *Museum* as "Manager Zero") chastising himself for conceding to the lure of self-pity in the wake of his cancer treatment. The final lines voice what Hall's speaker imagines his worst critic would find most objectionable about the poem, a rebuke paradoxical by nature in that it denies the poem's usefulness to a larger readership while acknowledging in its first sentence why it and poems like it are, in fact, necessary for the dying and the bereaved:

"Everyone dies. Blubbing never deterred a last breath
from blurring its elegy on a redundant mirror.

The narcissist believes that his death is the only death,
 and remorseless self-pity makes music of self-regard.
 There is something a little wrong about the sitter's mouth.
 You roll like a dog in the stinking carcass of your death." (*The Old Life* 24)

Indeed, everyone dies, and everyone grieves for the self, as the passage indicates; thus self-elegy proves much more than the solipsistic indulgence that the speaker's conscience here decries. Although the cynic may question the justifiability of the artist transforming himself into an art object capable of eliciting pity from the audience ("There is something a little wrong about the sitter's mouth"³⁴), the poet cannot prevent himself from writing about such emotionally charged experiences because of the massive space they inhabit in his daily life. The cynicism and ambivalence expressed in this passage provides evidence for Jahan Ramazani's argument in *The Poetry of Mourning* that the twentieth-century elegist, conscious of complex emotional reactions to the subject of death, cannot respond poetically to such a complicated subject with pure encomium or even pure lament, but must in turn express cynicism and ambivalence to the actuality of loss, even if that loss is rooted in the trauma of confronting his own death (Ramazani 5).

In the long poetical autobiography *The Old Life*, Hall revisits many of the issues explored more richly in *Baseball*. A short passage of *The Old Life*, however, eloquently and beautifully articulates Hall's and Kenyon's dependence upon each other for comfort when they both believed he would soon die from his yet-to-be-excised liver cancer:

When Dr. Clark telephoned
 about the hourglass-shaped lesion
 in my liver, I was sixty-
 three and lost. Jane and I lay
 on the painted bed
 weeping and hugging. Only the body
 of the other—rocking,
 hopeless, wet-faced—provided us house. (*The Old Life* 105)

The image conjured here of the couple comforting each other in their mutual yet individual grief echoes the image of the couple lying together in the husband's dead grandparents' bed in Kenyon's "Work" (*Otherwise*

³⁴This image--the flawed artistic product resulting from the flawed artist attempting to make near-perfect art out of imperfect actual experience--threads throughout much of Hall's poetry in *The Old Life* and fits well with one of the key issues at hand in this project: artistic language's limitations in accessing and alleviating the grief associated with traumatic personal loss. For some of Hall's other uses of this image, see the opening passage of "The Thirteenth Inning" (*The Old Life* 15) and Hall's description of his mother's funeral in the long title poem of *The Old Life* (120).

141). The image of the "hourglass-shaped lesion" highlights the importance of time, suddenly rendered fleeting and uncertain by the cancer diagnosis, to the speaker and his wife. This scene also reinforces the importance of touch as a critical mode of communication when words fail, as here the speaker acknowledges that "*Only* the body / of the other" [emphasis added] provides solace at such a profoundly threatening moment for both members of the marriage. The emphasis on touch, by now evident in both Hall's and Kenyon's poetry on terminal illness and death, not only underscores the limitations of otherwise powerful language to communicate the pain of illness and loss but also echoes the common fear among the terminally ill that they are "untouchable," a fear resulting in part, as Dreifuss-Kattan points out, from feelings of loneliness in facing one's own disappearance from the lives of loved ones (*Cancer Stories* 100-101). Finally, the speechless couple—transformed into speechless infants by the cancer diagnosis—are able to locate comfort only in each other. Couplehood and its bonds act as the only available refuge to the immediate shock and pain of a cancer diagnosis—shock and pain which will ironically and tragically revisit the couple once more before *The Old Life* comes to a close.

Near the end of *The Old Life*, Hall describes himself returning to his normal routine after recuperating from his recent bouts with cancer and the death of his ninety-year-old mother. On a winter morning dominated by peaceful shades of blue, Hall buys his newspaper, prepares coffee for himself and for Kenyon, and sits in a blue chair eating bagels and reading the *Globe*. The chaos of his recent dealings with death have appeared to settle; at the end of the morning, Hall tells the reader, "I sat myself at the desk / for this day's engagement / with the revisions of a whole life" (*The Old Life* 122). The calm is abruptly shattered, though, by the end of the next stanza:

Blueberry bagels
and the *Globe*. We walked in our daily fields
ignorant of the moment
but knowing that grass would collapse
one day into oblivion.
Every three months a Hitchcock
tech drew a titre
of my blood; a week later the phone rang
with numbers to water
the green meadow or burn it away.
Together we worried
over my days remaining until
on a Monday Jane's

nose bled. By bedtime, oxymoronic
 poison dripped murderous
 reprieve into her blood's white water. (*The Old Life* 122-23)

Paradox of situation dominates this stanza. Hall's and Kenyon's equilibrium, established in the previous section of the poem, here is portrayed as precarious, always mildly threatened by the fear the couple harbored of a return of Hall's cancer. The anguish of the situation, and of the horrible irony of Kenyon's leukemia diagnosis, returns Hall the poet to his psychic roots, his favored metaphors for the life cycle employed in earlier poems like "The Day I Was Older." Here water imagery, vegetation imagery, and references to the passage of time structure the poem's message and momentum, just as they did in the earlier text. The chemotherapy Hall describes in the final lines of this stanza is "oxymoronic" both in its effects on Kenyon—weakening her body in an effort to strengthen it—and in its use as a healing agent for her rather than for Hall. Cruelly and suddenly, the couple is plunged into chaos again, their roles reversed. Predictably, the result of such physical and emotional turmoil is a collapse of language, as the final stanza of *The Old Life* indicates:

Back at the motel, after
 all day by her bed, I walked up
 and down, talking
 to myself without making a sound, staying
 clear, and made a slip
 of the tongue: "My life has leukemia." (*The Old Life* 123)

Kenyon's ordeal, at this point too fresh and painful for Hall to describe more fully, is reduced to a few lines concluding the end of her husband's poetic autobiography, eliding the bulk of her treatment and decline prior to her trip to Seattle for a bone marrow transplant. As these lines indicate, words are failing the grieving husband, so much so that the poet who traditionally has trumpeted his love for working with words is capable only of "talking / to [him]self without making a sound," itself a paradoxical situation. In "staying / clear" of the fear of his wife's death, which threatens him now at least as greatly as did his earlier fear of his own extinction, the poet can do anything but express clearly—even to himself—the bare facts of the couple's predicament. The Freudian slip that concludes *The Old Life* bears with it a double meaning, made especially poignant by an earlier slip Hall confessed to making on the couple's return to their farm after Hall's mother's funeral. At that moment, Hall declared to Kenyon, "'It's good; / it's *good* that I married my

mother'" (*The Old Life* 122 [Hall's emphasis]). Just as Hall linked his origins to his wife in that stanza, saying *married* instead of *buried*, so he does metaphorically in the final stanza by confusing *wife* with *life*. Hall fears his own strength will be sapped by the emotional trauma he and Kenyon face in battling her disease so shortly on the heels of his own struggle with cancer and the death of his mother. With the threat of the loss of his life and writing partner, Hall's language fails him, and *The Old Life*, literally and figuratively, is forced to end.

But Hall's poetry did not end, as the powerfully rendered elegiac tour de force *Without* (1998) illustrates. Titled after a hauntingly moving central poem originally published in slightly different form as the final poem of *The Old Life* collection, *Without* marks a zenith of Hall's elegiac efforts to date. *Without*, appearing three years after Kenyon's death, demonstrates an agonizing return to the work of poetry which must be accomplished in the wake of traumatic personal loss. This loss is inextricably linked with the poet's vocation because of the lost partner's identity as a poet herself, whose work habits and attitudes are interwoven with those of the survivor. Thus Sacks' assertion in *The English Elegy* that "much of the elegist's task lies in his reluctant resubmission to the constraints of language" (xiii) becomes particularly pertinent to analysis of Hall's poems in *Without*. Indeed, the structure of *Without* embodies the struggle of a poet in mourning whose efforts to reclaim the work of language parallel his efforts to survive his own grief.

The first half of *Without* is dominated by the frequently interrupted and resumed poem, "Her Long Illness," which chronicles--often in sparse, reportorial language--Jane Kenyon's battle against cancer. "Her Long Illness" and its lengthy coda, "Last Days," presents a frank narrative of Kenyon's emotional and physical fight at home and in hospitals, concluding with the moments surrounding her death. The emotion of "Her Long Illness," while intense, is often restrained, and Hall's word choice, while vivid, rarely operates figuratively. Present throughout the poem's sequences is Hall himself, figured in third person, often acting as a helpless and desperate observer whose heroic efforts to comfort his dying wife cannot save her from the ravages of her disease. The choice to position himself as a third person in this structurally ruptured opening poem evinces Hall the elegist's reluctance to re-engage with language after the loved one's death. The poem's opening lines demonstrate the tension between Hall's restrained poetic voice and the violent emotion that sparked the poem's composition:

Daybreak until nightfall,
 he sat by his wife at the hospital
 while chemotherapy dripped
 through the catheter into her heart.
 He drank coffee and read
 the *Globe*. He paced; he worked
 on poems; he rubbed her back
 and read aloud. Overcome with dread,
 they wept and affirmed
 their love for each other, witlessly,
 over and over again. (*Without* 1)

Virtually devoid of metaphor, the passage describes a fearful routine through surprisingly calm, reportorial language. It is significant that, despite the occasion of the poem and its title, it is the figure of the husband who dominates this opening passage ("he" appears five times in the passage; "her" appears twice; "they/their" appears twice). In coming to grips with the loss he describes, the poet paradoxically distances himself from the experience (by figuring himself in the third person and reporting actions in clipped, objective phrasings) and immerses himself in the experience (by highlighting the subjective viewpoint of the figure he has created for himself). It is also significant that Hall's third-person representation of himself attempts to alleviate the strain of the situation for both members of the couple through coping mechanisms established in earlier experience with terminal illness. Those methods—reading, writing, touching, weeping together—are a mixture of verbal and nonverbal communication that serves as a comforting force in the face of traumatic personal loss. They also give Hall occasion to draw parallels among the couple's multiple recent brushes with death, as the following passage indicates:

When he roiled in Recovery
 after the surgeon cut out half his liver
 two years earlier,
 Jane pushed the morphine bolus.
 She brought him home,
 a breathing sarcophagus, then rubbed his body
 back to life with her hands.
 Now, rocking on the bed in their horror,
 they wept and held on
 against the proliferation of blasts,
 murmuring together
 of what adhered them. This ardent
 merging recollected
 old passionate connections at two
 in the afternoon:
 brief, breathless, ecstatic, then calm. (*Without* 12)

This section underscores the irony of the couple's experience and also gives Hall occasion to dialogue with Kenyon's poetry describing her experience with his cancer treatments three years earlier. The initial lines of the passage make reference to Kenyon's depiction of her role as caregiver in "Chrysanthemums" and as a wife fearful of becoming a widow in "Pharaoh."³⁵ The second half of the passage describes the tragic ways in which the tables have turned on the couple, portraying them once more as virtually helpless in the face of their predicament. The "proliferation of blasts" is both physical, as both have been subjected to chemotherapy and radiation, suffering physically in an effort to survive, and emotional, as both have confronted the violent rupture of their two-decade relationship. The "ardent / merging" of their emotional support for each other reminds Hall of past days when both members of the couple were healthy enough to spend mornings working on poetry and afternoons in lovemaking. As in poems analyzed earlier, this passage emphasizes the importance of touch and nonverbal expression to communicating powerful emotion. The final line itemizes the similarities between the couple's sexual expressions of love for each other and their attempts to comfort each other in the face of extreme fear and physical pain. Once more, paradox drives the passage, as emotionally intense nonverbal expressions are described in verbal, poetic terms.

As the above passage illustrates, present throughout various passages of "Her Long Illness" is reference to the couple's grief-besieged attempts to make love in the face of their shock and pain, again emphasizing the sexual/creative act's role in forestalling death. The tone of such passages, however, is much darker than portions of *Baseball* that employ the same metaphor, as is understandable given the author's loss. For example, one section of "Her Long Illness" describes the evening before Kenyon began her chemotherapy in isolation in the Seattle hospital, when the couple "slept / together, as they understood, / maybe for the last time." The act is much less celebratory and playful than has been characteristic of Hall's sexual imagery in poetry prior to *Without*:

His body
 curved into Jane's,
 His knees tucked to the backs of her knees;
 he pressed her warm soft thighs,
 back, waist, and rump, making the spoons,

³⁵See the analysis of these two poems in the previous chapter of this project.

and the spoons clattered
with a sound like the end man's bones. (*Without* 19)

Here the sensuality of the moment is interrupted by an image of death, figured significantly through sound, which once more places emphasis on the couple's joint interest in poetic expression. The healthy and vigorous image of the lover's "warm soft thighs / back, waist, and rump" is underscored by the heavy stresses and multiple caesurae of these two lines, but the beauty of the moment is shattered by the image of the spoons clattering "with a sound like the end man's bones." As Hall suggested in "Another Elegy," the regenerative physical act affirms life but, paradoxically, through its very physicality, acknowledges the inevitability of death. This paradox is made exceptionally poignant by the reader's knowledge of Kenyon's death, described in the coda, "Last Days."

"Last Days" begins with a doctor's office scene resembling passages of Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and Hall's *Baseball*, only the anxiety of those poems is replaced by despair in "Last Days," as Hall describes the doctor's assistant telling the couple "'The leukemia is back. / There's nothing to do.'" This announcement, conveyed as a direct quote, underscores the importance of the paradox of language's power and inadequacy in confronting traumatic loss. This issue, more than any other, dominates "Last Days." Shortly after the final diagnosis scene, Hall describes the couple working feverishly to organize Kenyon's final poetry collection and to compose her obituary. As in the case of Carver and Gallagher's collaboration on *A New Path to the Waterfall*, to be examined in the next two chapters of this project, Hall and Kenyon's final collaboration to arrange *Otherwise* asserts the primacy of the work of language as a mechanism for achieving creative togetherness when the poet-couple is faced with permanent separation. Hall writes

The day after,
with more work to do
on her book, he saw how weak she felt,
and said maybe not now; maybe
later. Jane shook her head: "Now," she said.
"We have to finish it now."
Later, as she slid exhausted into sleep,
she said, "Wasn't that fun?
To work together? Wasn't that fun?" (*Without* 37)

Despite—indeed, because of—Kenyon's recognition that death is imminent, the push to write and revise is

relentless. The couple, long used to working separately together in the same house, find themselves needing a more intimate working collaboration to complete work on Kenyon's book before she dies. The work energizes Kenyon spiritually, despite its physical drain on her, and the couple achieves a bond through creative poetic collaboration that echoes Hall's descriptions of sexual intimacy in earlier poems. The passage also highlights the fact that Kenyon's death causes Hall to lose both a life partner and a working partner whose identity is doubly interwoven with his own. His return to writing in the wake of her death becomes, therefore, all the more excruciating and all the more imperative. As Kenyon declares in a later passage of "Last Days," "'Dying is simple,' she said. / 'What's worst is...*the separation.*'" (*Without* 42 [Hall's ellipsis and emphasis]).

But the death scene of "Last Days" proves anything but simple. In several agonizing passages Hall describes Kenyon's gradual loss of voice and consciousness, again evocative of the power/powerlessness of language in the face of death and loss. As friends and family arrive to visit Kenyon, she is capable only of "star[ing] silent goodbyes," unable at the end to use the words she loved and labored with throughout her adult life. The final scene of "Last Days" is characterized by its silence and its emphasis on physical gestures, as Kenyon's involuntary death spasms underscore the emotional violence of the poem's moment:

In the last hours, she kept
her forearms raised with pale fingers clenched
at cheek level, like
the goddess figurine over the bathroom sink.
Sometimes her right fist flicked
or spasmed toward her face. For twelve hours
until she died, he kept
scratching Jane Kenyon's big bony nose.
A sharp, almost sweet
smell began to rise from her open mouth.
He watched her chest go still.
With his thumb he closed her round brown eyes. (*Without* 45)

Other than Hall's comparison of Kenyon's dying body to the goddess statuette, a gesture mildly evocative of regeneration and immortality myths, the entire final passage is devoid of metaphor, focusing instead with realism on Kenyon's death. Again, without words to communicate, only physical gestures remain as a means of expression to reach the dying lover. The three heavy stresses ("round brown eyes") that conclude

"Last Days" suggest finality and solemnity of mood. The speaker's loss is actual at this point, and here the poem ends.

Rupturing the flow of "Her Long Illness" are six poems featuring the poet as a first-person speaker. Several of these poems—including "Beard for a Blue Pantry," which recalls a long-dead favorite pet; "Song for Lucy" and "The Porcelain Couple," which remember Hall's mother who died during Kenyon's illness; and "Blues for Polly," which elegizes Kenyon's mother, who also died during her daughter's illness--commemorate losses that reflect the dying process confronted by Kenyon and Hall. They also emphasize the vastness of the poet's many rapid-fire confrontations with loss. The ensuing frustration Hall experiences is especially reflected in another poem that interrupts "Her Long Illness," "Air Shatters in the Car's Small Room." Here the poet's sense of helplessness intersects with his struggle to articulate the story of his experiences, his attempt to express the inexpressible. "Air Shatters in the Car's Small Room" opens with an image of the speaker "set[ting] syllables / into prosy lines" and recalling that "William Butler Yeats / denounced with passion / 'the poetry of / passive suffering.'" The poet refers to his writing as an effort to "distract" himself, and his quotation from Yeats acknowledges his own self-conscious fears that his poetry of loss may be self-indulgent or a means for survival that offers little utility to readers. However, in response to letters sent to the couple urging courage or strength, the poet acknowledges that the impulse to write in the face of catastrophe cannot be denied: "What else could we do / except what we do?" The final lines of this poem, however, demonstrate the ambivalence the poet feels toward exercising his voice while his wife suffers from cancer:

Sometimes,
driving the Honda
with its windows closed
in beginning autumn
from the low motel
to Jane's bed, I scream
and keep on screaming. (*Without* 18)

At this point in both the story's process of the couple's battle against Kenyon's cancer and the poet's process of his own struggle with the value of language, the urge to articulate suffering cannot be subdued. However, the urge also cannot be reined in. Again paradoxically, the poem articulates the inarticulable, a condition perfectly figured in the limitless scream that closes the poem. No one could hear the scream in the

enclosed car and, if anyone could hear it, it would be essentially incomprehensible, as the pain of Hall and Kenyon is essentially untranslatable to others. However, Hall the artist cannot resist making the sound, exercising the voice, and eventually recording the experience in the controlled form of the poem. The poem illustrates Harold Schweizer's argument, that "suffering is a universal predicament" which, paradoxically, "also remains the most unsharable, incommunicable mystery, the very epitome of secrecy and particularity" (1).

The title poem of *Without* appears at the approximate midpoint of the volume. "Without" is partitioned into eight seven-line stanzas but is thoroughly unpunctuated. The poem reads like a chant, yet it ruptures language by removing conventional markers that would designate shifts in voice or idea and by mixing conventionally poetic metaphorical language with impersonal, clinical language that surrounds the modern experience of terminal illness. Positioned after the death scene of "Last Days," "Without" represents a descent into an underworld characterized by vacancy, resulting not only from the devastating loss of a life partner but also from the accompanying loss of the balancing forces of language, forces intricately attached to the lost partner by her identification as a poet. Hall's portrait of an empty landscape pivots on the disruption of language emerging from the catastrophe of Jane Kenyon's death:

no spring no summer no autumn no winter
no rain no peony thunder no woodthrush
the book was a thousand pages without commas
without mice oak leaves windstorms
no castles no plazas no flags no parrots
without carnival or the procession of relics
intolerable without brackets or colons (*Without* 46)

The relentless pressure of unfettered language which Hall describes also acts as a figure for the relentless pain associated with Kenyon's death. The sixth stanza of "Without" further illustrates this disruption:

vincristine ara-c cytoxan vp-16
loss of memory loss of language losses
pneumocystis carinii pneumonia bactrim
foamless unmitigated sea without sea
delirium whipmarks of petechiae
multiple blisters of herpes zoster
and how are you doing today I am doing (*Without* 47)

As the dying loved one slowly loses her capacity to speak, the poet survivor loses solid faith in the capacity of language and must work to reclaim it. This struggle is evinced in the sixth stanza, where the

Whitmanesque “foamless unmitigated sea without sea” is sandwiched between lines describing the impact of disease in highly specialized clinical terms. The cancer patient’s gradual loss of memory is directly associated with the survivor’s loss of the capacity of language, a loss that cuts to the core of his identity. The incomplete thought of the sixth stanza’s final line further illustrates how language’s power has been diminished. The poet and the patient respond to the trite question “how are you doing today” by stating “I am doing,” a phrase which both refuses to complete itself with traditional modifiers and suggests stagnation, a process of simply “going through the motions” as a survival mechanism.

Emerging from the underworld of “Without,” Hall’s collection represents healing as a gradual reclaiming of the power of the written word. The first poem to appear is “The Gallery,” centering on Hall’s gathering of pictures of Kenyon shortly after her death (*Without* 48). “The Gallery” lists brief descriptions of Kenyon snapshots, arranged chronologically from age twenty-four to the photo that accompanied her obituary in a Concord, New Hampshire, newspaper. The poem again fuses the verbal and the nonverbal, as it attempts to represent poetically the mourner’s entirely visual remembrances of his lost wife.³⁶ Following “The Gallery,” nine poems are figured as letters to Kenyon from Hall, whose resumed life at their New Hampshire farmhouse gropes toward healing through writing poetry that addresses the lost loved one and incorporates many of the central images of Kenyon’s poetry. Through the letter poems, Hall achieves a dialogue with Kenyon that extends beyond the grave and maps out a healing process which allows the survivor to continue living through writing, by means of incorporating the poetic voice of the lost loved one into the survivor’s poetry. Several of the letter poems find the poet adopting not only intellectual and emotional aspects of the lost loved one’s personality, but physical attributes as well. In “Letter in the New Year,” the speaker declares

Sometimes I weep for an hour
twisted in the fetal position
as you did in depression.
Hypochondriac, I fret over Gus
and decide he’s got diabetes.
In daydream I spend afternoons

³⁶“The Gallery” also resonates with a Kenyon poem originally appearing in *Constance*, entitled “Moving the Frame,” in which the poet attempts a posthumous linkage with a dead friend by trying unsuccessfully to lock her eyes with his gaze from a photograph (*Otherwise* 199).

digging around your peonies
 to feed them my grandfather's
 fifty-year-old cow manure.
 Next week maybe I'll menstruate. (*Without* 71)

Hall the persona in this passage adopts physical and emotional traits clearly associated with his lost wife.

Kenyon suffered for years with depression and is depicted earlier in "Her Long Illness" as worrying hypochondriacally about Hall's health. Gus the family dog and peonies feature prominently in Kenyon's poetry, often as sources of solace in the face of her depression. Hall again reaches out to Kenyon by paralleling his own depression with hers in "Midwinter Letter," where he insists "If a car pulls into the drive / I want to hide in our bedroom / the way you hid sometimes / when people came calling" (*Without* 76).

Even more dramatically, the short poem "Postcard: January 22nd" figures Hall the speaker as a pregnant female who "grew heavy through summer and autumn / and now I bear your death" (*Without* 73).

Researchers in patterns of grieving have acknowledged the common emergence of the characteristics of the lost loved one within the changing personality of the survivor, and the poetry of *Without* dramatizes this process.³⁷

In "Midwinter Letter," Hall declares to Kenyon that, when she wrote "about lovemaking or cancer, / about absences or a quarrel," he "loved to turn up in [her] poems" (*Without* 75). Indeed, Kenyon's voice as a poet, no longer merely the image of her dying self, repeatedly turns up in the letter poems of *Without*. Perhaps the most prominent reference appears in "Midsummer Letter," in which Hall quotes lines from Kenyon's poem "Afternoon at MacDowell," written when Hall appeared to be dying from cancer in the early 1990s. Kenyon's question—"I believe in the miracles of art but what / prodigy will keep you safe beside me"—instead became Kenyon's epitaph, and Hall returns the question to her in his own poem as tribute and as a search for solace (*Without* 56). "Letter at Christmas" features a scene echoing Kenyon's poem "Back," published in the 1993 volume *Constance*. Kenyon's poem figures a gradual recovery from a depressive episode as "the black silk nightgown / that he once thrust / into the toe of my Christmas

³⁷See Erich Lindemann's pioneering article on this subject, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief" [*The American Journal of Psychiatry* 101 (1944): 141-48], and Wolfgang and Margaret S. Stroebe, *Bereavement and Health: The Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss* [New York: Cambridge UP, 1987] for discussion of the appearance of traits of the lost loved one in the transformed identity of the survivor.

stocking," while Hall's poem recalls the lost loved one emptying stockings containing "felt pens, paperclips, chocolate, / and something libidinous / in the toe" (*Without* 64).

Several of the letter poems reinforce the healing function of poetry as dialogue with the lost by rendering Kenyon's voice as spoken rather than merely written. "Letter after a Year" describes Hall returning to Kenyon's grave site for the first time since winter weather kept him from reaching it; he imagines Kenyon asking all winter "Perkins! Where the hell / are you?" Hall replies with pathos "In hell" (*Without* 77). "Midsummer Letter" features a brief scene in which Hall reads Kenyon's poetry to a group of local nurses, one of which, as Hall tells both Kenyon and the reader, "hooted when I read 'The Shirt,'" referring to one of Kenyon's few playfully erotic poems. Hall declares that, as he left the reading, he was "happy / under the summer night, harsh / with stars" (*Without* 55). Reading Kenyon's poems (as well as, one would assume, later writing about them in his own poetry addressed to her) provides Hall with access to momentary relief and suggests hope for the prospect of long-term healing.

Following the letter poems, the final poem in *Without*, "Weeds and Peonies" (81), closes the volume with an ambivalent reach toward healing. The title announces the bittersweet tone of this poem, which dialogues in beautiful and complex ways with Kenyon's "Peonies at Dusk," one of her more hopeful and more well known poems from *Constance*. In Kenyon's poem, the peonies serve as a symbol for life, as they "send out light / while the rest of the yard grows dim." In a rare exclamatory statement, Kenyon describes the blooms as "Outrageous flowers big as human / heads!"--blossoms "staggered / by their own luxuriance." By the end of the poem, the speaker finds the flowers so seductive that she must "draw a blossom near, and bending close / search it as a woman searches / a loved one's face" (*Otherwise* 207). The peony thus becomes a metaphor for transcendent romantic love. Hall's "Weeds and Peonies" resumes the metaphor, but Kenyon's palpable absence suffuses the poem, and the peonies are no longer portrayed as a purely hopeful force. While the opening stanza appears to celebrate the flower and its identification with Kenyon ("Your peonies burst out, white as snow squalls, / with red flecks at their shaggy centers / in your border of prodigies by the porch."), the poem hinges on opposites which acknowledge loss as much as the promise of rebirth. At the center of the poem, Hall declares that "grief's repeated particles suffuse the air," an acknowledgment that, as life always returns, so does death. The peonies, associated with the return of

spring, are also associated with the desolation of winter, as Hall describes them in the first stanza as "white as snow squalls" and again as "snowy" in the last. Indeed, in "Weeds and Peonies," the return of spring does not guarantee a return to order after the trauma of partner loss but rather is figured itself as a chaos which the speaker makes no effort to render meaningful:

A raccoon dislodged a geranium from its pot.
Flowers, roots, and dirt lay upended
in the back garden where lilies begin
their daily excursions above stone walls
in the season of old roses. (*Without* 81)

The lost partner, whose presence is tremendous in this poem, is nonetheless described in terms of synecdoche, as a "blue coat" disappearing while walking the dog, or as "purple hiking boots" climbing nearby Mount Kearsarge. But it is the final two lines of the poem which make powerful use of understatement to emphasize the speaker's ambivalent emotions and capture death and rebirth in a single image: "Your peonies lean their vast heads westward / as if they might topple. Some topple." The random collapse of some of the flowers beneath their own weight calls to mind the randomness of the speaker's loss. The speaker's struggle to find hope in the images of a returning spring underscores the fact that grief is a complex process and that the loss to death of a loved one is an experience which, even through the language of elegy, is rarely recuperated fully.

In his 1998 interview with Jeffrey S. Cramer, Donald Hall described a strange phenomenon he was then still encountering as a writer who had simultaneously lost his wife and long-time professional partner. Since Kenyon's death, Hall explained, he had been unable to work successfully in prose, even on a book about Kenyon's illness. "It's curious," Hall tells Cramer, "Jane died three-and-a-quarter years ago and I have not, with minor exceptions, been able to write prose since" (Cramer 508). The reasons behind such an occurrence are too complex to ascertain, but perhaps they involve poetry's ability to represent the nonverbal, the inarticulable, through an emotional physicality less powerfully present in prose. Certainly one of the chief "conflicts" creating the energy Hall describes in "Goatfoot, Milk tongue, Twinbird" is the paradox of life and death and of verbalizing the unspeakable. Hall's poetry on Kenyon's illness and death as well as his own battles with cancer are permeated with such contradictions. Love and death for Hall become the indiscernible mysteries that poetry is compelled to attempt to discern. Hall's assessment of his marriage

with Kenyon in the Cramer interview could well apply to the poetry the two writers produced, working tirelessly, separately together: "We meshed terribly well," he asserts. "[W]e seemed to discover a secret that practically nobody else has ever discovered because it is so difficult to understand, so profound" (Cramer 509).

Chapter Four

Sleeping and Waking: Raymond Carver's Poetry of Loss

*I want sleep to come and go, smoothly.
Like passing out of the door of one car
into another. And then to wake up!
Find tomorrow in my bedroom.
I'm more tired now than I can say.
My bowl is empty. But it's my bowl, you see,
and I love it.*

Raymond Carver, "Tomorrow"

It's like, but not like, a dream.

Raymond Carver, "Heels"

It almost goes without saying that Raymond Carver's current literary reputation is built upon his work as a short story writer. But although Carver once declared to Michael Schumacher that, when pressed to decide between the poem and the short story as his preferred genre, he "came down on the side of the short story" (217), in interview after interview Carver insisted himself to be, first and foremost, a poet. In 1986 he told Roxanne Lawler that his poems "seem closer to me somehow, more personal" (174), and a year later he asserted that "I began as a poet. My first publication was a poem. So I suppose on my tombstone I'd be pleased if they put 'poet and short story writer--and occasional essayist.' In that order" (Boddy 197).³⁸ Just a few months before his death in August 1988, he stated, "When I'm writing poems, I don't know if I'll ever write a short story again, I feel incapable of it, because the poetry is so much with me" (Moffet 241). Thus the writer best remembered for groundbreaking collections of fiction such as *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* (1976), *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981), *Cathedral* (1983), and *Where I'm Calling From* (1988) valued at least as much his work as a poet, for which he is far less well known.

³⁸Carver's gravestone actually reads "Poet, Short Story Writer, Essayist" (see Gallagher, "Nightshine..." 445). Carver was actually notified on the same day in 1962 that a poem and a short story were first accepted for publication at two national journals. His poem "The Brass Ring" was published that year by the now-defunct magazine *Targets*, and his short story "Pastoral" was published that year by *Western Humanities Review*. Carver himself first published a short story, "The Furious Seasons," the previous year in *Selections*, a literary magazine he had founded and edited as a student in 1960 at Chico State College in Paradise, California.

Indeed, Carver's poetry is charged with emotional power and engenders strong and varied responses from his readers, a result which not only pleased the reader-focused Carver but likewise earned him *Poetry* magazine's Levinson Prize in 1985. In a habit evocative of Donald Hall's multiple revisions, Carver took his poetry composition seriously, revising his poems through "forty or fifty drafts" before considering them complete (Simpson and Buzbee 43-44).³⁹ In several interviews Carver echoed his belief that writing "is not just expression, it's communication" (McCaffery and Gregory 110), repeatedly referring to his art as an act of "bearing witness"—of giving voice to the lives of people who resembled the characters in his texts.⁴⁰ Carver's last prose composition before his death—an address to the 1988 graduating class of the University of Hartford, where he received an honorary doctor of letters degree—was structured on a thesis adapted from a line from Saint Teresa which Tess Gallagher had used as an epigraph to her poetry collection *Amplitude*. That line—"Words lead to deeds—they prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness"—became a vital expression of both Carver's and Gallagher's aesthetic ("Meditation" 223). Novelist Jay McInerney, once a student of Carver's, wrote that Carver possessed "a respect for the language bordering on awe, a reflection of his sense that words should be handled very, very gingerly. As if it might be almost impossible to say what you wanted to say. As if it might be dangerous, even" (119). Thus Carver's writings, like the works of Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall, often brought to the forefront the powers as well as the limitations of artistic language. Nevertheless, in his poetry as well as in his fiction, Carver had messages to share, and long before his struggles with cancer, death was among one of the most frequent concerns of those messages.

Much has been written, by Carver and by his readers, on the pervasive sense of "menace" present in Carver texts. Referring primarily to fiction in his influential essay "On Writing," Carver insists, "I think a

³⁹Interestingly, Carver consistently cites Hall as one of his models for conscientious revision of poems, telling Simpson and Buzbee "Donald Hall told me he sometimes writes a hundred or so drafts of his poems. Can you imagine?" (43-44). See also Robert Pope and Linda McElhinny, "Raymond Carver Speaking." Rpt. in *Conversations with Raymond Carver*. Ed. Marshall Bruce Gentry and William Stull. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1990.

⁴⁰For context on Carver's use of the term "bear witness" to describe his artistic goals, see Carver's interviews with David Sexton (132), Roxanne Lawler (175), and Michael Schumacher (226), all collected in Gentry and Stull's *Conversations*.

little menace is fine to have in a story. For one thing, it's good for the circulation. There has to be a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion" (26). This sense that things are changing permeates Carver's world view and provides energy to his writing, impelling the reader forward. Tess Gallagher, in her introduction to *Carver Country*, states that a "current of benign menace seemed to pervade Ray's fictionalized world at its inception" (8). Graham Clarke goes so far as to argue that "Carver's early death in itself suggests something of the very ambience of his fiction and makes clear how pervasive the continuing fear and anxiety of death (and cancer) is to the lives he depicts" (100). Clarke's conclusion—that "[d]eath frames Carver's world and suggests an underlying nothingness" (100)—reductively overstates the darkness of Carver's oeuvre, disregarding the increased hopefulness apparent in his later fiction and much of his poetry. Nevertheless, it does place emphasis on one of Carver's acknowledged "obsessions" (he disliked the word *theme*) and its personal ramifications, to which he became reconciled most completely through his poetry. As Tobias Wolff wrote after Carver's death,

Ray's work had always been conditioned by his sense of mortality, most often felt as an atmosphere of malign possibility, but in his last stories and poems he dragged the beast out of the corner and stared it in the face. And the result of these encounters was not cynicism or despair but increase of appetite—appetite for love, for adventure, for friendship, for knowledge, for work, for more life. ... Through his customary greedy alertness he is making his world bigger by finding more of it to wonder at.

That was how he responded to fear. ("Appetite" 249)

As is likewise the case in Kenyon's and Hall's poetry, Raymond Carver's poetry of loss, illness, and death pivots on linguistic and situational contradiction. Paradoxically, indeed almost ironically, Carver's poetry becomes noticeably less menacing the closer he comes to his own death. The poems collected in *A New Path to the Waterfall* reflect this impulse towards optimism in the face of personal annihilation. Part of the reason for such hopefulness lies in Carver's highly publicized struggles with near-fatal alcoholism in the years before he and Gallagher began their close association. In late 1976 and early 1977, Carver was hospitalized four times for acute alcoholism, before finally quitting drinking for good on 2 June 1977, a date he referred to as "the line of demarcation" in his life (Weber 43). Carver stated in a letter to a fellow writer struggling with alcoholism that he could not write for a prolonged period after becoming sober, producing only "a few book reviews, and a very few poems" for two years (*Carver*

Country 106). Gallagher asserts in her introduction to *Carver Country* that “Ray’s sobriety was the single most empowering element of his life during our time together. Without that, nothing would have been possible” (13). When Carver had been sober for ten years, he was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1987. Within less than a year, Carver would undergo surgery to remove two-thirds of his lung, would be diagnosed with brain cancer, and would face the recurrence of lung cancer approximately eight months after his lung operation, before dying peacefully at home on 2 August 1988. Partly because of his sense that he had cheated death once by surviving severe alcoholism, Carver appeared capable of confronting these serious bouts with cancer with greater hopefulness.⁴¹ This sense of gratitude for life and optimism for the future is perhaps best captured in his late poem “Gravy.”

Like Hall’s and Kenyon’s poetry of grief, Carver poems like “Gravy” highlight the work of language as a process for expressing the inexpressible and for allowing the poet to impose order upon the chaotic experience of terminal illness. Like much of Hall’s poetry dealing with his and Kenyon’s cancer treatments, “Gravy” is composed in third-person, distancing the author and speaker from the painful experience it relates. Unlike the poetry of Kenyon and Hall, however, “Gravy” and similar Carver poems to be discussed in this chapter ground the speaker’s hope in the face of death not merely in a cosmic vision of literary or spiritual immortality; rather, these poems describe Carver’s hope for a future beyond death as emanating from his faith in his own memory as an integral part of his friends’ lives—a memory that will not be lost to physical decay. “Gravy” tells a brief story of the response of a recovering alcoholic to a diagnosis of terminal illness. Surprisingly, the poem opens as follows: “No other word will do. For that’s what it was. Gravy. / Gravy, these past ten years” (*A New Path* 118). As the first sentence declares, the poem is not merely about its subject’s experience but about finding the words to describe that experience, to communicate the subject’s emotions to readers, both of the poem and of the experience itself. Carver’s diction throughout the poem appears, as it does throughout most of his poems and short stories, highly colloquial, bordering on the cliché, indicative not of sloppy composition or slipshod editing practices but

⁴¹In an interview for *The Boston Globe* a few months before his death, Carver insisted that, when he was drinking, “[m]y life was a mess domestically, my health was a shambles—this [cancer], in a way, is like a picnic, compared to that. Things are much better. Things could never be so bad, you know, as they were then” (Caldwell 247).

rather of an attempt to access extraordinary experience through ordinary language. As Carver remarks in "On Writing,"

It's possible, in a poem or short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring—with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along a reader's spine [...]. That's the kind of writing that interests me. (24)

Thus Carver's choice to describe his life since giving up alcohol by use of the commonplace metaphor for additional benefit—"gravy"—fits his aesthetic precisely. In "Gravy" Carver describes his post-alcoholic life as blissful because of its complex and hard-won simplicity: "Alive, sober, working, loving and / being loved by a good woman" (*A New Path* 118). What many other men might take for granted, the poet suggests, seems nothing short of miraculous to the subject of the poem, who once before faced a death sentence because of his alcoholism:

Eleven years
ago he was told he had six months to live
at the rate he was going. And he was going
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?
After that it was all gravy, every minute
of it, up to and including when he was told about,
well, some things that were breaking down and
building up inside his head. "Don't weep for me,"
he said to his friends. "I'm a lucky man.
I've had ten years longer than I or anyone
expected. Pure gravy. And don't forget it." (*A New Path* 118)

Again, communication drives the plot behind the poem. The major changes the subject faces result from acts of communication reminiscent of the diagnosis scenes in Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and in Hall's poetry about his own cancer diagnoses in *The Museum of Clear Ideas* as well as his poetry about Kenyon's diagnosis in *Without*. Carver's diagnosis scenes, however, are noticeably less specific, though the spoken word impels the subject's reactions to his situation. What is spoken here is, simultaneously and paradoxically, imperative and inconsequential. After he was "told" he had six months to live as an alcoholic, the subject "changed his ways / somehow. He quit drinking!" The essentials of the doctor's words are less important in this poem than the fact that those words spurred the subject to "quit drinking!"—evidenced by Carver's well placed exclamation mark. The speaker goes so far as to group the

subject's cancer diagnosis scene among the "gravy" of the subject's life, indicative of the gratitude and awe he feels at having been able to achieve sobriety. Again, the specifics of what the doctor said are less important than the power those spoken words had to impel the subject to act. The horrible particulars of brain cancer are reduced to a vague and relatively unthreatening assessment of the patient's condition as "some things that were breaking down and / building up inside his head." Much more important is the patient's reaction, gratitude for his life of sobriety which enabled him not only to live as long as he did but to work and to comfort his friends who were grieving over their imminent loss. Obviously the subject would never have been capable of verbalizing the words he speaks to his friends at the close of the poem had he died of alcoholism ten years earlier; neither would Carver, who in the depths of his alcoholism was unable to write, have been able to compose poems such as "Gravy" had he drunk himself to death. Thus the subject's "luck"—a ubiquitous force in Carver writings—resides not only in his ability to cheat death once and survive "ten years longer than I or anyone / expected," but also in his ability to tell his story, to express a message affirming the life and creativity his last ten years of sobriety afforded him. As Harold Schweizer notes about the poem, "In 'Gravy' the poet becomes his own survivor, so to speak.... [the poem] is a retrospective, redemptive self-completion by which life acquires the structure and meaning of a closed narrative" ("The Very Short Stories..." 127).

It is worthwhile to contrast "Gravy" with an earlier Carver poem, "My Death," first published in *The Ohio Review* in 1985 and included in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*. In this highly sentimental poem, Carver, two years before his cancer diagnosis, imagines his ideal death scene as one in which he has an opportunity to say goodbye to old friends. The poem pivots on two contrasting scenarios the speaker envisions for his death, once more surprising the reader with its definition of good fortune:

If I'm lucky, I'll be wired every whichway
in a hospital bed. Tubes running into
my nose. But try not to be scared of me, friends!
I'm telling you right now that this is okay.
It's little enough to ask for at the end.
Someone, I hope, will have phoned everyone
to say, "Come quick, he's failing!"
And they will come. And there will be time for me
to bid goodbye to each of my loved ones. (*Where Water* 106)

As in "Gravy," the speaker's view of an ideal end-to-life rests in his vision of friends gathered as mourners

and living memorials to his memory. Carver's speaker hopes for "luck," oddly envisioned as a slow dying process redeemed by the chance it provides for human connection. Communication by telephone, in many Carver writings a harbinger of menace, here becomes an instrument of comfort for the speaker, as it provides opportunity for a final reunion with friends and family before death.⁴² Once more, language proves simultaneously necessary and inadequate to expressing the scene's emotions:

Sure, they might lay eyes on me and want to run away
and howl. But instead, since they love me,
they'll lift my hand and say "Courage"
or "It's going to be all right."
And they're right. It is all right.
It's just fine. If you only knew how happy you've made me! (*Where Water* 106)

As in much of Kenyon's poetry on death and mourning, Carver imagines the natural reaction of friends confronted by his impending death to be a reversion to the pre-verbal, an impulse to "run away / and howl." Carver's fantasy allows him to achieve his own ideal, which involves his friends steeling themselves against their grief in order to verbalize words of comfort for themselves and their friend. The ability of his friends to find words to say goodbye is an important reason for the happiness he describes and expects to continue experiencing up to the moment of his death.

Significantly, Carver's vision of the perfect ending to such a scene involves a picture of his dying self finding the energy to express to his loved ones that communication and understanding have taken place:

I just hope my luck holds, and I can make
some sign of recognition.
Open and close my eyes as if to say,
"Yes, I hear you. I understand you."
I may even manage something like this:
"I love you too! Be happy."
I hope so! But I don't want to ask for too much. (*Where Water* 106)

Communication, whether verbal or nonverbal, is the ultimate hope of the poet, as the key words of this passage indicate (*sign of recognition, say, hear, understand*). Finding words to express his feelings is such

⁴²Carver texts that feature the phone call in a much less positive light include, among the short stories, "Are You a Doctor?" (from *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*); "Put Yourself in My Shoes" (from *Will You Please...*); and "A Small, Good Thing" (from *Cathedral*) and its earlier, darker version, "The Bath" (from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*). Among the poems are "The Painter & The Fish" (from *A New Path*.); "The Offending Eel" (from *A New Path*); and "Summer Fog" (from *A New Path*, to be examined later in this chapter).

an ideal for the poet that it seems too miraculous an accomplishment to anticipate. Again, as in Hall's and Kenyon's grief poetry, the wordless gesture is invested with nearly as much power as the spoken gesture at the moment when loss is realized, but for Carver, verbalizing his final message to loved ones is imperative:

If I'm unlucky, as I deserve, well, I'll just
drop over, like that, without any chance
for farewell, or to press anyone's hand.
Or say how much I cared for you and enjoyed
your company all these years. In any case,
try not to mourn for me too much. I want you to know
I was happy when I was here.
And remember I told you this a while ago—April 1984. (*Where Water* 106-07)

Carver finds himself unable to expect his ideals to become a reality, even in death, so he imagines an "unlucky" death scene that offers no chance to say farewell to his loved ones. Carver uses poetry to take some control over an otherwise uncontrollable situation. The poem becomes the final testament to his friends that Carver feared he would be unable to make if his death came suddenly instead of slowly, and its poignance is heightened by the actual circumstances of his death just three years after the poem's publication. The conclusion of "My Death" anticipates the message and tone of "Gravy," insisting that the poet's life, no matter the circumstances of his death, was a gift for which he feels great gratitude.

"In the Year 2020," also collected in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, is similar in subject and tone but contemplates not simply the speaker's own death but the eventual loss of an entire generation of writers. The poem pivots on the act of creating stories as a gesture of remembrance, thus illustrating well Gallagher's theories in "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief." Gallagher's view, that "poems may bring one's loss into communion with other deaths and mythic elements which enlarge the view of solitary death" (104), is highlighted in Carver's poem. But perhaps even more pronouncedly, "In the Year 2020" enacts Gallagher's view of the poem as an instrument of meshing past, present, and future into one,⁴³ erasing temporal boundaries and providing a mechanism for keeping the lost alive in a way that resonates with Dreifuss-Kattan's view of artwork as a means for the artist to achieve some measure of immortality (Dreifuss-Kattan 4). "In the Year 2020" paradoxically depends upon and defies time, as the speaker of the

⁴³In addition to Gallagher's "Reservoir" essay, see also her article "The Poem as Time Machine." Both texts are included in Gallagher's *A Concert of Tenses* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1986).

poem's present ponders friendships forged in his past and wonders who will survive decades into the future to share stories of the dead with the new generations:

Which of us will be left then—
 old, dazed, unclear—
 but willing to talk about our dead friends?
 Talk and talk, like an old faucet leaking.
 So that the young ones,
 respectful, touchingly curious,
 will find themselves stirred
 by the recollections.
 By the very mention of this name
 or that name, and what we did together.
 (As we were respectful, but curious
 and excited, to hear someone tell
 about the illustrious dead ahead of us.) (*Where Water* 49)

As in "My Death," communication—the "talk" which the speaker values despite his playfulness—is essential to his vision of the future. The speaker does not wonder if the stories of his friends will be shared; he assumes they will be, leaving to him only the question of who the teller will be. The work of language is inevitable, cyclical, mythical in its own right, a necessary preservative of a powerful and creative tradition within which he and his friends played a vital role. In looking forward, the speaker recalls his past, when he and his friends were the "respectful, but curious / and excited" young writers who learned by listening to "someone tell / about the illustrious dead ahead of us." The "talk" referred to in this poem is essential not merely to preserve the memories of the writers who have passed away, but also to preserve the art of writing and the work of language itself. The shared stories mythicize the writers they describe, linking them in a community of writers whose lives and works were enriched by their connection:

Of which of us will they say
 to their friends,
 he knew so and so! He was friends with _____
 and they spent time together.

 Of which of us will it be said—
 he knew them? Shook hands with them
 and embraced them, stayed overnight
 in their warm houses. Loved them! (*Where Water* 49)

Although clearly idealized almost to the point of sentimentality, the memories reflect the bountiful creativity that the speaker suggests is made possible by writers maintaining positive communication with other writers. The work of words serves the memories, and the memories serve the work of words. The final lines

of the poem reflect what the speaker believes is the best he can hope for when faced with one day losing such a community:

Friends, I do love you, it's true.
And I hope I'm lucky enough, privileged enough,
to live on and bear witness.
Believe me, I'll say only the most
glorious things about you and our time here!
For the survivor there has to be something
to look forward to. Growing old,
losing everything and everybody. (*Where Water* 49-50)

Carver's concept of "bearing witness" surfaces here, reiterating his view of the function of literature (remembered stories, crafted poems) as a bridge between writer and reader, teller and listener. The speaker's imagined agency as the sole survivor is highlighted by his insistence that he will shape the stories creatively to ensure the lost writers are fondly remembered ("Believe me, I'll say only the most / glorious things about you and our time here!"). It is this work of language, of shaping the memories into artistic form, that the speaker imagines to be his greatest consolation in the wake of profound loss. Nonetheless, the poem's generally upbeat tone at this point deflates significantly, as the work of language once more is paradoxically necessary and inadequate to the task of consolation. The stories the survivor will shape about his lost loved ones become a "something / to look forward to" that, the poem suggests, offers relatively little solace to the single surviving artist figure who must confront the stark realities of "[g]rowing old, / losing everything and everybody." It is doubtless no accident that even the stress patterns of the last line descend, that the poem ends on a weak syllable; as powerful as the work of literature is in the wake of loss, Carver suggests, it pales in comparison to the actual loss itself.

A significant aspect of "My Death" and "In the Year 2020" involves Carver the writer's ability to dissociate himself from Carver the subject, a task which all writers of concern to this project have been capable of accomplishing to some extent; however, in Carver's poetry, this experience of dissociation--of looking at some portion of the writer's self as alien to himself, an experience of "standing apart from whatever defines the self" (Boxer and Phillips 75)--is emphasized repeatedly. This dissociation, itself paradoxical in its division of the image of the self in subject/object terms, is made even more contradictory

because of its effect on the speaker, as the phenomenon simultaneously inspires within him anxiety and comfort in the face of loss.⁴⁴

Ultramarine's "Circulation" illustrates this theme. The poem operates via another of Carver's most frequently used tropes, the liminal space between sleeping and waking, which often functions as a *memento mori* of sorts to the characters inhabiting that space. "Circulation" describes the speaker's memory of awakening one night to discover his arm has lost all feeling. It requires the joint efforts of the speaker and his mate to coax the arm out of its paralysis, but the experience so frightens the speaker that he finds himself unable to sleep for the rest of the night, largely because the figurative "death" of his arm reminds him of the inevitability of his own death. The speaker pictures himself at the whim of chaos, with his life so precarious that it renders his environment absurd, as is illustrated by the opening stanza:

By the time I came around to feeling pain,
and woke up, moonlight
flooded the room. My arm lay paralyzed,
propped like an old anchor under
your back. You were in a dream,
you said later, where you'd arrived
early for the dance. But after
a moment's anxiety you were okay
because it was really a sidewalk
sale, and the shoes you were wearing,
or not wearing, were fine for that. (*Ultramarine* 7)

At the poem's opening, the speaker does not only feel separated from a part of himself but also from his mate who, while sharing his bed, is unconscious to his reality, lost in a dream whose humorous absurdity both contrasts with the speaker's real fear of loss and death and reflects that fear as it is about to be realized through the poem's narrative. The lover's dream—in which she watches herself in a panic over a fashion faux pas—becomes her own version of dissociation paralleling the speaker's, as both lovers in the poem

⁴⁴For commentary on dissociation of the self in Carver's work, see David Boxer and Cassandra Phillips, "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver," *The Iowa Review* 10.3 (1979): 75-90; Arthur A. Brown, "Raymond Carver and Postmodern Humanism," *Critique* 31 (1990): 125-36; and Kirk Nessel, *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study* [esp. Chapter Two]. Athens: Ohio UP, 1995. All of the above sources focus almost exclusively on Carver's fiction. For consideration of Carver's poetry with regards to dissociation, see Theresa Ann Kemper, "Raymond Carver's Poetry: A Window to the Soul." M.A. Thesis. San Diego State U, 1995.

experience "a moment's anxiety" that ends in relief, however uneasy that relief may be. The passage also illustrates the separate togetherness that characterizes many loss experiences (Dreifuss-Kattan 130) and was a dominant element in Hall's and Kenyon's grief poetry. While the speaker is awakening to pain, his mate is oblivious to what he feels, enmeshed as she is in her dream consciousness. Not only is she unaware of his pain, she is, the poem suggests, partially (if unwittingly) responsible for it; her weight on her lover's arm cuts off the speaker's "circulation" and causes the pain that incites his fear, just as emotional entanglements can simultaneously alleviate and exacerbate anxieties produced by thoughts of death.

Indeed, the couple's love bond is further highlighted in the next passage of the poem, as the speaker's lover is finally awakened and enlisted in his efforts to regain sensitivity in his arm:

"Help me," I said. And tried to hoist
my arm. But it just lay there, aching,
unable to rise on its own. Even after
you said "What is it? What's wrong?"
it stayed put—deaf, unmoved
by any expression of fear or amazement.
We shouted at it, and grew afraid
when it didn't answer. "It's gone to sleep,"
I said, and hearing those words
knew how absurd this was. But
I couldn't laugh. (*Ultramarine* 7)

Evident once more is the role of language in the couple's symbolic attempt to stave off death. The speaker's lover becomes drawn into the drama after the speaker verbalizes his alarm, and the couple's attempt to reanimate his arm center on a darkly comic routine of verbal commands to the arm to rejuvenate itself: "We shouted at it, and grew afraid / when it didn't answer." The arm represents death to the speaker—not only in its state as a temporarily dissociated part of himself, but also in the speaker's sexualized descriptions of the couple's attempt to revive it. The speaker becomes a version of an impotent fisher king—evocative of William Trout in Hall's "Another Elegy"—as the arm, despite the speaker's or his lover's efforts, "just lay there, aching, / unable to rise on its own." The arm's death-like state is, significantly, explained in terms of silence and an absence of communication; it lies "deaf, unmoved / by any expression of fear or amazement." The acknowledged absurdity of the speaker's declaration—"It's gone to sleep"—lies not only in the fact that such a statement is obvious, by this point in the drama needless to say; it also lies in the speaker's recognition that words fail to access fully his experience. Such a euphemism in this instance pales in

comparison to the serious death anxiety the speaker and his lover feel at this point. Still, paradoxically, by verbalizing the situation as such, the speaker and his mate finally begin to succeed in restoring circulation to his arm; their words, however limited, help them to bring the dead to life. But the speaker's unnerving dissociative experience is far from over:

Somehow,
between the two of us, we managed
to raise it. *This can't be my arm*
is what I kept thinking as
we thumped it, squeezed it, and
prodded it back to life. Shook it
until that stinging went away. (*Ultramarine* 7-8)

It requires the couple's joint efforts to accomplish the task, but throughout the experience the speaker cannot easily view the arm as his own. To do so would acknowledge the lack of control he has over his own body, over factors of life and death. As in Kenyon's and Hall's poetry of illness and death, the gesture here—albeit a much more violent, much less comforting one than is typical of Kenyon's and Hall's poetry—is combined with the word to effect healing. As might be expected in a Carver text, laden as it often is with a cognizance of what Wolff called “malign possibility,” the physical gesture becomes desperate rather than merely gentle. Nevertheless, as their words help them find the strength to bring the dead to life, so does their mutual touch—the darkly comic “thumping” and “prodding” that finally revitalizes the weakened arm. When the speaker recovers his physical strength, the couple speaks to each other again:

We said a few words to each other.
I don't remember what. Whatever
reassuring things people
who love each other say to each other
given the hour and such odd
circumstance. I do remember
you remarked how it was light
enough in the room that you could see
circles under my eyes.
You said I needed more regular sleep,
and I agreed. (*Ultramarine* 8)

Once more, in the aftermath of a harrowing experience, words for the poet prove both necessary and inadequate. As with the doctor's words in “Gravy,” the couple's act of speaking proves more vital at this point than the actual words they spoke, evidenced by the speaker's recollection that the couple “said a few words to each other,” although he cannot recall what those words were. The speaker, however, does recall

what his partner said next, because those words acknowledge the apparently chronic anxiety that routinely plagues him at night, robbing him of “regular sleep.” The dramatic circumstance of the poem strongly suggests that this anxiety results from the speaker’s fear of death, as the concluding lines of the poem indicate. The speaker’s partner falls asleep again—“Maybe / into that same dream, or else another”—and effectively leaves him to confront his fears alone:

I lay until daybreak, holding
both arms fast across my chest.
Working my fingers now and then.
While my thoughts kept circling
around and around, but always going back
where they’d started from.
That one inescapable fact: even while
we undertake this trip,
there’s another, far more bizarre,
we still have to make. (*Ultramarine* 8)

Still shaken by the experience of his arm going numb—the “commonplace thing” invested with “immense, even startling power” (“On Writing” 24)—the speaker cannot fall asleep again. The poem title’s multi-layered significance is tapped in these final lines, as the speaker’s thoughts, which “kept circling / around and around, but always going back / where they’d started from,” create their own circulation process. His obsession with the life cycle, dependent as it is on an individual’s ultimate physical death, proves to be the “circulation” with which the speaker is most concerned, as the poem’s headnote from Louise Bogan indicates (“And all at length are gathered in”). What keeps the speaker awake this night—and, the poem hints, many other nights whose events were far less disturbing—is his realization that all people must “undertake” their own “bizarre” journey into death. Although the speaker has physically recovered from the night’s events—a fact he regularly reassures himself of by “[w]orking [his] fingers now and then”—his emotional/spiritual self is far from healed. “Circulation” ends in suspense, as the speaker’s life appears suspended before a future he cannot foretell or find hopeful, given the inevitable mystery of death.

The next poem in *Ultramarine*, “The Cobweb,” further explores the issue of death anxiety, though the poem’s tone is much calmer than that of “Circulation.” In “The Cobweb,” the speaker stands on the deck of his house where, overlooking the sea, he contemplates “everything that’s happened to [him] all these years.” The moment appears sapped of all energy, stagnant in its quiet: “It was hot and still. The tide

was out. / No birds sang." As is, the scene practically commands the speaker to think of loss and decline, but a final chance occurrence ensures that his thoughts will settle on death:

As I leaned against the railing
a cobweb touched my forehead.
It caught in my hair. No one can blame me that I turned
and went inside. There was no wind. The sea
was dead calm. I hung the cobweb from the lampshade.
Where I watch it shudder now and then when my breath
touches it. A fine thread. Intricate.
Before long, before anyone realizes,
I'll be gone from here. (*Ultramarine* 9)

The cobweb reminds the speaker of the delicate brevity of his own life. When the cobweb catches in the speaker's hair, he experiences a brush with death that frightens him enough to cause his retreat from the deck ledge into the figurative safety of his home, an anxious reaction he believes anyone familiar with death fears should understand ("No one can blame me that I turned / and went inside"). The urgency of the poem heightens after the speaker hangs the cobweb from the lampshade, as is evidenced by the verb tense shift from past to present. The speaker sees in the cobweb's precarious nature parallels to his own life, itself a "fine thread," "[i]ntricate," as vulnerable to unexpected change as the web is to the speaker's breathing. The speaker realizes that death is inevitable, unpredictable, a chaos over which he has little control; that he will die "[b]efore long, before anyone realizes," including himself, proves a difficult fact to confront. The fact that Carver died two years after the initial publication of "The Cobweb" contributes to the poignance of the final two lines.

Much nearer the end of *Ultramarine* there appears the poem "Simple," which in many ways serves as a companion poem to "The Cobweb." As in "The Cobweb," the speaker contemplates the natural world that surrounds him, questions his place within it, and concludes by considering the possibility of his own death. Even briefer than "The Cobweb," "Simple" possesses a somewhat lighter tone, as the speaker seems much less anxious about his death than does the speaker of the earlier poem:

A break in the clouds. The blue
outline of the mountains.
Dark yellow of the fields.
Black river. What am I doing here,
lonely and filled with remorse? (*Ultramarine* 126)

The oppressive atmosphere of "The Cobweb," although not entirely absent, is far from unrelenting in

"Simple," as the "break in the clouds" announced in the first line suggests. The natural world is not without its potentially threatening mystery ("Dark yellow of the fields. / Black river."), but the speaker's question hints that his mood does not fully reflect the world around him, intimating that its darkness is not entirely ominous, that the loneliness and remorse he experiences does not entirely fit the space he inhabits ("What am I doing here...?"). The final stanza develops the complexity of the speaker's situation:

I go on casually eating from the bowl
of raspberries. If I were dead,
I remind myself, I wouldn't
be eating them. It's not so simple.
It is that simple. (*Ultramarine* 126)

Carver surprises the reader with the start of this stanza, once more evincing a shift in attitude toward the subject of his own death. Unlike the speaker of "The Cobweb," the speaker of "Simple" appears to inhabit two moods at once, paradoxically "filled with remorse" yet capable of "casually eating from the bowl / of raspberries" that serves as his link with life and liveliness. His contradictory attitude is further illustrated by the paradox that concludes the poem, a paradox that provides some measure of comfort. Emotionally, for the speaker and his loved ones, the thought of his death is "not so simple"—is, in fact, as poems such as "Circulation" and "The Cobweb" illustrate, an instigator of severely disruptive anxiety. Materially, however, the speaker's death means little more than a cessation of energy, as the speaker's position in the life cycle of all mortal things is affirmed. With his death he will become physically a part of the natural world he contemplates in the first stanza, without the need or the ability to ask the question that concludes it. Both pleasure and pain will be beyond him then, and the thought of being placed in such a position inspires in the speaker both regret and relief. As such, "Simple" demonstrates Carver's gradual coming-to-terms with his own death, years before his cancer diagnosis would necessitate a new confrontation with the issue.

Like "Simple," "The Fields" suggests a paradoxical attitude toward death that merges fear with acceptance of the reality of loss but finally gestures toward comfort rather than despair. The speaker's shift in attitude towards death is clearly linked in this poem with the process of maturity, in which emotional and physical growth appears as a vital theme. Carver's epigraph for the poem announces its complex approach to its subject:

*The worms crawl in,
the worms crawl out.
The worms play pinochle
in your snout.*

—CHILDHOOD DITTY (*Ultramarine* 130; [Carver's emphasis])

Simultaneously humorous and grotesque, childish and severe, the epigraph nevertheless demonstrates that the speaker's consciousness of the inevitability of death has its roots in his earliest youth. However, as the speaker ages, he gravitates toward an acceptance of death as a part of the natural cycle which provides in its routine a form of immortality that comforts the speaker the closer he comes to his own decline.

As a child, the speaker was plagued by an oppressive fear of death, as the opening lines of the poem indicate:

I was nearsighted and had to get up close
so I could see it in the first place: the earth
that'd been torn with a disk or plow.
But I could smell it, and I didn't like it.
To me it was gruesome, suggesting death
and the grave. I was running once and fell
and came up with a mouthful. That
was enough to make me want to keep my distance
from fields just after they'd been sliced open
to expose whatever lay teeming underneath.
And I never cared anything for gardens, either.
Those over-ripe flowers in summer bloom.
Or spuds lying just under the surface
with only part of their faces showing.
Those places I shied away from, too. Even today
I can do without a garden. But something's changed. (*Ultramarine* 130)

The speaker remembers himself as a child, so "nearsighted" that he could not, given his youth, imagine his own eventual death but could fearfully "smell" its inevitability and work to avoid any reminder of his own mortality. Paradoxically, the speaker's young self recognized the life-and-death implications of "teeming" fields and blooming gardens but found himself reducing the complexity to a separate extreme: whereas many readers of a spring landscape would see only life and regeneration, the speaker as a boy sees only "death / and the grave," the decomposition that paradoxically makes growth possible. The boy's attitude here resembles the attitude of the speaker of the opening lines of Hall's "Another Elegy," in which April is described as a "creaking gate" and as a dull rain that "soak[s] / through night loam into sleep" (*The Museum of Clear Ideas* 3). Time, however, has adjusted the speaker's attitude, and although the adult speaker has

not loosed himself completely from a long-acknowledged death fear associated with the regeneration of spring, his attitude toward death has altered significantly. As Carver states with characteristic understatement, "But something's changed."

The next passage of "The Fields" describes the extent of this change:

There's nothing I like better now than to walk into
a freshly turned field and kneel and let the soft dirt
slide through my fingers. I'm lucky to live
close to the fields I'm talking about.
I've even made friends with some of the farmers.
The same men who used to strike me
as unfriendly and sinister.
So what if the worms come sooner or later?
And what's it matter if the winter snow piles up
higher than fences, then melts and drains away
deep into the earth to water what's left of us?
It's okay. Quite a lot was accomplished here, after all.
I gambled and lost, sure. Then gambled some more
and won. My eyesight is failing. But if I move
up close and look carefully, I can see all kinds of life
in the earth. Not just worms, but beetles, ants, ladybugs.
Things like that. I'm gladdened, not concerned with the sight.
(*Ultramarine* 130-31).

The speaker recognizes joy and hopefulness as well as loss and sorrow in the winter-to-spring, life-and-death cycles of nature. The dark violence of death he associates in the first passage with "the earth / that'd been torn with a disk or plow" is transformed into the benign promise of "a freshly turned field" laden not merely with the "worms" that frightened him as a child but with creatures much less ominous—the "beetles, ants, ladybugs" which represent positive renewal for the speaker. An unspecified life change accounts in part for his shift in perspective, and, as in other Carver writings, that life change is associated with an unexplained but hard-earned change in the speaker's luck ("I gambled and lost, sure. Then gambled some more / and won."). Not only is the speaker "lucky to live / close to the fields" he describes, but he is, as the poem suggests through the carefully placed line break, "lucky to live" at all. Once again, the speaker's sense that he has cheated death in the past—either spiritually or physically—has proven instrumental in erasing old death fears he harbored in his youth.

"The Fields" ends with the speaker's acknowledgment that he values his life more intensely because of his mature understanding of death's inevitability. As in "Gravy," the speaker of "The Fields"

expresses gratitude for this recognition and the comfort it provides:

It's nice to walk out into a field any day
that I want and not feel afraid. I love to reach
down and bring a handful of dirt right up under my nose.
And I can push with my feet and feel the earth give
under my shoes. I can stand there quietly
under the great balanced sky, motionless.
With this impulse to take off my shoes.
But just an impulse. More important,
this not moving. And then
Amazing! to walk that opened field—
and keep walking. (*Ultramarine* 131)

Here the speaker, like the sky, is “balanced,” at harmony with living and with dying. He views himself as both subject and object, both actor and acted-upon (“And I can push with my feet and feel the earth give / under my shoes. I can stand there quietly / under the great balanced sky, motionless.”). He recognizes that death is inevitable, but as long as life and energy remain his own, he revels in exercising his agency, a significant part of which involves conceiving the prospect of his death, imagining himself beyond capability of making his own choices. The final lines feature the speaker—and, presumably, Carver—affirming the positive value of life and of death, while nonetheless making use of his own liveliness as long as he can; what he finds “important” is the balance he achieves as well as his recognition of it (“this not moving. And then / Amazing! to walk that opened field—and keep walking”). This balance and its positive influence on the speaker’s attitude toward the future are made possible, the poem suggests, primarily by his own unspecified redemption from a previous brush with death, a redemption echoing Carver’s recovery from the alcoholism that plagued him for several years.

The final poem in *Ultramarine* is “The Gift,” dedicated “for Tess.” Because of its similar purpose and effect to the final poem in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water*, itself titled “For Tess,” it is worthwhile to consider these two poems in tandem, beginning with “For Tess,” the earlier of the two. In a brief essay explaining the circumstances surrounding its composition, Carver describes “For Tess” as “a kind of love letter to my wife” (“On ‘For Tess’ 120), a gesture of appreciation from Carver to Gallagher: “I was taking the occasion to say that I was grateful to her for coming into my life when she did, back in 1977. She made an immense difference and helped change my life in profound ways” (122). Carver likewise hoped the poem would achieve a broader effect; “I’m pleased if I reached [Gallagher],” he declared, “and,

because of that, touched other readers as well—gave them a little of the real emotion I was feeling when I wrote the poem” (122). In “On ‘For Tess,’” Carver takes the opportunity to reiterate his vision of poetry as a vehicle for communication rather than for mere self-expression. Once more he insists that, regarding literature, “the need is always to translate one’s thoughts and deepest concerns into language which casts these thoughts and concerns into a form—fictional or poetic—in a hope that a reader might understand and experience those same feelings and concerns” (121). The concerns at work in “For Tess” are, not surprisingly, of life-and-death importance, focusing on the power of love to sustain and to heal the weakened self.

As is much of Carver’s poetry, “For Tess” is a lyric-narrative whose effect depends largely on the elements of story at work in the poem. Carver states in his essay on the poem that “‘For Tess’ tells a little story *and* captures a moment” (121; Carver’s emphasis). As in other Carver poems, the opening lines of “For Tess” set the scene and position the speaker in relation to the natural world around him:

Out on the Strait the water is whitecapping,
as they say here. It’s rough, and I’m glad
I’m not out. Glad I fished all day
on Morse Creek, casting a red Daredevil back
and forth. I didn’t catch anything. No bites
even, not one. But it was okay. It was fine!
I carried your dad’s pocketknife and was followed
for a while by a dog its owner called Dixie.
At times I felt so happy I had to quit
fishing. ... (*Where Water* 130)

The speaker recognizes in the rough waters on the Strait of Juan de Fuca a symbol for emotional and spiritual turmoil which he is grateful to escape.⁴⁵ In comparison to such turmoil, an uneventful day appears a blessing; the sentiments in this passage echo Carver’s assertion in various interviews and writings that he actually welcomed the inactivity imposed on him during his recovery from years of alcoholism and personal

⁴⁵Not only did Carver’s relationship with Gallagher assist him in overcoming his alcoholism permanently and beginning to write again, but his association with Gallagher rescued him from the distractions of the literary scene, allowing him time and space to write. He states in “On ‘For Tess,’” that the poem was written in March 1984, shortly after Gallagher convinced Carver to leave the distractions of Syracuse, New York, where she was still teaching creative writing at Syracuse University, for refuge in her home in Port Angeles, Washington, where he could devote attention to his own creative work (“On ‘For Tess,’” 120). Shortly after the move, Carver began writing poems at a frenetic pace, completing enough pieces to fill *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water* and *Ultramarine* within the space of a few months.

and financial woes.⁴⁶ As in poems like “Gravy” and “Simple,” the speaker of “For Tess” possesses the capacity to praise the ordinary—even the lackluster—because his experience with extraordinary pain and loss leaves him remarkably thankful for the absence of such stressors. Pastoral in its simplicity, the scene described in the opening lines of “For Tess” recalls William Trout’s gratitude for his opportunity at redemption in Hall’s “Another Elegy,” in which Trout’s marriage to Reba provided him with healing and inspiration to compose “line after beautiful line” of poetry despite the trauma of his past or the claustrophobic surroundings of his present (*Museum* 7).

Like William Trout, the speaker of “For Tess” also achieves poetic inspiration through romantic love. The remaining lines of “For Tess” illustrate this point:

Once I lay on the bank with my eyes closed,
 listening to the sound the water made,
 and to the wind in the tops of the trees. The same wind
 that blows out on the Strait, but a different wind, too.
 For a while I even let myself imagine I had died—
 and that was all right, at least for a couple
 of minutes, until it really sank in: *Dead*.
 As I was lying there with my eyes closed,
 just after I’d imagined what it might be like
 if in fact I never got up again, I thought of you.
 I opened my eyes then and got right up
 and went back to being happy again.
 I’m grateful to you, you see. I wanted to tell you.

(*Ultramarine* 130; Carver’s emphasis)

Significantly, the main action of the poem’s story line begins with the poet “listening.” Sound, communication, understanding are crucial to the speaker’s experience and to his identity as a poet. The “wind” he refers to—a force long associated with poetic inspiration—is by its nature paradoxical, simultaneously the “same wind” blowing on the Strait with all its “rough” and destructive tendencies and a “different wind,” the quieter and gentler breeze representing the speaker’s state of emotional calm and artistic regeneration. His calm is so vast he links it at first with death—the kind of death evocative of the positive role death plays in the life cycle as it is imagined in “The Fields.” But just as the speaker of “The

⁴⁶See Carver’s letter to a fellow writer recovering from alcoholism in *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver* (“Unpublished Letter to Mr. Hallstrom” 105-107); see also his interview with William L. Stull, “Matters of Life and Death,” included in Gentry and Stull’s *Conversations with Raymond Carver*, in which Carver declares that “in this new life [free of alcoholism] it wasn’t all that important if I wrote or not. But Tess was writing, and that was a good example for me” (183).

Fields” ultimately chooses to “walk” and “keep walking” (*Ultramarine* 131), so the speaker of “For Tess” senses that he has much of life left to enjoy, a sudden realization that the love he shares with his life partner has afforded him not only a chance to be still but the energy to work as well. The speaker’s realization, as in much of the poetry examined in this project, inspires him to defy death—physical, spiritual, emotional—by returning to the work of words. The speaker not only “got right up / and went back to being happy again”; he likewise created a poem to serve as a message of thanks to his companion for reminding him of his reasons for living. Not merely the speaker’s feelings but their translation into poetry are imperative in this text. As in “The Fields,” the speaker revels in his renewed ability to act on his inspiration to verbalize his joy. The speaker “wanted to tell” his partner how much he appreciated her revitalizing force in his life, and he did so through his poetry.

As its title might suggest, “The Gift,” like “For Tess,” serves as a thank-you note from Carver to Gallagher for much of the peace he felt in the later years of his life, but this poem—much longer than “For Tess”—is focused less exclusively on the speaker’s renewed self and more broadly on the couple’s mutual support and need for each other in their shared lives. Although death is never mentioned directly in the poem, its inevitability casts a shadow over the action of the text. While his partner sleeps, the speaker lies awake at night and recalls two moments in his life when the menacing aspect of impending death could not be ignored. Prior to his experience of these recollections, however, the speaker and his wife shared a happy evening marked by the couple’s mutual ability to be sensitive to the world around them:

Snow began falling late last night. Wet flakes
dropping past windows, snow covering
the skylights. We watched for a time, surprised
and happy. Glad to be here, and nowhere else. (*Ultramarine* 139)

Again, the speaker and his partner view their positions in relation to the natural world as emblematic of their emotional states. Happily insulated from the outside world by the walls of their home and the accumulating snow, the couple enjoys their togetherness and the peace it provides. The speaker expresses “surprise”—not merely at the unexpected snowfall, but at his own generous life, and once more a tone of contented gratitude suffuses the opening lines, as the speaker declares himself and his mate “[g]lad to be here, and nowhere else.”

Menace intrudes, however, when the couple lies down to sleep, still together in body but not in mind. The speaker's thoughts reveal a nagging anxiety over the prospect of loss which his shared life with his mate has soothed but has not eliminated entirely:

We went to bed, where I closed my eyes at once.
 But for some reason, before falling asleep,
 I recalled the scene at the airport
 in Buenos Aires the evening we left.
 How still and deserted the place seemed!
 Dead quiet except the sound of our engines
 as we backed away from the gate and
 taxied slowly down the runway in a light snow.
 The windows in the terminal building dark.
 No one in evidence, not even a ground crew. "It's as if
 the whole place is in mourning," you said. (*Ultramarine* 139)

As in Kenyon's poetry, the image in this passage is primary. As the speaker's companion indicates, the image of the darkened, quiet, snowy Buenos Aires airport becomes a figure for loss, as well as an objective correlative for the speaker's mood at this point in the scene of "The Gift." The eerie silence of the airport illustrates once more Sacks's assertion that elegiac poetry often associates death and loss with a cessation of language (Sacks 2). It is significant that the poet's mate—herself a poet—breaks the silence to describe it figuratively, in terms of an expression of absence and loss. Thus the memory not only echoes the speaker's gloomy turn of mood after his mate falls asleep; more importantly, it suggests the reasons he has found hope for his future in part because of his relationship with her. A writer herself, she is willing and able to shatter the silence the speaker associates with his own despair, and to encourage him to do so also.

Recalling the scene of "Circulation," the next passage of "The Gift" opens with the speaker fully recognizing that his wife, in falling asleep, has momentarily left him alone with his thoughts. Before allowing his mind to wander to another memory, he "cover[s] [her] with an arm" in a physical gesture intended to be not only an expression of protection or affection for his mate but also a means of personal reassurance that she remains, literally and figuratively, by his side. This gesture evokes the speaker's next memory of a time when he was alone, debt-ridden, and still struggling with the effects of alcoholism while living in a one-room apartment in Palo Alto:

The refrigerator stood next to the bed.
 When I became dehydrated in the middle of the night,
 all I had to do to slake that thirst was reach out

and open the door. The light inside showed the way
 to a bottle of cold water. A hot plate
 sat in the bathroom close to the sink.
 When I shaved, the pan of water bubbled
 on the coil next to the jar of coffee granules. (*Ultramarine* 139-140)

Grimly comic, the scene describes a time when the nearest thing the speaker had to a mate he could turn to in the night was the refrigerator whose light "showed the way" to the water that quelled the dehydration brought on by his alcoholism. His desperate loneliness and tight financial bind are highlighted in the next portion of his memory:

I sat on the bed one morning, dressed, clean-shaven,
 drinking coffee, putting off what I'd decided to do. Finally
 dialed Jim Houston's number in Santa Cruz.
 And asked for 75 dollars. He said he didn't have it.
 His wife had gone to Mexico for a week.
 He simply didn't have it. He was coming up short
 this month. "It's okay," I said. "I understand."
 And I did. We talked a little
 more, then hung up. He didn't have it. (*Ultramarine* 140)

Turning to a friend and fellow writer for help, Carver discovers that help is not available, partly because his friend's situation—at least financially, if not otherwise—is also dire. Three times Carver repeats "he didn't have it," a phrase illustrating the separate-togetherness quality of suffering, as neither Carver nor Houston seemed entirely secure at the time. Both men, however, survived the despair. The final section of "The Gift" finds the speaker regaining a tenuous but welcome emotional calm with the start of a new day, a delicately uncertain equipoise significantly coinciding with his companion's awakening:

This morning there's snow everywhere. We remark on it.
 You tell me you didn't sleep well. I say
 I didn't either. You had a terrible night. "Me too."
 We're extraordinarily calm and tender with each other
 as if sensing the other's rickety state of mind.
 As if we knew what the other was feeling. We don't,
 of course. We never do. No matter.
 It's the tenderness I care about. That's the gift
 this morning that moves and holds me.
 Same as every morning. (*Ultramarine* 140)

The paradox of separate togetherness permeates this passage. The speaker acknowledges that both he and his mate "had a terrible night," though the reasons for their suffering, however similar, were not identical. Each member of the couple makes every effort to soothe the other in the wake of a fitful night, taking care

to do no further damage “as if sensing the other’s rickety state of mind.” The speaker recognizes that neither member of the couple can fully understand the other’s emotional state, but clearly some degree of understanding is taking place, providing impetus for the “tenderness” the speaker values.⁴⁷ That tenderness, rooted in the couple’s fulfilling and mutually supportive partnership, is “the gift” for which the poem serves in part as a thank-you note. By awakening each morning with his partner, the speaker awakens to the tender gesture that speaks what words cannot, providing a measure of hope for the future. Carver is paradoxically “moved” and “held” by this tenderness, which both impels him toward creative growth and anchors him against the anxious menace he experienced prior to his redemptive partnership with Gallagher.

One of the finest tributes to the creative and redemptive partnership that Carver and Gallagher shared is Carver’s posthumously published collection, *A New Path to the Waterfall*. The circumstances surrounding the compilation of this volume require special attention here, to highlight the book’s role as a catalyst for the couple’s joint process of coming to terms with Carver’s impending death and their collaboration as a step toward establishing a spiritual dialogue between Carver and Gallagher that would continue in Gallagher’s *Moon Crossing Bridge* and *Portable Kisses*. Frantically but carefully assembled in the wake of Carver’s terminal diagnosis in June 1988, *A New Path* resembles in its method of collection the hurried gathering of poems included in *Otherwise*, on which Kenyon and Hall collaborated as editors shortly before her death in April 1995. Carver and Gallagher made the difficult decision to keep the recurrence of his lung tumors secret from many friends and relatives in order to assure the couple time and privacy to complete the book and to make a fast trip to Reno, Nevada, where they married on 17 June 1988, less than two months before Carver’s death (Gallagher, “Introduction” to *A New Path* xxi). Gallagher took an extremely active role in the creation of *A New Path*; indeed, the volume was largely a collaborative project. Throughout their relationship, Carver relied heavily on Gallagher’s editorial contributions to his

⁴⁷In *Reading Raymond Carver*, Randolph Paul Runyon argues that “The Gift”—indeed, all of the poetry in *Ultramarine*, which he reads as Carver’s finest poetic collection—is, despite the poem’s assertion otherwise, a demonstration of the speaker’s skill at “knowing what the other is thinking” (216). Runyon views the *Ultramarine* poems and virtually the whole of Carver’s oeuvre as exercises in “[m]etaphorical reflexivity” (7), an assertion that bears some merit but may well overstate the case, given Carver’s well-documented distaste for writing more concerned with postmodern experiment than with communication to a broad audience and “bearing witness” to the experience of life beyond the bounds of the academy.

work, as he indicated in his *Paris Review* interview in 1983:

I show her everything I write except for letters, and I've even shown her a few of those. But she has a wonderful eye and a way of feeling herself into what I write. I don't show her anything until I've marked it up and taken it as far as I can. That's usually the fourth or fifth draft, and then she reads every subsequent draft thereafter. So far I've dedicated three books to her and those dedications are not just a token of love and affection; they also indicate the high esteem in which I hold her and an acknowledgment of the help and inspiration she's given me. (Simpson and Buzbee 49)

With *A New Path*, Gallagher's role as editor proved especially crucial. According to her introduction to the volume, Gallagher was responsible—as she often was with earlier Carver books—for arranging the book into its six sections: “My perhaps primitive way of ordering a manuscript was to scatter the pages out on the living-room floor and crawl on my hands and knees among them, reading and sensing what should come next” (xxii). She also proposed the refashioning of Chekhov's prose into poetry and including his voice, as well as those of other writers, in the collection:

One night I looked at certain passages I had bracketed in the stories and realized that they seemed to be speaking toward poems of Ray's which I'd been helping him revise and typing into the computer. On impulse I went to the typewriter and shaped some of these excerpts into lines and gave them titles. When I showed the results to Ray, it was as if we'd discovered another Chekhov inside Chekhov. (xx)

Clearly Gallagher's role in *A New Path* was a strong one, though it is difficult to determine the full extent of her contribution based on what she has stated about the compilation of the volume. Nevertheless, the couple's work as collaborators on this final collection of Carver's poetry must be acknowledged as an important consideration when writing critically about the poems, although the extent of that collaboration on each individual poem is, as of this writing, difficult to determine.

The rich creativity of Carver's later years culminates in *A New Path*, whose inclusiveness is modeled on the structure of Czeslaw Milosz's *Unattainable Earth* and the lessons Carver drew from his extensive reading and longtime admiration of the writings of Anton Chekhov. Gallagher introduced Chekhov's *Ward No. 6* to Carver during the early stages of their collaborative work on *A New Path*. Milosz's volume in particular affected the ultimate form of *A New Path*, whose six sections are introduced by and incorporate passages from various writers of various cultures, including Milosz, Jaroslav Seifert,

Tomas Tranströmer, Charles Wright, Robert Lowell, Stephen Oliver, James Chetham, and—most repeatedly—Chekhov.

Carver and Gallagher's choice to incorporate these varied voices within *A New Path* has sometimes been read as evidence of a thinness of purpose or a lack of a unified focus to the collection. Runyon views the multiple quotations from other writers as an attempt to "fill out [the volume's] pages" in order to complete it before his death (208), and Chappell in his negative review of the collection found particularly objectionable the shaping of Chekhov quotations into poetic form, a decision he declares the product of "artsy-fartsy pretentiousness" (170). What both of these readers overlook, however, is the extent to which Carver's choice to expand the bounds of his poetry collection beyond his own original poetry fits well with his stated vision of writing as communication rather than merely expression. This inclusiveness likewise parallels the direction in which his writing as a whole appeared to be developing at the time of his death. One of the latest Carver stories to appear, and one of the most universally praised, is "Errand," a partially fictionalized account of Anton Chekhov's death scene which has its foundations in Carver's 1987 reading of Henri Troyat's biography of the famous Russian author but which finds itself by the end of the story focusing on a nervous, anonymous, largely imaginary bellhop sent by Chekhov's widow to summon a mortician.⁴⁸ In its blend of historically significant biography and imaginatively shaped fiction, "Errand"—praised by Adam Meyer as "one of the crowning jewels in Carver's oeuvre" (159)—resembles in its hybridized genre the prose/poetry blend which Carver aimed to accomplish in the arrangement of *A New Path* and suggests a nascent enlargement of the boundaries of Carver's writings on the eve of his death. Similarly, the inclusion of outside voices in *A New Path* reaffirms Carver's commitment to writing as an act of communication rather than mere expression. The multiple voices of *A New Path* highlight the dialogic function that Carver viewed his writing as serving, reminding readers of the ways in which poetry—and indeed the whole of literature—constantly reverberates with itself, perpetually folding the writer's translation of experience into the reader's experience and thus creating new artistic experience worthy of

⁴⁸See Carver's commentary on the composition of this story in his brief sketch "On 'Errand,'" collected in *No Heroics, Please* (123-24), where he states, "I knew as I was writing this story that it was a good deal different from anything I'd ever done before. I'm pleased, and grateful, that it seems to have come together" (124).

further communication. It is thus no accident that many of the passages Carver adopts from other writers for inclusion in *A New Path* echo many of his favored "obsessions" as a writer—the random occurrence of menace and good fortune, repeated fears of death and gratitude for life, the harrowing and healing forces of the natural world, the powers and limitations of language as a means of describing experience.

According to Gallagher's introduction to *A New Path*, the six sections of the volume are divided loosely according to theme and chronology of composition. The first section includes various early Carver poems that dealt with revelatory moments in his life. Although Gallagher does not mention this quality, many poems of the first section appear to deal with moments of foreboding, suggestive of the imminence of change. The second group of poems is haunted by characters trapped by identity crises, alcoholism and dissolving relationships, what Gallagher terms "dis-ease" (xxiv). The third section, introduced by a Charles Wright quote asserting that "[w]hat lasts is what you start with," returns the speaker of the poems most forcefully to his origins, his boyhood innocence and the ways in which the dark realities of life and death can shatter that innocence. The art and artistry of the mortal writer, and the longed-for possibility of immortality granted by his writings, unify the fourth section. A counterpoint to these issues appears in the fifth section, in which such artistic ideals are questioned but not wholly negated by what Gallagher calls "the unrelenting, obsessive magnetism of 'the real,' its traps and violences" (xxv). The concluding section, as Gallagher notes, "deals with the stages of [Carver's] awareness as his health worsened and he moved toward death" (xxvi). The earliest poems of this section acknowledge—at times obliquely, at times straightforwardly—the speaker's acutely present death anxiety, but later poems in this portion of the volume evince an acceptance of death that reveals itself through a mixed tone of defiance and poignance.

Two poems included in the first section—"Two Worlds" and "Woman Bathing"—foreground the sensual pleasures of couplehood and explore, especially in the second poem, the tension between the sexual/creative act and the speaker's recognition of impending death. In this respect, "Two Worlds" and "Woman Bathing" reflect passages from Hall's poetry that oppose death fears with a reaffirmation of vibrant sexuality (e.g., the passage in *Baseball* containing the speaker's declaration that "[i]t is ecstasy beyond pleasure / to watch Jennifer squeeze orange juice"). As such, Carver's poems here also resonate with Sacks's assertion in *The English Elegy* that the elegiac speaker is often forced to assert his own

sexuality, however wounded or subdued it may be in the wake of loss, to defy his own death anxieties amplified by recent bereavement (7). In Carver's case, however, among the chief losses he confronts throughout *A New Path* is his own impending death, a fact which gives even the poems written long before his cancer diagnosis a new, self-elegiac context for interpretation because of their inclusion in this final volume.

"Two Worlds" was first published in 1972; "Woman Bathing" was first published in 1967.⁴⁹ As such, both poems obviously predate numerous important events in Carver's life, including his most crucial struggles with alcoholism and recovery, his relationship with Gallagher, and his cancer diagnoses and treatments. Nevertheless, the poems are haunted by the speaker's fear of death and loss, evincing what Harold Schweizer calls "a characteristic quality of Carver's poetry: the speaker in these poems is always dying" ("The Very Short..." 127). "Two Worlds" establishes a lush, tropical setting in its initial three stanzas, only to deflate the sensually redolent atmosphere by hinting of the speaker's loneliness and his consciousness of death as the ultimate form of separation in the final three stanzas. The poem itself is only twelve lines long, and begins as follows:

In air heavy
with odor of crocuses,

sensual smell of crocuses,
I watch a lemon sun disappear,

a sea change blue
to olive black. (*A New Path* 6)

Carver's use of sound, particularly in the first three lines of the poem, whose images are least threatening of all in the poem, is carefully designed to suggest the sensuousness of the scene. The long vowels--themselves as "heavy" as the air--the sibilant consonants, the repetition of the word "crocuses" all communicate abundance, creativity, and sexuality. Again paradoxically, even emblems of loss and decline are beautiful in these lines, as the disappearance of the "lemon sun" and the darkening of the sea water hint of death but

⁴⁹For publishing history of many of Carver's poems, see Appendix 5, "Bibliographical and Textual Notes" to *All of Us: The Collected Poems* [of Raymond Carver]. Ed. William L. Stull. New York: Knopf, 1998.

soothe the poem's own version of menace with the vibrance of the imagery. This effect is continued in the final three stanzas:

I watch lightning leap from Asia as
sleeping

my love stirs and breathes and
sleeps again,

part of this world and yet
part that. (*A New Path* 6)

After watching the lightning, again a beautiful yet dangerous image, the speaker's attention is turned to his love, caught between waking and sleeping, between life and death, as the final lines suggest. The semi-ominous tone of the final lines derives in part from the speaker's choice of the word "love"—most specifically a reference to his lover, but more abstractly a reference to his emotion. Just as the woman "stirs and breathes and / sleeps again," so might the speaker's feelings for her, or, by extension, her feelings for him. As in "The Gift," sleep becomes a symbol of separation to Carver's speaker, not merely a barrier between himself and his lover, but an emblem of the larger separation between worlds which death—of emotion, of individuals—can cause. The fact that the speaker's lover is "part of this world and yet / part that" is not entirely a peaceful image, as the harsh, heavy-stressed syllables of the final line indicate. Once again, Carver's speaker feels displaced from himself and from someone he loves; the lush beauty (and the creativity it suggests) of the speaker's surroundings can accomplish only so much in comforting his latent anxieties of loss, abandonment, and death. Yet "Two Worlds," imagistic rather than narrative, demonstrates that Carver could make use of the techniques of lyric poetry and allegorical devices to communicate a mood in his poetry. The "two worlds" of the title are not simply East and West, or the physical world and the landscape of dreams, but are likewise the tenuous separate togetherness of the lovers, as well as the speaker's consciousness of the blurred line demarcating life and death.

"Woman Bathing" is similarly mixed in tone, asserting a desperate *carpe diem* theme through the familiar image of two passionate lovers in a lush but vaguely threatening environment. It is significant that the passage immediately preceding "Woman Bathing" in *A New Path* is a section from Chekhov's "A Visit to Friends" that likewise expresses the urgency of the *carpe diem* theme. In that passage, a man watches a

young woman dancing, "her white dress billowing and showing glimpses / of her slim, pretty legs," and as he gazes, "thoroughly contented," another watcher whispers to him, "Misha, don't run away from your happiness. Take it / while it offers itself to you freely, later you will be running / after it, but you won't overtake it" (*A New Path* 15). The lovers in "Woman Bathing" are heeding just such a lesson, but their knowledge of the inevitability of death adds a frantic restlessness to their passion:

Naches River. Just below the falls.
 Twenty miles from any town. A day
 of dense sunlight
 heavy with odors of love.
How long have we? (*A New Path* 16)

Again, the setting, in its remote exoticism, virtually brims over with light and liveliness in the first four lines. Water imagery, clearly a favorite of Carver's as it was of Hall's, suggests here sexuality and renewal. The lovers are isolated from everyone but each other ("Twenty miles from any town"), and that isolation, as in other Carver poems, is simultaneously glorious and ominous. The italicized question, however, proves to be pivotal, as it hints not only at the lovers' fear of running out of time for their lovemaking but also at the fear of death, as the following lines indicate:

Already your body, sharpness of Picasso,
 is drying in this highland air.
 I towel down your back, your hips,
 with my undershirt.
 Time is a mountain lion.
 We laugh at nothing,
 and as I touch your breasts
 even the ground-
 squirrels
 are dazzled. (*A New Path* 16)

The speaker's unexpected description of his lover's body as possessing the "sharpness of Picasso" suggests the couple's sense that they are in many ways "living on the edge," nearing the moment when they will be forced to separate temporarily and ultimately permanently, in life or in death. Aptly, the speaker figures time as a "mountain lion," a dangerous devourer whose presence foregrounds the lovers' mortality. Interestingly, when originally published in 1967, line 7 was followed by an additional line, which Carver later removed: "*A few minutes only?*" (*All of Us*, Appendix 5, 362). The couple's desperation to have more time for their rendezvous is suggestive of a larger desire to evade impending death. It is not merely because

the couple fears discovery that they “laugh at nothing”: the gravity of death, which is the foil to their creative/sexual act, casts a specter on their togetherness. The beginning of the couple’s lovemaking “dazzle[s],” bewilders as well as inspires wonder in not only themselves but the world around them. As in Hall’s and Kenyon’s poetry, by asserting their sexuality the couple not only defies death but paradoxically confirms its presence as an unrelenting threat.⁵⁰

The third section of *A New Path* contains “Another Mystery,” in which Carver contemplates his own death by recalling through a routine chore the deaths of his father and his grandfather. In its linkage of Carver’s death to those of his ancestors, “Another Mystery,” first published in *Poetry* in 1989, resonates with much of Kenyon’s and Hall’s poetry of mourning for their dying parents and likewise parallels other Carver poems about his father, who died on 17 June 1967.⁵¹ The poem begins with the speaker’s memory of a trip to the dry cleaners shortly before his grandfather’s funeral:

That time I tagged along with my dad to the dry cleaners—
What’d I know then about Death? Dad comes out carrying
a black suit in a plastic bag. Hangs it up behind the back seat
of the old coupe and says, “This is the suit your grandpa
is going to leave the world in.” What on earth
could he be talking about? I wondered.
I touched the plastic, the slippery lapel of that coat
that was going away, along with my grandpa. Those days it was
just another mystery. (*A New Path* 48)

Carver captures in this passage the innocence of his early childhood, his inexperience with death. The deceptively simple rhetorical question—“What’d I know then about Death?”—is phrased as a child might phrase it, complete with its awkward contraction. As in Kenyon poems such as “Coats,” “Cleaning the Closet,” and “Afternoon at MacDowell,” clothing imagery structures Carver’s poem, magnifying once more the tension between the physical and the emotional/spiritual, which contemplations of death often reveal. Once more, the word and the gesture offer themselves as differing strategies for accessing the experience of

⁵⁰The second section of *A New Path* contains several important poems, but they generally pre-date Carver’s cancer diagnosis. Similarly, they are most often concerned with the dissolution of a marriage and are thus based on his break-up with Maryann Carver. As such, they are less crucial to the present project and will not be examined in this chapter.

⁵¹See “My Dad’s Wallet” (*Where Water* 55-56), “Photograph of My Father in His Twenty-Second Year” (*Fires* 59), and “The Sturgeon” (*A New Path* 45-46). See also Carver’s essay “My Father’s Life” in *Fires* (13-21).

loss, though neither appear at all effective at this point in the poem. Confused by his father's reference to the grandfather's impending death, the young Carver apparently does not further question his father in the hopes that more words can clarify his understanding of the situation; rather, he resorts to the physical, the tangible, in an effort to comprehend what his father means. The boy's touch of the "slippery lapel of that coat / that was going away" like his grandfather nevertheless offered no answers because the physical loss that would trigger the emotional loss had not yet taken place. His grandfather, like the suit he would be buried in, had not yet been fully lost to the boy. Death at that point was indeed still "just another mystery."

The second stanza of "Another Mystery" describes the funeral of Carver's father. Again, the word and the gesture act as separate methods for examining and coping with the loss experience, but once more, both strategies prove inadequate:

Then there was a long interval, a time in which relatives departed
this way and that, left and right. Then it was my dad's turn.
I sat and watched him rise up in his own smoke. He didn't own
a suit. So they dressed him gruesomely
in a cheap sports coat and tie,
for the occasion. Wired his lips
into a smile as if he wanted to reassure us, *Don't worry, it's
not as bad as it looks*. But we knew better. He was dead,
wasn't he? What else could go wrong? (His eyelids
were sewn closed, too, so he wouldn't have to witness
the frightful exhibit.) I touched
his hand. Cold. The cheek where a little stubble had
broken through along the jaw. Cold. (*A New Path* 48; Carver's emphasis)

As the boy in the first stanza attempts to glean the spiritual/emotional meaning of his father's words through the physical/material gesture of touching the suit, so the young man in the second stanza attaches a verbal meaning that he knows to be a lie (*Don't worry, it's / not as bad as it looks*) to the physical spectacle of his father's dead body arranged awkwardly for viewing. Carver's grotesque physical description of his father reflects the young man's horror at the moment but does little to dignify or to soothe the pain of his loss. The "frightful exhibit," meant to "reassure," only exacerbates the pain and magnifies the speaker's loss, as the father finds no comfort before his death and is as literally manipulated after death as he figuratively was in life. Still, the son attempts a final reaching out, as he touches his father's hand and cheek, the few parts of his father which have apparently not been altered or garishly dressed after his death. Nevertheless, the touch proves largely comfortless, as the only sensation the speaker recalls is "Cold." Despite his more intimate

dealings with loss as a young adult, death remains a mystery for the speaker at this point.

The final stanza, however, features a literal and figurative breakthrough for the speaker, who achieves some release from the pain of his earlier losses by contemplating his own death and its nearness:

Today I reeled this clutter up from the depths.
 Just an hour or so ago when I picked up my own suit
 from the dry cleaners and hung it carefully behind the back seat.
 I drove it home, opened the car door and
 lifted it out into sunlight. I stood there a minute
 in the road, my fingers crimped on the wire hanger. Then
 tore a hole through the plastic to the other side. Took one of
 the empty sleeves between my fingers and held it—
 the rough, palpable fabric.
 I reached through to the other side. (*A New Path* 48-49)

Death, in the first two stanzas a frightening and confusing separation caused by the speaker's loss of loved ones, becomes a less anxious prospect when the speaker imagines his own death and recognizes within it a physical loss that does not necessarily translate into a spiritual severing of ties with loved ones. The memories that Carver refers to as "clutter" in the first line of the passage actually survive longer than any physical emblem of loss ever could. It takes a moment for the speaker to muster the courage to make the deceptively simple gesture of tearing a hole in the plastic and touch "the other side," but once he does so, he realizes the suit (presumably the suit he will be buried in) is nothing more than "rough, palpable fabric" subject to decay but, in itself, no longer a representation of menace to the speaker. Approaching death himself, the speaker acknowledges its inevitability and begins to conquer his fears, to solve the mystery as much as he can while still alive. Solving that mystery involves writing the poem, a verbal act that translates nonverbal experience in an effort to communicate with readers who have experienced similar losses. The poem keeps alive through memory, individual and collective, the people and events that are no longer materially a part of the present. As such, "Another Mystery" demonstrates well Gallagher's view of poetry as a link among multiple past and future losses, as she argues in "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief":

the time of the poem is multi-directional. It reaches richly into the past and forms linkages with the present and with other isolated pasts. It searches into the future. It reminds us of longings. ... Poems often remake the grief-causing experience in terms of myth or analogy so that the unconscious and the conscious experiences of the speaker and the reader are enabled to meet. Myth mediates between the conscious and unconscious minds. It moves from ego release to psychic and spiritual embrace. (107)

The fourth section of *A New Path*, concerned as it is with memory and the artist's legacy, also well illustrates Gallagher's point in her "Reservoir" essay. The section opens with Czeslaw Milosz's "Return to Krakow in 1880," a poem which concludes with the lines, "To win? To lose? / What for, if the world will forget us anyway" (*A New Path* 52), a statement which questions the very determinations that appear to drive Carver's final project. Despite Carver's possible suspicions that memory is as slippery and mysterious as death itself, his poems in *A New Path*—indeed, the whole of his oeuvre—and his commitment to "bearing witness" to undiscussed experience suggest that the creative determined act serves a positive preservative function by keeping the ephemeral in place in the minds of writers and readers. Two poems that demonstrate this ideal, in very different ways, are "His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed with Notes" and "Poems."

"His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed with Notes" is a list poem that offers a portrait of the writer's legacy as a random gathering of ideas he had no sufficient time to explore through his writing. Each stanza represents a note—a description of a vignette, an arresting quotation or historical fact—which contained the seed of a poem, short story, essay, or some other form of written work. The somewhat random collection of ideas is nonetheless linked by a general tenor of loss and decline, despite the speaker's occasional playfulness. The notes catalogue a series of sad or anxious moments: "Those dead birds on the porch when I opened up / the house after being away for three months"; "The policeman whose nails were bitten / to the quick"; "'We've sustained damage but we're still able / to maneuver.' Spock to Captain Kirk."; "The bill collector (in Victoria, B.C.) who asks / the widow if she'd like it if the bailiff dug up / her husband and repossessed the suit he was buried in" (*A New Path* 65-66). What the speaker concludes after reviewing all the notes is evident from the final two lines of the poem, each given its own stanza. "I've got—how much longer?" the speaker asks, and the answer, though never given directly, is clear from the final line: "Enough horsing around!" The need to write and record is imperative, the line implies, because however long a lifetime may be, the writer's ideas will not likely be exhausted before he dies; he must find the words to bear witness to the extraordinary experiences he encounters in the everyday. Interestingly, "His Bathrobe Pockets Stuffed with Notes" was originally published in 1986, a year prior to Carver's cancer diagnosis. As such, it proves what Carver asserted in his interview with Michael Schumacher just a few months before the

symptoms of his lung cancer first appeared: "I feel like now there's everything to do and little enough time to do it in" (Schumacher 230).

Much more consistently serious in tone, "Poems" likewise reveals that Carver felt compelled to write, particularly poetry, even in the face of dying. Beautifully lyrical, "Poems" suggests an abundance of spirit which the speaker hopes to share with his readers, even those who might wish him ill. The speaker views the poems he writes as blessings for which he did not plan but proves grateful for, in a tone that links "Poems" with many other pieces collected in *A New Path*. "Poems" begins as follows:

They've come every day this month.
Once I said I wrote them because
I didn't have time for anything
else. Meaning, of course, better
things—things other than mere
poems and verses. Now I'm writing
them because I want to. (*A New Path* 72)

What once was a pale substitute to the speaker for what he saw as grander pursuits—presumably the writing of fiction—has become his choice mode for communicating his experience and developing the ideas that required development before his death. It is no accident that "Poems" appears in *A New Path* directly after a short essay entitled "Some Prose on *Poetry*," originally published in 1987 in *Poetry* magazine's seventy-fifth anniversary issue, which describes Carver's awakening at the age of eighteen or nineteen to the possibility of publishing his own poetry. As the whole of *A New Path* demonstrates, at the time of his death poetry was to Carver much more than "mere / poems and verses."

Perhaps more than any other Carver poem, "Poems" directly links the composition of poetry with nature's rebirth, in a gesture evocative of the dependence on vegetation myths characteristic of much elegiac verse (Sacks 27). Carver's speaker insists that "[m]ore than anything" he attributes the blessing of an abundance of new poems to an odd reversal of nature that suggests some hope despite his serious illness:

this is February
when normally not much of anything
happens. But this month
the larches have blossomed,
and the sun has come out
every day. It's true my lungs
have heated up like ovens. (*A New Path* 72)

The speaker acknowledges the critical state of his health but finds hope in the glory of a natural world that

appears to defy its own cycles by blossoming in winter. In this respect "Poems" enacts what Gallagher describes as "Carver's law" in her introduction to *A New Path*: "not to save up things for some longed-for future, but to use up the best that was in him each day and to trust that more would come" (xvii). Thus "Poems" manages to balance a realistic assessment of the speaker's situation with an optimistic outlook for the future, creating a paradoxical tone that carries throughout the poem. The speaker recognizes that not everyone he knows will wish him well in battling his illness; nevertheless, he turns his obvious frustration with their gloating into a blessing offered to them, though that blessing contains a reminder that they, too, will one day confront their own deaths:

And so what if some people
are waiting for the other shoe
to drop, where I'm concerned.
Well, here it is then. Go ahead.
Put it on. I hope it fits
like a shoe.
Close enough, yes, but supple
so the foot has room to breathe
a little. Stand up. Walk
around. Feel it? It will go
where you're going, and be there
with you at the end of your trip.
But for now, stay barefoot. Go
outside for a while, and play. (*A New Path* 72)

Carver, expert at transforming colloquial expression into fresh metaphor, takes the language of ill-wishers and turns it back against them, paradoxically by encouraging them to believe and to act upon whatever grants them satisfaction, even if that satisfaction comes at Carver's expense. Given this purpose, it is not surprising that a poem which begins by addressing a general audience and describing the poet's gratitude for his recent productivity suddenly shifts its audience and directly addresses those who would relish the speaker's misfortune. The final lines of "Poems" are particularly complex, given that Carver in his later years experienced a great deal of guilt for the wounds he believed he caused others during his drinking years; the speaker of these lines thus appears to know the consequences of wishing bad luck on others, yet he encourages his unnamed enemies to continue harboring their wish for vengeance, though the consequences of that wish will likely follow them to their graves ("It will go / where you're going, and be there / with you at the end of your trip"). Still, despite the speaker's sense that such ill-wishers will think

what they want, he encourages them (apparently for their own benefit, though the speaker clearly enjoys defying their expectations) to avoid wasting too much of their lives on anger and jealousy. The final lines of "Poems" contains a hint of the *carpe diem* theme, though the speaker suggests that those who truly seek happiness will not ground it in wishing pain on others but rather in pursuing basic pleasures for themselves ("But for now, stay barefoot. Go / outside for a while, and play"). By including these references to his anonymous enemies in a poem entitled "Poems," Carver achieves another subtle dig against those who might take pleasure in his suffering. Carver senses that his reputation and his writings will serve as his legacy long after his death, a situation that would cause the unnamed and unremembered ill-wishers even more frustration.

The poems of the final two sections of *A New Path* approach most directly Carver's recognition of his impending death, as well as the simultaneous sadness he feels at leaving behind his newfound productive life and gratitude he feels for the "gravy" years he shared with Tess Gallagher. These poems tend to vacillate in form between brief lyrics addressed to or directly concerning Gallagher and her grief and longer lyric-narratives that relate a story important to Carver's and Gallagher's coming-to-terms with his physical decline. Among the most important lyric-narratives of this group are "Wake Up," "What the Doctor Said," "Summer Fog," and "Proposal"; important brief lyrics include "Hummingbird," "Cherish," and "No Need."

Among the least hopeful of this group is "Wake Up." The setting of the poem echoes its ominous subject, as the speaker and his female companion tour the dungeon of Zurich's Kyborg Castle. After scanning the various torture devices that litter the room, noting as well the crucifix hanging ironically on the wall, the speaker is drawn to the chopping block, where he cannot resist the temptation to recline in the spot where prisoners were positioned for execution. In doing so, the speaker acknowledges a death wish that he believes all humans share, a wish he is willing to act upon as long as the outcome is not truly fatal:

I stare at the block. Why not? Why not indeed?
Who hasn't ever wanted to stick his neck out without fear
of consequence? Who hasn't wanted to lay his life on the line,
then draw back at the last minute?
Who, secretly, doesn't lust after every experience?
It's late. There's nobody else in the dungeon but us,
she and me, the North Pole and the South. I drop down
to my knees on the stone floor, grasp my hands behind
my back, and lay my head on the block. Inch it forward

into the pulse-filled groove until my throat fits the shallow
 depression. I close my eyes, draw a breath. A deep breath.
 The air thicker somehow, as if I can almost taste it.
 For a moment, calm now, I feel I could almost drift off. (*A New Path* 110–11)

The passage is saturated with oppositions--past and present, man and woman ("the North Pole and the South"), excitement and calm, and most notably life and death. The speaker's choice to rest his neck on the block results from his sense that he, like most people, views dying as the ultimate act of living, and he hopes to gain some awareness of how it feels by mimicking the moment of his own death without fear that it will actually take place in this particular location, at this particular moment in time. The "it" which the speaker can "almost taste" is not only the thickened air, but the imagined experience of his own death. Not violent, as were those of the prisoners, his imagined death descends upon him as a form of calm, a kind of "drift[ing] off" to sleep, made possible in part by the fact that the threat of death he imagines is exactly that--imagined. The presence of his companion, however, intrudes on his calm:

Wake up, she says, and I do, turn my head over to see
 her standing above me with her arms raised. I see the axe too,
 the one she pretends to hold, so heavy it's all she
 can do to hold it up over her shoulder. Only kidding,
 she says, and lowers her arms, and the idea-of-axe, then
 grins. I'm not finished yet, I say. A minute later, when I
 do it again, put my head back down on the block, in
 the same polished groove, eyes closed, heart racing
 a little now, there's no time for the prayer forming in my
 throat. It drops unfinished from my lips as I hear her
 sudden movement. Feel flesh against my flesh as the sharp
 wedge of her hand comes down unswervingly to the base of
 my skull and I tilt, nose over chin into the last
 of sight, of whatever sheen or rapture I can grasp to take
 with me, wherever I'm bound. (*A New Path* 111)

In contrast to the speaker's relatively peaceful contemplation of his death in the previous stanza, the entrance of his companion into this mock life-and-death drama raises the stakes, enhances the menace involved in the moment. Romantic partnership, as Carver's own experience bore out, can prove both emotionally deadening and emotionally enlivening. In either case, as "Wake Up" suggests, the presence of a romantic other can make the prospect of death all the more insufferable, as death may either cap an emotionally desolate life or cut short an emotionally enriched one. It is therefore not surprising that, in the speaker's eyes, his companion indeed symbolically holds the power of life and death over him--the "idea-of-

axe"--so much so he must assert to himself as well as to her, "I'm not finished yet." The final lines of the above passage return the reader to the conflict between words and gestures as means of communicating emotions relating to loss. The words of his prayer are silenced by the feel of "flesh against my flesh as the sharp / wedge of her hand comes down unswervingly." The erotic overtones of the passage suggest a link between sex and death which is much more disturbing than the descriptions of sexuality employed to counteract fears of death in the poetry of Kenyon and Hall, and even in earlier Carver poems. This particular form of menace, however, is balanced somewhat by the vaguely comic atmosphere of the scene described, but it nevertheless reinforces the realistic attitude toward couplehood that permeates the poem: the power of emotional involvement with another, if strong enough to revive, may also be strong enough to kill. The final lines of the poem underscore this point even as they suggest the possibility of redemption:

You can get up now, she says, and
 I do. I push myself up off my knees, and I look at her,
 neither of us smiling, just shaky
 and not ourselves. Then her smile and my arm going
 around her hips as we walk into the next corridor
 needing the light. And outside then, in the open, needing more.
 (A New Path 111-12)

Once more, the physical gesture rather than words sustains the couple's emotions in the wake of the threat of death and separation. Neither member of the partnership appears to speak as they leave the fearful atmosphere of the dungeon, but instead a "smile and my arm going / around her hips" become for the speaker the best comfort they can manage. Their togetherness, if potentially threatening individually, also provides an avenue for survival for each member of the couple, as they guide each other to "the open" and its comforting light. The speaker's attitude to the many oppositions that drive the poem proves as "shaky" as are the couple's emotions at the end of their visit to Kyborg Castle.

"Wake Up" is followed by "What the Doctor Said," a poem somewhat lighter in tone but certainly not in subject matter. As in sections of Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and Hall's *Museum of Clear Ideas* and *Without*, "What the Doctor Said" centers on a cancer diagnosis scene and its effect on the speaker. Bereft of punctuation or any indicator for the reader for stresses and pauses, the poem's trajectory imitates the relentless onslaught of language that could characterize such an experience for cancer patients and their loved ones. In this respect, the flow of "What the Doctor Said" resembles the incantatory impact of

“Without,” though its effect in comparison with Hall’s poem is tempered pronouncedly by Carver’s narrative thread and his incorporation of dark humor into the scene he describes.

As the title indicates, words and their strengths and limitations for coping with drastic occasions serve as a crucial theme in this poem. As in Kenyon’s “Chrysanthemums” and “Pharaoh,” the doctor’s words are given precedence in the poem; the phrase “he said” is repeated seven times in Carver’s poem, while the phrase “I said” appears only three times. The first two-thirds of the poem reads like an unpunctuated transcription of a grimly comic dialogue:

He said it doesn’t look good
 he said it looks bad in fact real bad
 he said I counted thirty-two of them on one lung before
 I quit counting them
 I said I’m glad I wouldn’t want to know
 about any more being there than that
 he said are you a religious man do you kneel down
 in forest groves and let yourself ask for help
 when you come to a waterfall
 mist blowing against your face and arms
 do you stop and ask for understanding at those moments
 I said not yet but I intend to start today (*A New Path* 113)

The speaker attempts to deflect the fatal diagnosis with humor, so that the doctor acts primarily as a straight-man figure to whom the speaker responds with darkly funny punch lines tinged with desperation. The prayer image, thwarted in “Wake Up,” recurs in “What the Doctor Said,” this time as the physician’s suggestion to the speaker for a last-ditch effort at survival. Once more, the prayer image hinges on the capacity of language to evoke change (“let yourself *ask* for help”; “stop and *ask* for understanding”), but the speaker seems to have placed little stock in the power of prayer to achieve his wished-for results in the past. Despite his plans to “start today,” his intention is less an affirmation of faith than an otherwise helpless attempt to achieve healing. Nevertheless, if the speaker—or at least his urge to survive—is to be taken at all seriously, he never fully rejects the potential for prayer, faith translated into words, to do him good. Once more, language’s usefulness is both potentially powerful and seriously suspect, paradoxical and impossible to avoid. It is significant as well that the evocation of the spiritual and the capacity for renewal in this poem rests in the image of the waterfall—the central metaphor of the title of Carver’s last collection. As in Hall’s death poetry and in countless vegetation myths undergirding elegiac verse, the water image evokes the life

cycle and is suggestive of the restorative powers of all living things. Despite his much-publicized realism, Carver in the bulk of his poetry placed great emphasis on the power of nature to renew and sustain. Whatever the comic overtones of the poem, the prayer scene described in "What the Doctor Said" is not merely held up for ridicule but likely contained for Carver a genuine possibility for redemption.⁵²

The speaker does recognize that words are not utterly powerless, as his response to the doctor's words indicates. The poem continues to its end as follows:

I said Amen and he said something else
I didn't catch and not knowing what else to do
and not wanting him to have to repeat it
and me to have to fully digest it
I just looked at him
for a minute and he looked back it was then
I jumped up and shook hands with this man who'd just given me
something no one else on earth had ever given me
I may even have thanked him habit being so strong (*A New Path* 113)

Again paradoxically, words in this passage prove simultaneously powerful and ineffectual. The doctor's words in the early lines of the poem create such a marked impact on the speaker that he at last loses the capacity to speak meaningfully or to comprehend the last words the doctor spoke ("he said something else / I didn't catch"). After the speaker learns he will die soon, the doctor's words are both so frightening, and so ultimately unimportant, that he does not ask the doctor to repeat them and does not want to "fully digest" them. Suddenly communication halts between the speaker and the doctor, as both men "just looked" at each other in silence. Plunged into the chaos of anticipating his own imminent death, the speaker's words and gestures prove meaningless, losing even the wit that characterized his initial denial-induced responses to the doctor's diagnosis. By the end of the poem, the speaker's words have become for him a mere formality ("I may have even thanked him habit being so strong"), ironically rendered so by the force of the doctor's diagnosis.

In her introduction to *A New Path*, Tess Gallagher describes the circumstances surrounding the composition of another important lyric-narrative, "Summer Fog":

⁵²When asked by Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee if he considered himself religious, Carver responded, "No, but I have to believe in miracles and the possibility of resurrection. No question about that. Every day that I wake up, I'm glad to wake up. That's why I like to wake up early" (Simpson and Buzbee 46).

The poem "Summer Fog" [...] was made all the more extraordinary for me because of something Ray said when he first gave me the poem to read. He told me he was sorry he wouldn't be there to do the things for me that I was doing for him. 'I've tried something here,' he said. 'I don't know if it works.' What he had tried was to leap ahead into the time of my death, and to imagine his grief as a gift to me against my own approaching solitude. It seems all the more moving that this was done at a time when his own death was, in the words of the poem, the "stupendous grief" we were feeling together. (*A New Path* xxv-xxvi)

Carver's gift to his wife is thus in its very conception a poignant reconciliation of opposites, as the dying imagines himself the survivor struggling to cope with the death of a partner who in actuality will outlive him. The opening lines list the types of experiences Carver might expect to endure shortly after learning of his loved one's death in a parallel construction that creates an incantatory effect for the reader, evocative of the somber and the sacred:

To sleep and forget everything for a few hours...
 To wake to the sound of the foghorn in July.
 To look out the window with a heavy heart and see fog
 hanging in the pear trees, fog clogging the intersection,
 shrouding the neighborhood like a disease invading a healthy
 body. To go on living when she has stopped living... (*A New Path* 90)

Both the sounds and the imagery of the opening passage suggest grief and stagnation. The repetition of the word "fog" not only establishes the pathetic fallacy and echoes through its sound the poem's heaviness of mood; it hints as well at the speaker's own psychological state, trapped in a metaphorical fog, uncertain what to do or how to do it since his companion is dead. The speaker's confused state of mind is further echoed by the "to sleep"/"to wake" opposition opening the first two lines of the poem. In many other Carver poems, the imagery of sleep is suggestive of complacency, alcoholic numbing, even death, while awakening is viewed as a reinvigoration of an individual's capacity to live and work productively. Here the opposite attitude prevails, as the speaker, depressed and disoriented by the magnitude of his loss, prefers the numbing effects of sleep to the almost hellish pain of consciousness, which repeatedly forces him to acknowledge that his mate "has stopped living." Interestingly, the fog—and, by extension, the effects of the speaker's loss on his emotional integrity—are compared in this passage to "a disease invading a healthy / body." Carver, then suffering the actual effects of such a disease, imagines the emotional effects of serious loss in terms of the physical effects of the illnesses that frequently lead to such losses, equating through language two types of pain traditionally viewed as essentially different. But, as in much of Kenyon's poetry,

Carver's carefully subtle use of ellipsis in this poem, a type of punctuation he rarely uses in his writing, indicates a falling away of language, a questioning of its fitness for accessing fully the experience he describes. The speaker's mistrust of words is revealed in different form in the next passage of the poem:

A car eases by with its lights on, and the clock is
turned back to five days ago, the ringing and ringing that brought me
back to this world and news of her death, she who'd simply been
away, whose return had been anticipated with baskets
of raspberries from the market. (Starting from this day
forward, I intend to live my life differently. For one thing,
I won't ever answer the phone again at five in the morning. I knew
better, too, but still picked up the receiver and said that fateful
word, "Hello." The next time I'll simply let it ring.) (*A New Path* 90)

Once more in Carver, the ringing telephone is a harbinger of menace. As in "What the Doctor Said," words bring alarm and despair, but the speaker's imagined alternative—insulation from the outside world—is no better, as it would only reinforce the loneliness that accompanies his grief. While contemplating the fog that besets him, the speaker appears trapped, bereft of his life partner and unable at this point to trust the means of communication that could eventually mollify his loneliness.

After a few lines acknowledging his dread of the upcoming funeral service, the speaker's voice shifts from a kind of interior monologue to an imperative prayer of sorts pleading for the return of sunlight. The speaker paradoxically asserts that his dead companion is bereft of all agency while simultaneously associating her with life, liveliness, and the renewal of spring:

May this fog lift and burn off before three this afternoon! Let us
be able, at least, to bury her under sunny skies, she who worshiped
the sun. Everyone knows she is taking part
in this dark masque today only because she has no choice.
She has lost the power of choice! How she'd
hate this! She who loved in April *deciding*
to plant the sweetpeas and who staked them before
they could climb. (*A New Path* 90; Carver's emphasis)

The woman associated in the speaker's memory with light and activity is at this point associated with darkness and inertia, a contrast the speaker has difficulty reconciling. If hope appears in this passage, it rests in the speaker's memory of his loved one as a cultivator, a maker, a creator whose power to nourish and nurture may remain emotionally and spiritually in his memory after her physical demise. Nevertheless, his wounds still fresh, a powerful struggle remains for the speaker to endure, as the final lines indicate:

I light my first cigarette of the day and turn away from
the window with a shudder. The foghorn sounds again, filling me
with apprehension, and then, then stupendous
grief. (*A New Path* 91)

The image of the cigarette, the presumed cause of Carver's cancer, in the irrational atmosphere of "Summer Fog" resumes its old role as an agent of comfort despite its deadly capabilities, of which Carver was very much aware while composing "Summer Fog." Again the sound of the foghorn triggers the speaker's increased despair. Still trapped in a fog of confused emotions, the speaker can only express it (to use Carver's terms) rather than communicate it. His loss, still fresh, has bereft him of a life partner and a dialogue partner.

"Proposal" treats in poem form Carver and Gallagher's decision to marry shortly after the diagnosis of his lung cancer recurrence in June 1988. The opening stanza describes the proposal scene as a mutual choice to confirm in words and ceremony the love shared by the couple for a decade. The couple's long-standing intimacy renders words almost unnecessary, as the first three lines show. Also, as is characteristic of Carver, the scene he describes demonstrates that realistic detail—the "ordinary"—is given power and precedence over romantic visions of how such an experience should be conducted:

I ask her and then she asks me. We each
accept. There's no back and forth about it. After nearly eleven years
together, we know our minds and more. And this postponement, it's
ripened too. Makes sense now. I suppose we should be
in a rose-filled garden or at least on a beautiful cliff overhanging
the sea, but we're on the couch, the one where sleep
sometimes catches us with our books open, or
some old Bette Davis movie unspools
in glamorous black and white—flames in the fireplace dancing
menacingly in the background as she ascends the marble
staircase with a sweet little snub-nosed
revolver, intending to snuff her ex-lover, the fur coat
he bought her draped loosely over her shoulders. Oh lovely, oh lethal
entanglements. In such a world
to be true. (*A New Path* 115)

The long description of the Bette Davis movie underscores the contrast between the precision of the ordinary moment and the stylized romantic ideal, of which Carver is routinely suspicious. Even within the "glamorous black and white" finely crafted world of Hollywood, life rarely proves emotionally black-and-white, as is illustrated by Carver's final lines as well as the film scene he describes. "Menace" pervades—in

life, in film, in poetry. The paradox of the final lines is multi-layered. Romantic partnerships, for all their tenderness, are "entanglements." As "lovely" as intimate involvement can be, death always waits in the wings—metaphorically, when emotional conflicts can cause relationships to die, or literally, when one member of the couple succumbs to disease or sudden death. The final phrase—"In such a world / to be true"—can be read as a wish to defy irrational despair and "bad luck" by a commitment to an individual or a life purpose, but it can likewise be read as a lament, as if such a commitment were ideal but impossible. Carver, however, does not clarify what he means by "such a world" nor by the equally problematic "true." The poem at this point—like the emotional and physical pain its subject involves—is in many ways inscrutable.

The next portion of the poem returns the reader to another diagnosis scene, and once more the efficacy of language at such a moment proves a central issue:

A few days back some things got clear
about there not being all those years ahead we'd kept
assuming. The doctor going on finally about "the shell" I'd be
leaving behind, doing his best to steer us away from the veil of
tears and foreboding. "But he loves his life," I heard a voice say.
Hers. And the young doctor, hardly skipping a beat, "I know.
I guess you have to go through those seven stages. But you end
up in acceptance." (*A New Path* 115)

The communication among the doctor, Carver, and Gallagher is hollow, largely because of the doctor's apparent inability to read and understand the human reaction to the impact of his words. As such, this scene well illustrates Gallagher's point in her "Reservoir" essay concerning the obsession in a fast-paced modern world with quick emotional recovery from serious loss. The doctor's reference to Carver's body as a "shell," his "going on" and "hardly skipping a beat," demonstrate his ingenuous insensitivity to the multiple possible interpretations of his words and to the shock the couple feels. Gallagher could have been speaking of the doctor in Carver's poem when she explained how the chief aim of the "business present" is to "act upon language and consequently upon our lives" by "driv[ing] out the ambiguity of language which is the life blood of grief feeling and of poem making and reading" ("Reservoir" 106). Far less sensitive than even the somewhat comical doctor figure of "What the Doctor Said," the doctor of "Proposal" reduces Kubler-Ross and other stage theories of grief to their worst and least useful form: a rigid schematic through which

all individuals are expected to pass in similar fashion. Little wonder, then, that the speaker—an expert at the art of language—finds himself so confused as to momentarily wonder at the voice of his ten-year life companion. The doctor's handling of the act of telling renders words far less beneficially powerful than they might have been at such a traumatic moment.

Nevertheless, as in "Gravy," the doctor's words and the meaning behind them have a serious impact on the couple. At lunch after the doctor visit, they begin the task of mapping out how best to use the time left to them. Again, the "word" figures prominently in their adjustment:

We had plans to make, time pressing down
on us like a vise, squeezing out hope to make room for
the everlasting—that word making me want to shout "Is there
an Egyptian in the house?" (*A New Path* 115-116)

The "everlasting," when faced as a part of the couple's reality rather than merely a concept, creates a sense of urgency similar to the *carpe diem* atmosphere of other Carver poems in the collection. Again, Carver's dark humor both distances and intensifies the magnitude of the emotional struggle the couple faces, while likewise evoking Kenyon's "Pharaoh" and presaging Gallagher's "We're All Pharaohs When We Die" through its allusion to Egyptian preservation of the dead. The wit of the passage, though, is balanced by the tenderness of the next section, in which the image of the couple's physical support for each other recalls similar scenes from Hall's *Museum of Clear Ideas* and *The Old Life*:

Back home we held on to each other and, without
embarrassment or caginess, let it all reach full meaning. This
was it, so any holding back had to be stupid, had to be
insane and meager. How many ever get to this? I thought
at the time. It's not far from here to needing
a celebration, a joining, a bringing of friends into it,
a handing out of champagne and
Perrier. "Reno," I said. "Let's go to Reno and get married." (*A New Path* 116)

Once more the gesture, the "[holding] on to each other," proves as necessary as the decision to exchange vows. The understated "it" that they allow to "reach full meaning" is unspecified but surely refers to multiple intangible aspects of the couple's relationship—their knowledge of the nearness of Carver's death, the intensity of their emotional investment in each other, the various modes of expressing their love which will reach a symbolic zenith in their marriage. The choice to marry in Reno is prompted in part by the time constraints the couple feels pressing on them since the terminal diagnosis; as a later passage of "Proposal"

states about Reno weddings, “No waiting period. Just ‘I do.’ And ‘I do’” (*A New Path* 116). The choice also reflects Carver’s love for the experience of the ordinary individual; according to Gallagher, he affectionately referred to their Reno marriage ceremony as “a high tacky affair” (Introduction to *A New Path* xxi). Thus in yet another paradoxical act, the couple agrees to reshape a grief-charged ending into the celebration of a beginning, as the poem’s final passage illustrates:

We were getting ready, as if we’d found an answer to
that question of what’s left
when there’s no more hope: the muffled sound of dice coming down
the felt-covered table, the click of the wheel,
the slots ringing on into the night, and one more, one
more chance. And then that suite we’d engaged for. (*A New Path* 116)

Carver’s concluding image—“that suite we’d engaged for”—suggests both a beginning and an ending, both the honeymoon suite of the newly married and the inevitable human passage into death. By choosing to marry in the face of terminal illness, the couple gambles for time against an unavoidable fate, figured appropriately as “the muffled sound of dice” and the ominous “click of the wheel.” “[O]ne more, one more chance” well describes the hope that many of Carver’s characters cling to, in poetry or in fiction, and the couple in “Proposal” find themselves seizing the life left to them as the only hope remaining when, again paradoxically, “there’s no more hope.”

Among the most powerfully moving poems in *A New Path* are the brief lyrics in which Carver expresses his love to Gallagher and wishes her and his readers goodbye. Aside from “Gravy,” among the most important are “Hummingbird,” “Cherish,” and “No Need.” “Hummingbird” centers on the voice of a speaker directly addressing his mate. Like “The Gift,” it is dedicated “*for Tess*,” and, similar to the poem “For Tess,” it stands as a beautifully crafted love poem. The entire poem follows:

Suppose I say *summer*,
write the word “hummingbird,”
put it in an envelope,
take it down the hill
to the box. When you open
my letter you will recall
those days and how much,
just how much, I love you. (*A New Path* 92; Carver’s emphasis)

The written word’s power to assuage grief is celebrated in this poem, as the image of the letter placed in the surviving partner’s mailbox acts as a thinly disguised figure for the poem itself. The incorporation of the

images of summer and the hummingbird *as words* affirm a faith in natural renewal and in the power of the written artifact to console. Echoing Gallagher's "Reservoir" essay, Carver indicates in "Hummingbird" that the letter/poem has the power to evoke memories of "those days" and the happiness the couple's togetherness afforded them, thus allowing for the incorporation of the past into the present that Gallagher sees as a vital function of poetry ("Reservoir" 107). "Hummingbird" suggests that the poem paves the way to memory, which reanimates in multiple beneficial ways the survivor's capacity to commune emotionally with the lost loved one.

"Cherish" offers yet another poetic take on these issues, as the speaker relishes the little time left to him to refer to his mate as his wife. "Cherish" immediately follows "Proposal" in the collection, an appropriate placement given its subject. The speaker of "Cherish" watches his wife through a window as she clips roses carefully in her garden. He realizes then that she seems already "more alone in the world / than I had known," and he views her tending to the roses as a rite of endurance, helping her cope with a situation that words cannot adequately convey. "She won't / look up, not now," he thinks. "She's alone / with roses and with something else I can only think, not / say" (*A New Path* 117). The speaker recites to himself the names, taken from traditional wedding vows, of the rose bushes given to the couple as a wedding gift—"Love, Honor, Cherish," he says:

this last the rose she holds out to me suddenly, having
entered the house between glances. I press
my nose to it, draw the sweetness in, let it cling—scent
of promise, of treasure. My hand on her wrist to bring her close,
her eyes green as river-moss. Saying it then, against
what comes: *wife*, while I can, while my breath, each hurried petal
can still find her. (*A New Path* 117; Carver's emphasis)

Here words and gestures combine to ward off the emotional sting of impending death. The speaker revels in the sensual odor of the rose and its symbolic "promise" of life and hope. He draws his mate physically close in a gesture evocative of the "holding on" to each other that gave them strength in "Proposal." The word "wife" with all its liveliness and promise is finally enacted "against / what comes," his impending death and her impending loneliness. The speaker realizes that he, like the rose, is destined to wither away from her, the person who tended them both with gentleness. Less impishly optimistic in tone than "Hummingbird,"

"Cherish" nonetheless serves as a vital love poem meant to challenge the stagnation and fearfulness surrounding Carver's death.

Perhaps the most poignant poem in the whole of *A New Path*, "No Need" features the speaker bidding goodbye to his loved one as he reluctantly accepts the inevitability of their separation. The opening lines, if mildly playful, nevertheless betray a subdued frustration on Carver's part that he must leave his newfound life of renewal, creativity, and mutual love:

I see an empty place at the table.
Whose? Who else's? Who am I kidding?
The boat's waiting. No need for oars
or a wind. I've left the key
in the same place. You know where.
Remember me and all we did together. (*A New Path* 119)

Through the opening lines, Carver previews his own physical absence from Gallagher's future. Drawing on the traditional mythic symbol of the boat poised to take him from life to death, Carver speaks in the voice of a spouse embarking on a long voyage that will separate him from his mate, if not forever, for a long span of time, and in asking through the poem that Gallagher "remember" him and their lives together, he ensures that memory will take place by inscribing it as part of his literary legacy. The next passage then moves away from verbal/symbolic goodbyes to images of physical expressions of farewell:

Now, hold me tight. That's it. Kiss me
hard on the lips. There. Now
let me go, my dearest. Let me go.
We shall not meet again in this life,
so kiss me goodbye now. Here, kiss me again.
Once more. There. That's enough.
Now, my dearest, let me go.
It's time to be on the way: (*A New Path* 119)

Despite the speaker's repeated urgings to his wife to "let [him] go," his similarly repeated request for one last kiss reveals that he does not wish to leave her behind anymore than she wishes to be left. Ultimately, however, neither has a choice, and neither the physical nor the verbal gesture is strong enough to prevent the speaker's physical death. The final kisses and the poem inscribing them become the nearest the couple's love can approach to immortality "in this life." In the introduction to *A New Path*, Gallagher notes that she unconsciously enacted the dramatic scene of "No Need" on the night before Carver's death, a fact that contributes additional poignance to the poem's effect on Carver's readers:

The three kisses which had been meant as "Good night" had, at the time, carried the possibility that Ray would not wake up again. "Don't be afraid," I'd said. "Just go into your sleep now" and, finally, "I love you"—to which he answered, "I love you too. You get some sleep now." He never opened his eyes again, and at 6:20 the next morning he stopped breathing. (*A New Path* xxvi)

There is "no need" as well for Carver to have worried that his literature or his name would be forgotten.

Gallagher's most recent poetry, to be analyzed in the next chapter of this project, will illustrate her endeavor to ensure that Carver's voice and literary spirit still live, despite the absence of his physical presence.

The final poem in *A New Path* serves as the inscription on the gravestone that separates Carver's grave from the plot where Gallagher intends to be buried next to him. "Late Fragment" continues the expression of gratitude that threaded through much of Carver's poetry. Written as a dialogue of sorts—appropriate for a writer who valued communication as the central function of literature—in many ways it summarizes the whole of his life and work and as such is a fitting final word for his final book. In "Late Fragment," an unidentified voice asks the speaker if he managed to "get what [he] wanted from this life, even so"; the speaker insists, "I did." "And what did you want?" the voice asks. Not surprisingly, the speaker responds, "To call myself beloved, to feel myself / beloved on the earth" (*A New Path* 122). The popularity of Carver's writings and his final ten years with Tess Gallagher would suggest that indeed he earned the right to "feel [himself] / beloved on the earth."

Chapter Five

Body and Mist: Tess Gallagher's Poetry of Loss

*To speak is to be robbed and clothed,
this language always mine
because so partly yours. Each word
has a crack in it to show the strain
of all it holds, all that leaks
away.*

Tess Gallagher, "Second Language"

*Do you want me to mourn?
Do you want me to wear black?*

*Or like moonlight on whitest sand
to use your dark, to gleam, to shimmer?*

I gleam. I mourn.

Tess Gallagher, "Yes"

*Human love is a wonder
if only to say: this body! the mist!*

Tess Gallagher, "Close to Me Now"

Like Raymond Carver, Tess Gallagher was raised in a working-class family haunted by the specter of hard work for low pay and parental conflict springing from her father's alcohol binges. Indeed, much of her poetry written prior to Carver's death reflects the pain she suffered from her parents' tense relationship, balanced with a deeply abiding love and respect for both her mother and her father. In her essay "My Father's Love Letters," Gallagher traces her origins as a poet to the childhood she spent in Port Angeles, Washington, as the daughter of Leslie Bond, a logger and longshoreman, and Georgia Morris Bond, who often accompanied her husband on logging expeditions, performing jobs that marked her as "equal to any man, and maybe one better" (21). In the same essay Gallagher recalls her father extending his calloused hands and urging her to "get an education. Don't get hands like these" (6). What Gallagher took from such an experience propelled her toward poetry: "Out of this moment and others like it I think I began to make a formula which translates roughly: words = more than physical power = freedom from enslavement to job-life = power to direct and make meaning in your own life" (6). As Gallagher developed into a poet, she

learned that her art demanded an attention to the complexities of language that reflected the complexities of life:

For in the writing of the poem you must represent both sides of the question. If not in fact, then in understanding. You must bring them into dialogue with one another fairly, without the bias of causes or indignation or needing too much to be right. It requires a widening of perspective, away from oversimplification—the strict good or bad, wrong or rightness of a situation. The sensibility I’ve been attempting to write out of wants to represent the spectrum of awareness. In this way the life is accounted for in its fullness, when I am able.

I have spoken of words as a stay against unreasonableness, and they often are this—though more to one’s solitude than to actual life. (6)

Thus Gallagher acknowledges the many capabilities and limitations of the language of poetry, as well as what governs, in her view, its highest use. Although Gallagher insists that poets must “represent both sides of the question,” her own poems demonstrate that the issues central to poetry are rarely only two-sided, are rather multifaceted concerns that require the poet to make herself multivocal, as the above quote intimates in its call for a “widening of perspective, away from oversimplification.” Particularly in her grief poetry, Gallagher seeks to push language to its limits and to defy those limits, to varying degrees of success, as she herself has acknowledged. Despite her youthful sense that “words = more than physical power,” the mature writer realized that words, however strong a tool, are far from omnipotent in the face of disease and death: as she told one interviewer, “There are certain states that are very hard to bring to language. As a poet one attempts, and poems are a record of those attempts and failures and small successes” (Tomlinson 141).

Many of Gallagher’s critical writings champion the poem as a site uniquely suited to commemorating and communing with the lost. Peter Harris calls grief Gallagher’s “flood subject” (701), and Ron McFarland notes that Gallagher “has always been deeply concerned with what might be called the poetics of loss and of the attendant grief” (44). That concern is perhaps most thoroughly revealed in her important essay “The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief,” discussed earlier but worth recapitulation here before examining her own poetry in greater detail. As noted, “The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief” posits that, in a world characterized by a business-focused obsession with the present moment and the short-term future, poetry remains one of the few vehicles for the bereaved “to feel in a bodily sense our connection to loss” (103). Here Gallagher asserts that poems “remake the grief-causing experience in terms of myth or analogy so that the unconscious and the conscious experiences of the speaker and the reader are enabled to meet”

(107). As such, grief poetry performs a function similar to that of the pathographical writings Anne Hunsaker Hawkins analyzes in *Reconstructing Illness*, providing writer and reader with a method for connecting their loss experiences to those suffered by others and offering through the myth-making processes of literature an opportunity to achieve meaning from the chaotic experience of loss (see Hawkins, especially pp. 18-30). Poetry, Gallagher asserts, proves especially suited to exploring the dimensions of grief because it allows for the ambiguity and uncertainty disdained by a present-focused culture but essential to the grief experience because of its multifaceted emotional and spiritual consequences.

Poems likewise depend, in Gallagher's view, on a reconfigured definition of the temporal. She states in the "Reservoir" essay that time in poetry is "multi-directional" because "[i]t reaches richly into the past and forms linkages with the present and with other isolated pasts. The poem searches into the future. It reminds us of longings" (107). This concept of the amorphous character of time in poetry is further outlined by Gallagher in her "Concert of Tenses" interview with Jeanie Thompson and in her essay "The Poem as Time Machine," both included in *A Concert of Tenses: Essays on Poetry*; it is central to her view of the loss experience as well. Not surprisingly, her description of the ways in which poetry can carry the grief experience hinges on paradox, a reconciliation of the private and the public acknowledgment of loss:

poems allow a strictly private access to the grief-handling process, or, on another level, poems may bring one's own loss into communion with other deaths and mythic elements which enlarge the view of the solitary death. It is as if the poem acted as a live-in church, and one might open the book of poems in order, through experiencing loss, to arrive at an approach to one's particular grief and thereby transform that grief. ("Reservoir" 104)

Just as Gallagher's autobiographical essay and her comments to interviewers demonstrate her recognition of the paradoxically powerful and limited resources poetry provides for accessing and describing grief, so the "Reservoir" essay demonstrates the situational paradoxes that structure her grief poetry: the poet's need to publicize her private grief, the private reader's need for poetry to make grief a publicly voiced experience, and poetry's role in making the past a continual part of the present, itself projecting into a future which contains various new and as yet unarticulated gains and losses. As a consequence of this reconceptualization of grief and time in poetry, Gallagher's lost loved ones remain vibrant presences in her poetry long after their deaths, and the personae Gallagher adopts as speakers for

her poetry often absorb the characteristics of the lost loved ones and thereby project their voices beyond the limits of the grave. Particularly in the poems written after Carver's death and appearing in the 1992 collections *Moon Crossing Bridge* and *Portable Kisses*, Gallagher's theories about the functions and characteristics of grief poetry manifest themselves in a merging of identities between and among the speaker (most often, as McFarland notes, closely identified with Gallagher herself), the lost loved one, and the figure of future lovers who will supplement but never supplant the presence of the deceased lover.

The "Reservoir" essay, originally published in 1984 in *The American Poetry Review*, indicates that Gallagher's poems were imbued with a consciousness of loss long before she was forced to confront the imminent loss of her life partner in 1988. In 1982, her father, always a strong presence in Gallagher's life, died of lung cancer. In 1972, Gallagher's uncle, Porter Morris, a second father figure to her, was robbed and murdered in his Missouri farmhouse. A brother died when she was twenty years old. In addition to the various deaths Gallagher endured prior to her connection with Carver, she suffered through the break-up of two marriages, the first to U.S. Marine aviator Lawrence Gallagher and the second to poet Michael Burkard.⁵³ By the time Gallagher turned forty in 1983, she had suffered so many serious losses that there is little wonder that the process of grieving became her "flood subject."

Little wonder as well that much of Gallagher's poetry appearing before Carver's illness and death reflects the attitudes toward the intersection of poetry and emotional responses to loss as they are articulated in the "Reservoir" essay. "Stepping Outside," the title poem of her first limited edition collection appearing in 1974, is dedicated "for Akhmatova" and evinces a connection between Jane Kenyon and Gallagher--their shared interest in the elegiac mode and their common debt to the poetry of Akhmatova, whom Gallagher has characterized as "heroic," a poet "who had the dignity of a witness, a survivor" and who "set the high mark

⁵³Gallagher states in the "Reservoir" essay that the impetus for her articulation of her grief theories came from the failure of professional counseling to address her individual needs at the time of her separation from Michael Burkard. Gallagher explains, "The counselor was sympathetic when I cried in the first session, but when I cried in the second and third sessions, she reverted to a very businesslike disapproval. I was not making 'progress.' I was not 'forgetting' the attachments of the relationship quickly enough. ... But my life had been so intricately defined in terms of the 'other' that the grieving could not be accelerated as quickly as she would have liked" (103).

for what I'd considered lyric poetic excellence" ("Poetry in Translation" 51-52).⁵⁴ The opening stanza of "Stepping Outside" is ripe with situational paradox that derives from the speaker's encounters with the poetry and biography of Akhmatova, who faced the execution of friends and family members and the censorship of her own writings in the turmoil surrounding the Russian revolution:

Hearing of you, I never lost a brother
 though I have, never saw a husband to war
 though I have, never kept with my father
 the emptiness of his hands, my mother
 the dying of her womb. (*Amplitude* 28)

It is the word—the poetry that reveals in lyric intensity Akhmatova's own suffering—that provides the speaker of "Stepping Outside" a mechanism for connecting her own individual losses with "other deaths and mythic elements" that allow for a widening of perspective on the speaker's own loss while simultaneously validating its individuality. The speaker in the lines above both denies and asserts her own losses. This new, paradoxical reaction to her grief, made possible through the catalyst of poetry, provides it with enriched meaning and makes it more enduring, partly because the speaker realizes with new intensity that poetry offers the bereaved a method for preserving the lives of the lost as well as a recognition of the gravity of loss, as the next stanza illustrates:

Return: husbands, sons, fathers return.
 Many with both arms, with dreams
 broken in both eyes.
 They try, they try
 but they cannot tell us
 what comes back with them. (*Amplitude* 28)

Once more, the paradox of poetic language as it attempts to express loss reveals itself. The speaker's declaration in the first line of the second stanza enacts the very return she demands. However, the return is incomplete in this poem; language allows the lost to be reclaimed, but only partially. Their dreams still "broken" by death, the lost loved ones no longer possess a voice to communicate fully with those they left behind. As much as the speaker is able to achieve some access to the lost through poetry, that access is

⁵⁴Gallagher was first introduced to Akhmatova's poetry through Stanley Kunitz's translations. She acknowledges in the "Poetry in Translation" essay that "I know I'm not the only contemporary woman poet deeply affected by these poems. Jane Kenyon has worked, with the help of a Russian translator who knew Akhmatova, on a book of Akhmatova's poems not translated elsewhere" (51).

seriously limited: "They try, they try / but they cannot tell us / what comes back with them."

It is significant as well that the lost loved ones in this stanza are all figured as male and the speaker as female. The third stanza of "Stepping Outside" also contends with the loss of a male loved one, Gallagher's uncle Porter, "slain by thieves / in the night" and described as a loss that has "planted his hoe / in my heart like an ax" (*Amplitude* 28). Indeed, much of Gallagher's grief poetry concerns itself with women's experience of loss in particular, especially their loss of important male presences in their lives. As such, Gallagher explores in many of her poems the extent to which women in present-day Western societies still find themselves wounded when losing male loved ones, whether to death or to the dissolution of romantic partnerships, despite some feminist assertions that women should not permit themselves to feel so pained. As Gallagher explained in a 1992 interview with Megan Sexton,

[t]he feminist view that one isn't now allowed, as a woman, to authentically suffer for love, that injures us all. To suffer for love, according to certain feminists currents, is not a viable option, and yet it happens, and the poet has to reflect what happens. Women are still suffering in the kinds of love they find. (154)

In "Stepping Outside," Gallagher envisions a kinship with Akhmatova through the Russian writer's plight as a woman poet victimized by powerful men who, paradoxically, wound her largely by their cruelties to her male loved ones. The final lines of "Stepping Outside" feature the speaker asserting her kinship with Akhmatova but nevertheless championing Akhmatova's spiritual strength as greater than (indeed, a model for) her own:

You, who lived in your pain until it grew
its own face, would have left all this
like a monument in a field. Your words
would have made a feast of what ate you.

Sit with me.
No one has left; no one returns. (*Amplitude* 28)

Here Gallagher addresses Akhmatova directly—indeed, revivifies for her own readers the late Russian poet through the act of the poem, a gesture prefiguring her reclaiming of Carver's identity in the poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge* and *Portable Kisses*. Similarly, Gallagher envisions Akhmatova's losses as achieving a personification so vivid that "it [the depth of her loss] grew / its own face"—a disturbing image that nonetheless is suggestive of Gallagher's nascent attitudes toward the poetic immortality of those physically

lost. Akhmatova's (and, by extension, Gallagher's) power as creator to preserve and record what others have materially destroyed is affirmed vividly in the final lines of the penultimate stanza: "Your words / would have made a feast of what ate you." Akhmatova's endurance stems in part from her role as poet whose creative art possesses the potential to overcome the pain of loss, which is left behind in Gallagher's terms "like a monument in a field," and transform that pain into the dynamic commemoration of the poem, whose ideas can be repeated and disseminated long after the moment of the poet's losses has passed. The final two-line stanza both invites and asserts. The speaker communes with Akhmatova in their shared roles as women artists who have witnessed great loss but likewise draws upon Akhmatova's power to survive and record to bolster her own resources for endurance as an artist and as a bereaved woman. The final line, like the opening stanza, enacts what it wishes for. If "[n]o one has left," if no loss is absolute in a world in which poetry can ensure the emotional survival of those materially absent, then no one need "return." Yet it takes the poet's assertion to make this enactment so; the poet's act of recording the lost through the artifact of the poem is required in order for the loved one to remain spiritually accessible after physical death. Indeed, the speaker of "Stepping Outside" arrives at her final conclusion only through the process of first reading Akhmatova's poems of loss with which she could identify deeply—"stepping outside" herself paradoxically to discover herself in another artist's experience—before writing/speaking her own poem in dialogue with Akhmatova and, less obviously, with her own lost loved ones. The poem itself renders the command to "[r]eturn" unnecessary at the point of the poem's conclusion. The lost become found through the act of the poem, so completely that the linear progress of time is erased and it appears they were never lost from the start.

"Stepping Outside" resonates with much of the poetry of loss written and published by Gallagher in her earliest volumes of poetry, *Instructions to the Double* (1976), *Under Stars* (1978), and *Willingly* (1984). Many of her finest poems included in these volumes were collected in *Amplitude: New and Selected Poems* (1987). Much of the poetry in *Willingly* confronts the 1982 death of her father in ways that demonstrate the development of her attitudes toward poetry and its functions for the bereaved as expressed

in the "Reservoir" essay.⁵⁵ One poem from *Under Stars*, however, especially echoes both Gallagher's theories in the "Reservoir" essay and her poetry following the death of Raymond Carver. "The Ritual of Memories" describes a woman's search for healing in the wake of the loss of a lover, although the narrative behind the poem is complicated by the fact that the lover was known only briefly and died as the husband of another woman. As in "Stepping Outside," "The Ritual of Memories" depends in part on the function of the poem as itself a ritual whose declaration achieves the ends it describes.

"The Ritual of Memories" begins with an assertion dependent upon a temporal paradox, a dissolution of traditional boundaries separating past, present, and future. The poem features a woman speaker who seeks out the spirit of a dead lover in order to perform a ritual of absolution to renew herself in the aftermath of their affair, which consisted of a brief and secret union occurring shortly before the dead loved one's engagement to another. The poem's imagery evokes religious myth and suggests both baptism and marriage ceremonies, as the opening stanza intimates:

When your widow had left the graveside
and you were most alone
I went to you in that future
you can't remember yet. I brought
a basin of clear water where no tear
had fallen, water gathered like grapes
a drop at a time
from the leaves of the willow. I brought
oils, I brought a clean white gown. (*Amplitude* 47)

In the opening lines, past and future interlock in an intricate spiral of paradoxes. The poem, written predominantly in past tense, features the speaker relating the story of a past event to her dead lover and placing their last meeting after his death within the temporal space of "that future / you can't remember yet," a phrase which makes of the future a past inaccessible in the present. By creating such an ambiguous temporal setting for the poem, Gallagher defuses the power of death, hinting that the past endures well into

⁵⁵See especially the powerfully executed "Boat Ride" (*Willingly* 32-38); see also "Accomplishment" (39-40), "Black Silk" (41), "Candle, Lamp & Firefly" (42-43), and "The Kneeling One" (44-45). In a 1992 interview with Merle Bachman, Gallagher stated in reference to *Moon Crossing Bridge* that "[t]his book is well prepared for, in the sense that just six years before Ray's death, I had my father's death to deal with, from the very same situation, lung cancer. ... if I hadn't helped my mother nurse my father, I couldn't have been with Ray so well" (170-71).

the future and that the future has resonance with the past, which is developed in part by its inevitable progress into a new past. This configuration of time echoes her argument in "The Poem as Time Machine" that the poem "is like a magnet which draws into it events and beings from all possible past, present, and future contexts of the speaker. It is a vortex of associative phenomena" (96). The atmosphere created by this nonlinear vision of time contributes to the mythical ambience of the poem. The "clear water where no tear / had fallen," the oils, and the "clean white gown" are suggestive of religious ceremony and hint at the spiritual and emotional cleansing described further as the poem progresses.

The next verse paragraph presents the spoken word as a force capable of supernatural accomplishment, as the speaker's voice appears to enact the deed it commands. The speaker declares to her dead lover, "Come out," and immediately he emerges from his grave "like a man pulling himself out of a river, / a river with so many names / there was no word left for it but 'earth'" (*Amplitude* 47). Once more, a poet writing out of grief simultaneously affirms and deflates the power of the word. Immediately on the heels of the speaker's command, which successfully evokes the presence of the dead lover, the speaker describes the land from which he emerges as named so often that the words attached to it, save the all-inclusive but long-enduring "earth," have lost all useful meaning. Nevertheless, the ritual she proceeds to describe depends as much upon words as action, as the speaker often relies upon verbal prompts to entice the lover to perform the cleansing ritual. The speaker's words to the loved one most often consist of imperative statements: "Come out," "wash these eyes," "remember," "[l]isten." The speaker declares about the loved one, "[s]o you washed every part of me / where any look or touch / had passed between us" (*Amplitude* 28). By performing the ritual, the lovers paradoxically erase the past by commemorating it, looking in order to undo the look, touching in order to undo the touch. Thus the speaker declares after the lover bathes her eyes

you washed my eyes
with the pure water
so that I vanished from that road
and you passed a lifetime
and I was not there. (*Amplitude* 28)

Likewise paradoxically, the poem as record preserves the past that the ritual it describes works to erase, as the following stanza exemplifies:

"Remember,"
 I said, when you came to the feet,
 "it was the night before you would ask
 the girl of your village to marry. I
 was the strange one. I was the one
 with the gypsy look.
 Remember how you stroked these feet." (*Amplitude* 48)

Twice in this stanza the speaker commands the dead lover to "remember" what appears to be their first seduction scene, even as they work to perform the cleansing ritual in order to help her escape the limitations that their past together have placed on her individual growth. Giving words to their past preserves it, but rather than working against the speaker's spiritual renewal, that preservation paradoxically assists in the renewal by acknowledging the profound impact the brief affair had upon her life and transforming her grief over his dual loss—first to another woman and second to death—into a stronger, reconfigured version of herself, as the next stanza illustrates:

When the lips and the hands
 had been treated likewise and the pit
 of the throat where one thoughtless kiss
 had fallen, you rubbed in the sweet oil
 and I glistened like a new-made thing, not
 merely human, but of the world gone past
 being human. (*Amplitude* 48)

As in much of Jane Kenyon's poetry of grief, "The Ritual of Memories" is structured thematically on the linkages and oppositions between the physical and the spiritual realms of experience. The highly sensual anointment scene, described above in language filled with sibilant and liquid consonants reinforcing the sensuality it portrays, results in a spiritual transformation of the speaker, whose self is at last realized as "not / merely human, but of the world gone past / being human." The speaker's emotional and spiritual wounds resulting from the affair and the lover's death have begun to heal. She becomes capable of acknowledging, not only to herself but to the lover's presence as well, that her relationship with him left her wounded. Significantly, she locates the source of those wounds in the words he spoke to seduce her: "Listen," she commands him, "there is your voice and in it the liar's charm / that caught me" (*Amplitude* 48). Interestingly, the speaker's words apparently evoke the lover's words, but those words remain unstated in the poem. The speaker and her lover have access to the words that passed between them and set in motion the transformation of their lives, but the wider audience of the poem never hears precisely what is

said. Paradoxically, the lovers' unrepeatable words appear more sacred, indeed more powerful, the more mysterious they remain. Yet according to the poem, they have a profound effect on the dead lover:

You listened. You heard your voice
and a look of such sadness
passed over your dead face that I wanted
to touch you. Who could have known
I would be so held? Not you
in your boyish cunning; not me
in my traveler's clothes. (*Amplitude* 48)

Once more the poet interrogates the power of words vs. the power of the nonverbal gesture. The dead lover's memory of the apparently skillful ways in which he used words to seduce the speaker so pains him that his "dead face" paradoxically deepens into sadness, and this nonverbal expression of his emotional state moves the speaker to wish not to speak but rather to touch as an act of comfort. Here the speaker appears to realize that, at the time of the seduction which so affected her and, presumably, her lover's future, neither of the pair could have imagined the consequences of their brief union, especially on the speaker's life after the lover's marriage to another ("Who could have known / I would be so held?"). Now that both lovers have recognized, through the process of the cleansing ritual, the pain that each has caused the other, the speaker accepts that she has obtained new possession of her life and can move beyond the constraints the memory of her lost lover had placed upon her. The final stanza opens with a declaration evocative of the crucifixion scene in Christian myth and indicative of the speaker's complete transformation into a reinvigorated, independent self:

It's finished.
Put the gown on my shoulders.
It's no life in the shadow of another's joys.
Let me go freely now.
One life I have lived for you. This one
is mine. (*Amplitude* 48)

In the wake of a life-altering past event, the speaker has managed, after the physical demise of her former lover, to achieve another life-altering event that promises her a future less emotionally burdened, paradoxically because recording and preserving the richness of the past allows her to escape its restrictive force. The speaker's lover and the love they shared, while in one sense "dead," remained (indeed, remain) very much alive within her memory; the speaker has found through the mythical enrichment of the poem a

method for integrating the past more positively into her present life so as not to hinder her development into an independent and productive future self.

“Bonfire,” the first published Gallagher poem to address Raymond Carver’s cancer diagnosis, is similarly structured on paradox, particularly the contradictory emotions experienced by the couple once they learn of Carver’s cancer. Dedicated “for Ray,” “Bonfire” is the penultimate poem in the *Amplitude* collection. It appears spatially distinct from much of the poetry Gallagher writes, as each line of the poem establishes its own margins, unlike the flush-left format typically characteristic of Gallagher’s verse. As such, the poem visually suggests both chaos and freedom and thereby reinforces the contradictory pull that gives the poem its energy. The poem opens by insisting on the tenuous reconciliation of emotional opposites that accompanies confrontation with terminal illness:

The inflections of joy. The inflections of
suffering. And strangely
sometimes the mixing
of the two. (*Amplitude* 191)

The pain of imminent loss is counterpointed by an intensification of joy over the couple’s daily life together and their recognition of the happiness they have shared. As such, the opening lines of “Bonfire” resonate with passages of Hall’s *Museum of Clear Ideas* and *The Old Life*, in which he and Kenyon revel in the particulars of their daily routine as symbolic of the affirmation of life.⁵⁶ Gallagher’s opening lines are likewise suggestive of the transformative power of the recognition of imminent death, the impulse such a recognition can create for the dying to intensify their experience of life. This intermingling of suffering and joy is graphically illustrated in the story that follows Gallagher’s opening declaration:

It reminds me of opening the huge *International*
Butterfly Book with over 2000 species
illustrated in color
and among them, the giant birdwing butterfly
Ornithoptera victoriae
obtained when John McGillivray, aboard the *HMS*
Rattlesnake
used a shotgun to bring it down
somewhere in the Pacific. (*Amplitude* 191)

⁵⁶See Chapter Three of the present project for analysis of passages of Hall’s poetry from these volumes which celebrate moments that Hall suggests were taken for granted prior to the couple’s various battles with life-threatening disease.

So many kinds of crying. So much raw gaiety,
variegated with glittering
silence. And you,
my sudden bouquet,
who came to me awkwardly at the head of the stairwell
outside the room that sheltered
for so many nights
our sleeping and loving.
To weep there
together
with my death all handsomely in view,
all open before us
as the sea at night.
All tenderly
wild in that calm. (*Amplitude* 191-192)

The “crying” and the “raw gaiety” to which the speaker refers appear as verbalizations of the mingled suffering and joy mentioned in the poem’s first line. Once more, as in the grief poems of Kenyon, Hall, and Carver, silence and voicings of sorrow and of laughter are juxtaposed, as Gallagher’s line recalls similar passages in Kenyon’s “Chrysanthemums” and “How Like the Sound,” in Hall’s *Museum of Clear Ideas* and *The Old Life*, and in Carver’s “What the Doctor Said,” among other poems. Gallagher’s synesthesia in these lines—“glittering silence” that “variegates” the primal verbal expression of the couple’s emotion—emphasizes the surreal experience of their confrontation with terminal illness and suggests again (through the adjective “glittering”) that beauty suffuses even the most dire moments of the couple’s experience. Another crucial opposition in this passage is Gallagher’s figuration of her lover’s illness as “my death all handsomely in view” (emphasis added). This particular word choice is layered with a multitude of complex suggestions. Perhaps most obviously it asserts the couple’s joined lives and the ways in which their experience is shared:

[illegible]

⁵⁷For a more thorough analysis of Carver's "Summer Fog," see Chapter Four of the present project.

asserts, the loss is made all the more horrible if the fear of it interferes with attempts to glean joy out of the life that remains.

Gallagher explores this idea further in the next stanza, in which she describes a memory linked with her confrontation with Carver's illness in such a way that it illustrates her concept of the poem as a "vortex of associative phenomena" ("Time Machine" 96). Here she recalls a winter day in Quebec when, while ice skating, she found herself "falling all day, diving into flesh" as if she were "a spirit half / in, half out / of the world" (*Amplitude* 192). At one point, a friend dares her to skate with his violin, and after taking the dare, she suddenly proves able to keep her balance on the ice. Gallagher credits her new-found poise to her friend's gesture: "But give me a perishable, fragile beauty / that belongs to someone else and I skate / like music." Ecstatically she exclaims, "How many times I saved myself on behalf of / that borrowed, that shuddering / violin!" (192). Throughout this passage, Gallagher insists to herself and to Carver, as well as to her poetic audience, that strength emerges from accepting a seemingly insurmountable challenge when the stakes appear so high that failure proves more fearful than the test itself; paradoxically, the nearly impossible task becomes all the more possible the nearer it gets to impossibility. The final lines of the section provide the poem with its title, as they describe the violinist friend performing "his bonfire / of thanksgiving" in celebration of Gallagher's successful entrustment of his music and her defeat of her fears. Significantly, he opens his concert with a mazurka and a jig, but closes it with a mournful melody so "vast / and aching" that it reminds Gallagher of "when love must go on and at the same time / perish" (*Amplitude* 193). The violinist's song prefigures Gallagher's poem as a celebration of life that proves incomplete if it does not acknowledge the inevitability of death.

Gallagher connects her memory to Carver's battles with cancer as the poem nears its end and her recollections shift:

I'm talking about memory now, that moment
 in which the doctor's news
 flushed us through with dread,
 and I hadn't swerved
 back yet
 into life. Even then I didn't forget you, violin
 who threw yourself into my arms,
 violin asking not to
 be broken one more time.

It wasn't for music
 you came to me, but
 for daring—mine
 and yours.
 When they have to, they will write in the Book
 of Welcome:
 Two darings, two darlings.
 (*Amplitude* 193; Gallagher's emphasis)

Once more, the diagnosis scene appears as one of the darkest moments in the poetry central to this project, as Gallagher in "Bonfire" subtly connects it to the fearful "diving into flesh" she experienced on the ice in Quebec ("I hadn't swerved / back yet / into life"). Carver, who became involved with Gallagher just as his recovery from alcoholism and the break-up of a dysfunctional marriage had barely begun, was indeed "daring" to embark on a new relationship; so was Gallagher, who had recently endured the trauma of a second divorce. Nevertheless, their union, based on "daring," survived and strengthened them for the trauma yet to come, Gallagher suggests. It was in part their willingness to take a chance on each other—their "daring"—that provided their relationship with endurance, that transformed them into "two darlings." Once more, in the final line of "Bonfire," danger and beauty appear inextricably linked, as Gallagher acknowledges the complex emotions she and Carver faced at the moment of the poem's composition, and were even then yet to face in their fullest grief.⁵⁸

If *Without* was Donald Hall's tour-de-force collection elegizing Jane Kenyon, Gallagher's *Moon Crossing Bridge* (1992) proved an equally powerful volume intended in part to commemorate the life and work of Raymond Carver. Even more so than *Without*, *Moon Crossing Bridge* stretches beyond the bounds of elegy and asserts the immortality of the lost loved one through the gradual poetic integration of the dead lover's identity into the newly transformed self of the surviving lover/writer. Even structurally, the sexpartite collection echoes Carver's final volume, *A New Path to the Waterfall*, itself divided into six sections, and several *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems not only feature Carver as the addressee but enter into a dialogue with poems appearing in *A New Path*. As such, it is not surprising that Gallagher told Gabrielle Idlet that she "often dream[s] that some day they'll appear under a joint cover" (195). Indeed, Gallagher's

⁵⁸First published in 1987 in *Amplitude*, "Bonfire" predates Carver's brief recovery from his initial 1987 lung cancer diagnosis, which was followed by the diagnosis and treatment of brain cancer and the final, fatal recurrence of his lung cancer in the spring and summer of 1988.

persona in *Moon Crossing Bridge* and her later poetry, collected in *Portable Kisses Expanded* (1992) and *My Black Horse* (1995), figures Carver as an ever-present, generally positively charged energy that accompanies her through the present and into the future, including a future shared with a new lover.

The 1992 publication of *Moon Crossing Bridge* garnered much attention from reviewers, whose specific reactions to the book often reflected their general reactions to Gallagher's complex poetic style. Mark Jarman, for instance, in his review of the collection, criticizes what he describes as Gallagher's "obscure and ornamental" poetic tendencies that detract from the book's finer poems by "creat[ing] diffuse or clotted passages of writing that seem to be no more than poeticizing" (418-19).⁵⁹ By contrast, Peter Harris views the volume as a "great-souled, reckless, boundary-crossing book" in which Gallagher's "love, talent, and emotional predispositions" result in a "seemingly unquenchable commitment to all the nuances of loss" (702). Marilyn Kallet describes the book as "a rare document of loss, faith, and returns—return to the site of loving and to the gradual last breath, return to life's immediate summonings" (30). Gallagher's poetry is doubtless among the most intricately fashioned currently published, and her intricacies achieved a new intensity in the poems designed to represent the complexities of her grief over Carver's death. Gallagher's view of the poem as a "vortex of associative phenomena" ("Time Machine" 96) well describes the effects many of the *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems have on their readers. As Tony Hoagland concludes,

Gallagher's poems present a richly unstable surface, in which the elements of narrative, rhetoric, and figuration are so entwined and interfused, so inter-subordinated, that any word can tug and pull at the rest of the sentence in ways that are hard to describe. Even in such a simple lyric format, there is a sort of drunken abandon in how the poem turns. ("American Ecstasy" 150)

This highly suggestive, nonlinear quality of Gallagher's poetry at times may distract or confuse the reader (sometimes intentionally, on Gallagher's part), but often, especially in her grief poetry, it allows Gallagher to access referents of experience which would otherwise remain undeclared and unexplored. As a poet, Gallagher insists she is "always trying to find a way to indicate how mysterious events and objects and states of being truly are, to find a way to give these things form" (Sexton 156). The poems of *Moon*

⁵⁹For Gallagher's response to Jarman's review, see Gallagher's interview with Gabrielle Idlet, "To Go Naked on Horseback." *Indiana Review* 19.1 (1996): 18-39. Rpt. in *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2000. 176-95.

Crossing Bridge indeed prove indicative of the mysterious and of the ways in which understanding of the phenomenon of grief derives at least as much from emotional/spiritual experience as from intellectual analysis. As in the other poems crucial to this study, these poetic goals are achieved largely due to the verbal and situational paradoxes upon which Gallagher structures her poems.

The opening poem of *Moon Crossing Bridge* foregrounds Gallagher's poetic dialogue with Carver as well as the contradictory elements of the grief experience. "Yes" opens with the speaker declaring, about herself and her lost loved one, "Now we are like that flat cone of sand / in the garden of the Silver Pavilion in Kyoto / designed to appear only in moonlight" (MCB 3). The speaker and her lover are themselves mysterious, invisible to the business of daylight. Unsure what her lover expects of her, the speaker asks which of two opposite reactions he would prefer her to demonstrate:

Do you want me to mourn?
Do you want me to wear black?

Or like moonlight on whitest sand
to use your dark, to gleam, to shimmer?

I gleam. I mourn. (MCB 3)

The speaker herself contains the paradoxical, even as she and her lost lover represent forces as opposed as moonlight and darkness. Capable of either "gleaming" or "mourning," the survivor does both; indeed, the poem implies she could not do otherwise, despite her interrogation of her lover. As in "Bonfire," in which joy and suffering prove strangely and inexplicably intertwined, the speaker in her grief finds herself in need of simultaneously celebrating her life together with her lost loved one and expressing her profound sadness in the face of that loss. This dual impulse will characterize much of the rest of the poetry appearing in *Moon Crossing Bridge*.

Gallagher has stated that one of her chief goals in *Moon Crossing Bridge* involved challenging the taboos associated with death and expressions of love to the dead (Bachman 167). Three poems that evince this goal are "Red Poppy," "Wake," and "Paradise." Paradox of situation and of language is crucial to each of these poems, whose dramatic scenes center on the days just before and just after Raymond Carver's death. "Red Poppy" opens with imagery that recalls the hospital scene of Kenyon's "Chrysanthemums" and of sections of Hall's *Museum of Clear Ideas* and *Without* but drifts richly and associatively into imagery

uniquely Gallagher's:

That linkage of warnings sent a tremor through June
as if to prepare October in the hardest of apples.
One week in late July we held hands
through the bars of his hospital bed. Our sleep
made a canopy over us and it seemed I heard
its durable roaring in the companion sleep
of what must have been our Bedouin god, and now
when the poppy lets go I know it is to lay bare
his thickly seeded black coach
at the pinnacle of dying. (*MCB* 4)

Once again seasonal cycles of life and death are evoked to resonate with the elegist's individual loss. The image of October apples recalls Kenyon's October chrysanthemums as emblematic of the paradox of productivity apparent in a season of decline. Likewise, as in "Chrysanthemums" and much of the other poetry examined for this project, the nonverbal gesture in the opening lines of "Red Poppy" is offered as the best fitted means of communication between the marriage partners in the face of death. As the couple here holds hands "through the bars of his hospital bed," they both acknowledge and defy the threat of physical separation. The opening section of the poem is conspicuously absent of any dialogue or description of verbal discourse, focusing instead on the couple's togetherness as expressed through holding hands and their simultaneous sleep (the latter of which, as an emblem of togetherness, was noticeably difficult to achieve for the characters appearing in many of Carver's poems analyzed in the previous chapter of this project). Gallagher's evocation of the couple's "Bedouin god" emphasizes the transitory nature of life and the arbitrary nature of grace in confrontation with desperate circumstances. This image likewise achieves in its imaginative leap a reflection of the mystery surrounding lived experience which Gallagher has stated she wishes to preserve through her poetry (Bachman 170; Woodruff 69).

"Red Poppy" also demonstrates poetically the absorption of the lost loved one's identity into that of the survivor, whose own identity is paradoxically enriched and further individualized through the portrayal of her spiritual and artistic union with the other. Gallagher's self is described in "Red Poppy" as "simplified to 'for him'" while Carver's "thinned like an injection / wearing off so the real gave way to / the more-than-real" (*MCB* 4). Despite Gallagher's description of her life as "simplified" in its devotion to her dying husband, its actual complexity and individual strength are illustrated in the final lines of the poem, in

which she asserts her individuality even as she embraces Carver's identity as inextricably linked to her own:

By then his breathing stopped
so gradually I had to brush lips to know
an ending. Tasting then that plush of scarlet
which is the last of warmth, kissless kiss
he would have given. Mine to extend a lover's right past its radius,
to give and also most needfully, my gallant hussar,
to bend and take. (MCB 4)

In the poem's conclusion, Gallagher adopts the paradoxical role of soother and aggressor, of giver and taker, in a nonverbal gesture that asserts the rights of the survivor inasmuch as it honors the life of the dying. Here Carver and Gallagher are imagined to be as closely linked at the point of his death as a "gallant hussar" is to his horse, a figure that often represents Gallagher's imaginative self in her poetry. This scene serves as an answer to Carver's poem "No Need" from *A New Path to the Waterfall*, in which the speaker commands his beloved to "[r]emember me and all we did together" before asking her to kiss him three times, after which he declares, "Now, my dearest, let me go. / It's time to be on the way" (*A New Path* 119). The speaker of "Red Poppy" offers the asked-for kisses, but she also asserts her own needs "to extend a lover's right past its radius," to "let go" of the loved one on her terms as well as his. The convergence of their identities even in death is further insisted upon when Gallagher refers to the "kissless kiss / he would have given." Gallagher's persona asserts that she knows what her loved one would have done under the same circumstances, and that is to do as she does—take the love that remains at the moment of death as the survivor's own. In an interview with Jay Woodruff, Gallagher discusses the paradoxical effect of the conclusion of "Red Poppy":

I have to admit to myself that this ending represents not just a giving but also a taking. There's an illicitness in the act. I think you feel that, coming into the ending. That word "take" is a kind of violence. It's not only tender. It's mixed. And it has a kind of stolen quality about it. (Woodruff 68; Woodruff's emphasis)

Immediately following "Red Poppy" in the collection, "Wake" breaks similar taboos separating rituals of death from the sexual/creative act. Even the title of the poem is layered with rich, paradoxical reference, as it suggests simultaneously a rite of mourning and the reinvigoration accompanying the end of sleep and its metaphorical associations with death. The poem describes the speaker lying in bed with the lover's body three nights after his death. As in "Red Poppy," this act allows the speaker imaginatively to

extend beyond the threshold of death and merge again with her husband. The tension of opposites permeates the speaker's act; she describes joining the body of her husband in their "high bed, bed / we'd loved in and slept in, married / and unmarried" (*MCB* 5). Once again, as in much of the poetry central to this project, the sexual/creative act is evoked to counterpoint the trauma of death, but Gallagher in "Wake" extends the imagery of such an act beyond the boundaries of physical death and as such questions the validity of physical boundaries in contrast with the spiritual/imaginative partnership she shared with Carver.⁶⁰ The paradoxes continue in the second stanza:

There was a halo of cold around you
as if the body's messages carry farther
in death, my own warmth taking on the silver-white
of a voice sent unbroken across snow just to hear
itself in its clarity of calling. We were dead
a little while together then, serene
and afloat on the strange broad canopy
of the abandoned world. (*MCB* 5)

Evident in this passage is Gallagher's acknowledgment of the simultaneous strengths and limitations of language. The nonverbal gesture, important when death was imminent, proves the only medium of communication now available for the survivor to reach the spirit of her husband after his physical death. Paradoxically, the physical sensation replaces the spoken word as their means of communication beyond physical loss—the "body's messages [that] carry farther / in death" become transmitted through the imagery of warmth and cold. Gallagher further surprises the reader by unexpectedly achieving reunion with the dead loved one not through transferring her own spiritual and emotional warmth to him and imaginatively revivifying his spirit, but rather through allowing herself to join him inside his "halo of cold," to become "dead a little while together" with the body of the lover. As such, the couple's intimacy is intensified; their death—his literal, hers metaphorical—separates them from the busy living world and achieves some measure of peace for the survivor in the wake of her loss. In a poetical sense, as Gallagher has indicated, she indeed joined Carver in death, as she found herself unable to write for six months after his death; she stated to Gabrielle Idlet that after Carver's death, "there was a lot of silence inside [her]," which she interprets as an

⁶⁰The sexual undertones of these poems are echoed by similar passages in *Without*. See, for example, Hall's declaration to Kenyon in "Letter in the New Year": "I want to fuck you / in Paradise" (*Without* 72).

acknowledgment of “the unapproachable and the unavailable” quality of her emotional reaction to the loss (Idlet 176-77). Peter M. Sacks’s assertion that one of the elegist’s chief tasks involves the “reluctant submission to language itself” (2) thus fits Gallagher’s experience after Carver’s death and explains the paradox of silent voicings that drives the progress of “Wake.”

Appearing at the midpoint of *Moon Crossing Bridge*, “Paradise” parallels “Wake” and recalls “The Ritual of Memories” in that it describes an anointment ritual which the speaker performs on the body of her recently deceased husband. The situation of the speaker of “Paradise”—“alone with the powerful raft of his body” (MCB 49)—resonates not only with the dramatic scene of “Wake” but also with similar situations described by Kenyon in “Pharaoh” and Hall at the conclusion of “Her Long Illness.”⁶¹ The image also foregrounds once more the material/spiritual paradox evident in many of these poems, in which the physical gesture and physical intimacy simultaneously and paradoxically defy and confirm the inevitability of death. Yet again, this dichotomy is highlighted by the poem’s focus on the relative powers of language, as Carver, once an active “teller” himself in his role as writer, becomes a repository for all that Gallagher herself had left unsaid after his death:

He seemed to be there only for listening, an afterlife
I hadn’t expected. So I talked to him, told him
things I needed to hear myself
tell him, and he listened, I can say “peacefully,”
though maybe it was only an effect he had, the body’s surety
when it becomes one muscle. Still, I believe I heard
my own voice then, as he might have heard it, eagerly
like the nostrils of any mare blowing softly over
the damp presence he was, telling it
all is safe here, all is calm and yet to be endured
where you are gone from. (MCB 49)

Both speaker and listener, Gallagher here (as in “Red Poppy”) performs the parts of both the husband and the wife in the wake of the husband’s physical death (“I believe I heard / my own voice then, as he might have heard it”). What she says to Carver’s body in this scene is deliberately clouded, emphasizing the private nature of the words offered at such an intimate moment but, paradoxically, suggesting that the words themselves mattered less than the act of telling. Similarly, just as Gallagher in “Red Poppy” dares to take

⁶¹See the analyses of these passages in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of the present project.

what she assumes Carver would have given if he could, in "Paradise" she asserts her right to benefit as much—indeed, more—than her listener might from stating what was as yet unstated. It is by means of the process of speaking to Carver's remains that Gallagher is capable of concluding for her own well being that "all is safe here, all is calm and yet to be endured." The act of speaking—and, finally, the act of translating into poetry the experience of that speaking—provides Gallagher with another means of transforming and enriching herself poetically in the wake of her traumatic loss.

Gallagher opens the next stanza by explaining, "I spoke until there was nothing unfinished between us" (*MCB* 49). Having exhausted the usefulness of words, Gallagher moves on to the only form of communication remaining for her to extend tribute to her deceased lover, the physical gesture of massaging his feet with oil. This image is rich in mythic suggestiveness, casting Carver as a hero undergoing a cleansing ritual commemorating the conclusion of one journey and the commencement of another. As such, the passage recalls the various mythic constructs identified by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins as important to the framework of many pathographical texts.⁶² More importantly, the anointment image provides Gallagher with a catalyst for articulating the importance of the inarticulable at the start of the next stanza. There she insists, "For to confirm what is forever beyond speech / pulls action out of us" (*MCB* 49). The line might easily be read as an echo of Gallagher's *Amplitude* epigraph, in which she quotes Saint Teresa: "Words lead to deeds.... They prepare the soul, make it ready, and move it to tenderness."⁶³ If words are not action in and of themselves, they impel the act forward, creating an avenue for growth. Words as such, like the act of anointing the dead, possess importance in and of themselves and not for what they directly accomplish in material terms; the gesture and the words that lead to it thus appear, as Gallagher states in the final lines of "Paradise," "shining / even to the closed eye" (*MCB* 49).

Another poem that probes the limits of language is appropriately entitled "Deaf Poem." Built upon

⁶²Particularly important to Gallagher's poetry subsequent to Carver's death are the elements of the myths of rebirth and the myths of battle and journey characteristic of many pathographies and detailed in chapters two and three of Hawkins's *Reconstructing Illness*.

⁶³Carver also used this quote as a framework for his final piece of nonfictional prose writing, his address to the 1988 graduating class of the University of Hartford included in *No Heroics, Please* as "Meditation on a Line from Saint Teresa" (223-25).

a contradiction in terms, "Deaf Poem" begins with the speaker's injunction to her reader: "Don't read this one out loud. It isn't / to be heard" (*MCB* 53). The poem's premise evokes the traditional moment-of-silence method of honoring the dead, but it does not abjure language absolutely. "Deaf Poem" suggests that the unspoken word, the written word, honors the loss at least as thoroughly as silence can, as the speaker declares that her lover "needs a few words that stay out of / the vocal cords. No vibrations, please" (*MCB* 53). If silence must be broken, she suggests, the noises of the natural world better fit the occasion, as they honor the lost loved one's tastes even as they evoke myths of the natural cycle as a comfort for the bereaved: "Let / the birds sing," Gallagher asserts. "He always liked to hear them any time of day" (*MCB* 53). The unspoken poem, like the unutterable emotion that Gallagher feels in the wake of her loss, proves essential both to the survivor's grief process and to the preservation of Carver's own voice well after his death. Such a poem, Gallagher asserts, "pays attention another way" than through spoken words, just as Gallagher believed that Carver, who could no longer literally speak, retained a character and a voice through her poetry for and about him.

The final passage of "Deaf Poem" illustrates this situation with imagery that recalls Hall's *Museum of Clear Ideas*, which evokes Yeats's "Among School Children" in its declaration that "[t]he leg is the dancer and the mouth / the sculptor" (*Museum* 21). Gallagher's poem proclaims in turn that "[w]herever he is he still knows I have two feet / and one of them is broken from dancing" (53). For Gallagher, the dancing metaphor, suggestive of art and the music of poetry, lends itself to collapse in "Deaf Poem," in which grief is portrayed as demanding silence, itself paradoxically ominous and beneficial. The "speaker" of this poem cannot "speak" it and, like the lost loved one, is caught between life and death, frustratedly reaching to the dead from her living even as she envisions him reaching toward her living from his death. As with many bereaved individuals, her frustration at the situation of her loss becomes translated into anger at the dead loved one for abandoning her:

Sometimes
I forget what I'm doing and call out to him. It's me! How
could you go off like that? Just as things were
getting good. I'm petulant, reminding him of his promise
to take me in a sleigh pulled by horses
with bells. He looks back in the dream—the way
a violin might glance across a room at its bow

about to be used for kindling. He doesn't
 try to stop anything. Not the dancing. Not the deafness
 of my poems when they arrive like a sack of wet
 stones. Yes, he can step back into life just long enough
 for eternity to catch hold, until one of us
 is able to watch and to write the deaf poem,
 a poem missing even the language
 it is unwritten in. (MCB 53-54)

Despite Gallagher's anger over her loss, she recognizes Carver's lack of agency in the face of death. The violin image central to "Bonfire" returns here as an emblem of Carver, himself helpless to affect the physical world he has left behind even as the violin proves useless when its bow is destroyed. Nevertheless, if Carver can no longer express himself directly through his own art, Gallagher suggests, he can through her poetry remain vibrantly alive despite his death. By remaining central in Gallagher's memory, he "can step back into life" and enable her to "watch and write the deaf poem" whose substance paradoxically is defined through its lack, just as Carver's absence intensified his presence for the widow who grieved at his loss. Language at the end of "Deaf Poem" becomes both crucial and unnecessary to the task of remembrance, as is expressed by Gallagher's aptly chosen descriptor "unwritten"—a word that provides the poem's conclusion with power, paradoxically, because it was indeed written down.

Several poems in *Moon Crossing Bridge* allude to the added grief Gallagher faced in losing not only a life companion but also an artistic partner as well. "Reading the Waterfall" refers directly to Carver's last collection of poems and envisions those poems as communiques of love from beyond the grave that serve Gallagher as a road map for emotional survival:

Those pages he turned down in peaks
 at the corners are kerchiefs now, tied
 to the last light of each favorite tree
 where he paused, marking my path
 as surely as if he'd ordered squads
 of birds to rustle leaves overhead. (MCB 7)

Carver's last volume metaphorically acts as a marked trail, leading the mourner to the symbolic waterfall which, as in both Hall's and Carver's poetry, is suggestive of healing and renewal. As such, "Reading the Waterfall" especially recalls Carver's "Hummingbird," which was dedicated "for Tess" and instructed Gallagher to "open" the poem like a letter and make use of it as a means of remembrance and comfort (A *New Path* 92). Gallagher asserts later in her poem that reading Carver's poetry creates access to

“remembering his voice across rooms” calling to her for editorial help, asking her to “hear some line / of poetry read aloud in our two-minded way” (*MCB* 7). Thus Carver’s death makes even the work of poetry, otherwise a comfort or at least a welcomed distraction from intense grief, harder to endure because of its inextricable connection to the couple’s life together. Paradoxically, however, that added difficulty becomes for Gallagher, as it did for Hall, a central theme of the elegies produced in the wake of partner loss; Carver’s death makes the work of words more difficult but further impels that work to commence because it alone can serve as both a remembrance of the life that passed away and as a catalyst for the survivor’s transformation into a healed, newly productive artistic self. Gallagher addresses this situation in the final stanza of “Reading the Waterfall,” in which she struggles to find a way to retain the meaningful resonances of her past with Carver without sacrificing the future to the past:

So much love is curved there
 where his pen bracketed
 the couplet mid-page, that my unused
 trousseau seems to beckon deeply
 like a forehead pressed into paradox
 by too much invitation. (*MCB* 7)

Gallagher’s “unused trousseau” is not merely the life she and Carver might have lived together but is likewise the written work they might have produced while together. That lost potential looms so large shortly after Carver’s death that Gallagher is indeed faced with a “paradox” of “too much invitation.” In the face of so much love left unshared and so many texts left unwritten, Gallagher’s persona at the end of “Reading the Waterfall” must make a herculean effort to avoid losing her own creative potential to the depths of her grief for Carver.

Among the *Moon Crossing Bridge* poems that appear to dialogue most significantly with Carver’s poems are “We’re All Pharaohs When We Die” and “Anniversary.” “We’re All Pharaohs When We Die” resonates particularly with Carver’s “In the Year 2020” and “My Death,” both of which consider the effects of death on surviving loved ones. The image of the pharaoh in Gallagher’s poem likewise recalls Kenyon’s “Pharaoh,” in which Kenyon imagines Donald Hall’s afterlife as consisting of the things he valued on earth. Among those things valued in Gallagher’s poem are the friends with whom the lost loved one shared important life moments, the friends Carver described as “illustrious” and “embraced” and “[l]oved” by the

dying ("In the Year 2020," *Where Water...* 49), even as they are somewhat guiltily thankful not to be dying themselves. Gallagher's poem, however, contrasts with Carver's poems by suggesting that the dying loved one does not entirely leave behind those things he encountered in life:

Our friends die with us and are thrown in because we
used them so well.
But they also stay on earth awhile like the abandoned
huts of the Sherpas on a mountain that doesn't know
it's being climbed. They don't fall down all at once.
Not like his heart
fell down, dragging
the whole gliding eternity of him out of sight. (MCB 55)

The placement of the lines on the page are indicative of the gradual descent that characterized Carver's slow physical decline and likewise suggests the gradual deaths of entire generations of friends and colleagues, an issue of particular concern in Carver's "In the Year 2020": "Which of us will be left then--" he asks, "old, dazed, unclear-- / but willing to talk about our dead friends?" (*Where Water...* 49). The gradual descent in Gallagher's stanza retreats when she recalls Carver's death, the apparent suddenness of his heart stopping and the onslaught of grief that resulted from his loss. The trauma of the situation rendered her preverbal, indeed childish, as the next stanza indicates:

Guttural and aslant, I chew the leather sleeve
of his jacket, teething like a child on the unknown pressure
budding near its tongue. But the tongue
is thrown in too, everyone's who said his name
as he used to be called
in our waking and sleeping,
dreaming and telling the dreams. (MCB 55)

The image of the jacket recalls the clothing imagery that permeates much of Kenyon's poetry of grief, suggesting the contrast between the material absence and the spiritual/emotional presence of the lost or physically distant loved one. The leather jacket, associated in the poem with the tongue and the act of speech, reinforces the speaker's grief over the loss of a loved one whose primary vocation, the work of words, amplified their intimacy while he was alive.⁶⁴ The "guttural" vowels of the passage (*budding*, *tongue*) echo the low moaning described in the first line as Gallagher's verbal expression of her grief, while

⁶⁴The jacket in the poem quite possibly could refer to the leather "Camus" jacket that Gallagher bought Carver for his forty-ninth birthday prior to their trip together to Paris ("Carver Country" 18). He was frequently photographed wearing it thereafter.

the reference in the final lines to “waking and sleeping” both evokes traditional metaphors of life and death and recalls one of Carver’s favorite poetic tropes for physical and emotional decline and resurrection. Given the intricacies of Gallagher’s dialogue with Carver’s poetry through “We’re All Pharaohs When We Die,” there is little wonder that the concluding image of the poem features an emblem for transformation and immortality, as deer grazing in a meadow are envisioned as “returning souls” who “agree to be seen / gazing out of their forest-eyes / with our faint world painted over them” (*MCB* 56). Are the deer truly new manifestations of the lost loved ones, or are they merely assigned that identity by the grieving survivor? Gallagher does not answer the question clearly and as such attains the mystery she values in grief poetry. More importantly, however, the poem suggests that the question need never be answered, that the importance of the experience lies in its effect on the survivor more than in the nature of its source.⁶⁵ As such, the lost loved one’s spirit—literal or imagined—indeed remains within the transformed identity of his survivors, friends and life partner alike.

“Anniversary,” another Gallagher poem that revisits the terrain of *A New Path to the Waterfall*, is a soft-toned poem recalling Carver and Gallagher’s elopement in Reno, Nevada, seven weeks before Carver’s death. “Anniversary” counterpoints Carver’s “Proposal,” which features the couple asserting life in the face of death. As noted in the analysis of “Proposal” in the previous chapter of this project, the casino setting of Carver and Gallagher’s marriage and honeymoon underscores their battle against the odds for Carver’s life. Carver describes the couple making commitments for the future “as if we’d found an answer to / that question of what’s left / when there’s no more hope” (*A New Path* 116). Nonetheless, like the gamblers who surrounded them, Carver and Gallagher were ready to receive the miracle of “one more, one / more chance” (*A New Path* 116). In “Anniversary,” however, Gallagher recounts the events of “Proposal” from the point of view of the widow who has witnessed the arrival and departure of that final chance described in Carver’s poem. Gallagher’s title opposes Carver’s, suggesting a looking-back which inverts the future-focused connotations of the word “proposal.” As a result, the language of “Anniversary” is much more muted;

⁶⁵Gallagher describes this phenomenon in general terms to Gabrielle Idlet as follows: “I don’t know whether I invest or whether [Carver’s “spiritual dimension”]’s there. But it amounts to the same thing, really, because you’re moved and you’re engaged, extended into the world by it. The mystery is fluttering all around you” (178).

indeed, the efficacy of language itself in the face of personal tragedy becomes a central issue once more, as paradox again provides the poem with its energizing conflict:

We ate the wedding feast quietly
and to ourselves near the hush
of the gaming tables, the icy click
of dice in the half-closed hand
before they are thrown.
There were no toasts to the future
because by then it was a day
about to begin, which
was already stunted
by the hazard of its own
oblivion. What could I tell you
that would be simple and true enough
since words are candles I blow out
the moment I set them down? (MCB 62)

Here the couple's concerns about the future are portrayed as a gamble, as the casino becomes a microcosm of the risky world in which they confront the reality of loss. Sound and silence are palpable opposing forces in this passage, the "hush / of the gaming tables" contrasting with the "icy click / of dice" and, interestingly, echoing Carver's description in "Proposal" of the "muffled sound of dice" and the "click of the wheel, / the slots ringing on into the night" (*A New Path* 116). The tension between sound and silence is heightened in "Anniversary," where a future "stunted / by the hazard of its own / oblivion" forces the poet, in mourning for her lost husband and writing partner, to question the strength of the words the couple had held so valuable. Nevertheless, unlike "Proposal," "Anniversary" does not leave the couple at the moment of their marriage but carries their spirits away from the chancy public arena of the Reno casinos into the wordless power of nature. Returning to her favorite image of the horse, Gallagher figures the couple's spirits as inhabiting a "liquid and tranquil" region, mingled together at the mouth of a river, where "everything poured into us / hard and true." Transformed into the water of the river (another image evoking Carver's poetry), the couple's life force is drunk down by a horse whose "overflowing eye closed over us" (MCB 62-63). In such a world, spirits are fluid and need never die; rather, they perpetually transform themselves into new and equally vigorous carriers of life, beings who have no need for words but are nonetheless, paradoxically, named into being through Gallagher's poem.

Gallagher's vision of Carver as surviving spiritually within her self and her poetry derives not only

from her theories articulated in the essays collected in *A Concert of Tenses*; they likewise emerge from Gallagher's embrace of particular aspects of Japanese religious and cultural myths surrounding the commemoration of the dead. Many Japanese place faith in the survivor's ability to retain communicative ties with the dead, as is illustrated by the prevalence in Japanese homes of family altars (Yamamoto et al., "Mourning in Japan" 75). In Japanese tradition, the deceased loved one is transformed into an ancestor figure who can offer guidance to her or his survivors and who remains a crucial part of the community left behind, as would be fitting for a society like the Japanese that values the welfare of the group (e.g., the family) over that of the individual (Hoffman 33-34; Yamamoto, "Cultural Factors" 181). The Japanese view of loss resonates with nineteenth-century Western attitudes toward death and the dead, which valued attempts to retain ties with the dead through dreams, prayers, spiritualism, and visions of reunions with lost loved ones in the afterlife of the survivors (Stroebe et al., "Broken Hearts" 1208-1209). Japanese traditional commemoration of the lost also contradicts classical twentieth-century Western conceptualizations of death, which describe as pathological any overt attempts to interact with the dead or to view them as significant presences in the daily lives of survivors (see Freud 249-250; Lindemann 142).

In her interview with Merle Bachman, Gallagher acknowledged the impact a visit to Japan after Carver's death made on the progress of *Moon Crossing Bridge*, which she was in the process of writing at the time. Gallagher has stated that, prior to her visit to Japan, she had visited Carver's grave in Port Angeles daily for two and a half years (Bachman 164); thus Gallagher identified with Japanese rituals of maintaining the presence of the lost loved one in survivors' daily lives. While in Japan, Gallagher visited the Buddhist nun and novelist Jyakucho Setouchi, and afterwards Gallagher and her editor crossed the Togetsu Bridge, whose name, Gallagher was told, meant "Moon Crossing Bridge." Gallagher told Bachman, "I said, 'Well, this is my title,' because that's what these poems are doing; they are on this 'soul terrain.' I always think of the moon in that old way of being the repository of souls" (166). Gallagher's vision of herself and of Carver's spirit as being bridged after death thus comes to suffuse the poems appearing in the volume.⁶⁶ The

⁶⁶See Margaret Holley, "Myth in Our Midst: The Multiple Worlds of the Lyric." *The Michigan Quarterly Review* 32 (1993): 150-64, for a review of *Moon Crossing Bridge* that cogently acknowledges the influence of Gallagher's experience with Japanese culture on the imagery and structure of the collection.

title poem of the collection, for instance, asserts the inevitability of the couple's joining after Carver's death by describing the reflection of moonlight on river water as a visual emblem of that reunion. In "Moon Crossing Bridge," the light/dark paradox that structures "Yes" returns, as Gallagher describes the image of the light-on-water bridge as useful for its "witnessing" quality—its ability to act as a symbol of connection, to "let the water stay the water / and the incongruities of the moon to chart / that joining I was certain of" (MCB 59).

Other poems similarly evince the influence of Japanese poetry and attitudes toward immortality. "Blue Grapes," which consists of only ten brief lines, creates the imagistic effect of haiku, despite its structural deviation from the form. Devoid of any personal pronouns, the poem opens with a contrast—the guarded sensuality of the "blue grapes" the speaker eats vs. the abundant stillness of the "snow-covered valley" she overlooks from her window (MCB 75). For an instant the speaker imagines the "deep world / gazing back," but the spiritual weight of the moment is shattered by the appearance of a blue jay, whose movement "scatters snow from a bough" and appears to awaken the speaker from a reverie, plunging her into a desperate realization of the emptiness of the experience: "No world, no meeting. Only / tremors, sweetness / on the tongue" (MCB 73). What had appeared at first to be an unexpected experience of connection (the "deep world / gazing back"), likely involving the spirit of the lost lover, is suddenly perceived as nothing more than a flare-up of nervous emotion and sensation which, the final lines suggest, has no profound spiritual meaning. However, the effect of the lines leaves the reader—and, presumably, the speaker—suspicious of such an abrupt dismissal of the moment's meaning. The image of "sweetness / on the tongue," for instance, is a positive one; thus the speaker's situation at the poem's end does not appear to be as simple as the final lines overtly suggest. As such, "Blue Grapes" resonates well with Carver's "Simple," in which the speaker, while "casually eating" a bowl of raspberries, scans a horizon suddenly illuminated by a "break in the clouds" (*Ultramarine* 126). Although he wonders to himself why he feels "lonely and filled with remorse," he realizes as he eats the fruit that, were he dead, he "wouldn't / be eating them," concluding "It's not so / simple. It is that simple" (*Ultramarine* 126). Thus the apparently ordinary act becomes invested with a realization of the speaker's mortality, much as in "Blue Grapes" a similarly ordinary moment becomes emblematic of the consequences of death and loss. The haiku-like simplicity of "Blue

Grapes" therefore evokes not only Japanese death poetry traditions but also Carver's own poetic brand of memento mori.

"I Put On My New Spring Robe" opens with direct reference to a Japanese legend of a hero's death and the poetry that records it, linking Carver with the powerful and tragic image of the samurai:

Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto, samurai hero of *Kojiki*,
who "turned into a white bird upon his death."
No accident then, the headstone
to your left reads "White" and the one chiseled
to your right is "Bird."—A man who could arrange this,
not knowing where he would be buried, has to be scary. (MCB 69)

The myth that opens this poem derives from the *Kojiki*, the earliest written reference work offering sources of Japanese attitudes toward death (Hoffman 32). Hoffman points out that Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto was a second-century hero whose transformation into a white bird at the time of his death caused his wife and children to pursue the bird around the world, "cutting their feet on bamboo stumps and singing songs of mourning all the while" (34). Given Gallagher's concern in *Moon Crossing Bridge* with the woman poet's response to the loss of her poet-husband, it is fitting that the first death poem sung by a woman is recorded in the *Kojiki* and is ascribed to Oto-Tachibana, Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto's widow, who sacrifices herself to the gods in an attempt to redeem her husband's life (Hoffman 58-59). Oto-Tachibana, whose character is paradoxically independent and loyal, courageous and emotionally devastated, lives and dies in a fashion that parallels the life and death of her samurai husband.⁶⁷ This physically and emotionally violent power is echoed in the closing lines of Gallagher's poem:

Yesterday when someone
asked how I was doing I laughed
like a woman whose fate is to sleep next to a sword.
Whitebird, that's what I call you in my dreams of flying. (MCB 69)

Gallagher's struggle to retain her individuality while commemorating and emotionally preserving her shared

⁶⁷Oto-Tachibana's death poem appears to enact a recognition scene between the lovers after their mutual deaths. The following is her poem, translated by Yoel Hoffman:

Ah! Thou [whom I] inquired of,
standing in the midst
of the flames of the fire
burning on the little moor of Sagamu,
where the true peak pierces! (*Japanese Death Poems* 59)

life with Carver creates a powerful intertext with the legend of Yamato Takeru-no-Mikoto and Oto-Tachibana. Carver becomes a heroic force in Gallagher's life, but she, through her poetry, asserts herself as no less heroic.

Another poem that overtly employs Japanese ritual as part of its symbolism is "Picking Bones." The occasion of the poem is a visit to Carver's grave made by Gallagher and a Japanese translator of Carver's poems, Gallagher's friend Emiko. Upon arrival, the visitors notice that nearby seagulls have "walked their hieroglyphics across the poem" etched on Carver's gravestone, which Gallagher interprets as a message meant "to make sure we comprehend / this stopping off to flight" (*MCB* 71). Once more, Gallagher makes use of the Japanese image of the bird as the embodiment of the lost loved one's spirit (as a signifier of Carver's presence, or her perception of that presence) at a crucial commemorative moment. The fact that the birds' tracks are associated with language and symbol emphasizes their identification with Carver, who valued the art of fiction and poetry as a means for communication. Gallagher and Emiko perform a ritual to honor Carver that begins in silence but gradually allows for quiet talk and "[t]hat overlay too of new sound Emiko has given / his poems in Japanese," all of which evokes what Gallagher describes as the "palpable" presence of Carver's spirit to commune with those who mourn him. The conclusion of the poem introduces the origin of its title:

After cremation of the loved one,
working in pairs, the relatives join in the ritual

of "picking bones." Two by two with chopsticks lifting
each bone from the ashes, dropping it
into an urn. Her friend, Yoshi, who said he had
much feeling and grief on viewing
his father's body, but who saw and felt,
in lifting shards of a father—the lightness, the necessary
discrepancy of translation. For a moment we are held
precariously as a morsel
on the way to any mouth. "Don't
pick bones!" the mothers warn children caught
lifting the same piece of food. We pull
ourselves up from the low black table, from
the ivory clicking. (*MCB* 72)

The ritual of picking bones parallels the rites of remembrance, the frequent returns to memories of the lost loved one which Gallagher enacts in her grief poetry and advocates as beneficial for the bereaved in the

"Reservoir" essay. What the ritual accomplishes, paradoxically, is a relief from the anguish of grief by acknowledging the loss in physical terms but recognizing, as the bones come to symbolize in this poem, that some "morsel" of memory remains. The "necessary / translation" is both the dead loved one's absorption into the transformed identities of his mourners and the stories those mourners share—or the poems they create—to preserve his memory. The final image of "Picking Bones" again points to the paradoxical task Gallagher faces in the wake of Carver's loss—her need to commemorate his life and their time together and her need to move on with her own life. To avoid being swallowed by her grief, she realizes she must make herself leave the "low black table" of his grave and assert her own identity, which now includes rather than abandons that of her lost companion.

This need for growth beyond grief becomes particularly evident in the later poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge* as well as in the lighter-toned *Portable Kisses* collection. These poems dissolve traditional boundaries between self and other, life and death, even more pronouncedly than do the earlier poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge*. As the healing process continues for the speaker, she more fully accepts the lost loved one as a spiritual part of her transformed, independent identity and grows willing to attempt life with a new lover, an attempt she suggests would not have been possible had it not been for the generosity of spirit associated with her former relationship.⁶⁸ As Gallagher declares in the final stanza of "Glow,"

So I walked out one night under the full moon
and agreed with my dead love
that the cold light on the backs of my hands
belonged most to me. (MCB 79)

Indeed, in several of the later poems, identities of the speaker, the lost companion, and a new lover become so thoroughly intertwined as to render all boundaries indistinguishable, even unnecessary. "Kisses from the Inside," for instance, features the speaker referring to herself in first person but connecting herself to the image of a blind woman, a "she" who is guided by a mysterious male presence, a "he" who possesses

⁶⁸Gallagher's current life partner is Irish painter Josie Gray, with whom she has been involved for the past four years. Gallagher stated in conversation with the author of this project that she and Gray have been collaborating on a collection of his stories, developed in part from traditional Irish folk tales. See Gallagher's essay "A Nightshine Beyond Memory: Ten More Years with Ray" (*Philosophy and Literature* 22 (1998): 438-56. Rpt. in *Soul Barnacles* 226-44) for her brief description of their relationship. In that essay she declares, "It should now occur to those who see me simply as a mothballed extension of Ray that I have been alive and fervent all along in my own right" (444).

characteristics of both the spiritual force of the lost companion and the physical force of a new lover.

Paradox again is central to "Kisses from the Inside." In order to heal spiritually after loss, the speaker discovers she must return to honoring the physical and the sensual. As such, "Kisses from the Inside" and similar poems in the volume parallel Hall's poetry in *Without*, as they both illustrate and call into question Peter M. Sacks's contention in *The English Elegy* that

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 and rendered metaphorical, by the awareness of loss or mortality. (7)

Indeed, Gallagher's description of her movement toward a revitalized sexual self after Carver's death is not entirely celebratory, but it is neither entirely painful nor fearful. She says of the male presence in the poem,

He wants me all in light,
she who was stumbling three years
with the dead. He picks my feet up
by their heels in his palm. The more
I want to be high and golden, pitiless and
unformed, the more he tears me back
to earth. He rolls me in the red dust
inside the night. (MCB 94)

As part of her healing process, the speaker is both elevated from her "stumbling" ("He picks my feet up") and forcefully returned to the material world ("he tears me back / to earth"). Healing is figured as a necessary balance of opposites, though achieving such a balance is a violent and unnerving process that the speaker cannot accomplish alone. The concluding passage of the poem, likewise structured on paradox, describes the uneasy beginnings of the resolution the speaker is suffering to attain:

In the hovering noon of our devotional midnights
he flies off, until I am sheer and stolen,
rooted deep in the sea air
because the tide is everything
because the tide is everything
and I have never seen the sea. (MCB 94)

Still the identity of the male presence is purposefully clouded, suggestive both of Carver and the new lover, each of whom have at this point in the poem disappeared, leaving the speaker "sheer and stolen." Time and matter are likewise intermingled, as noon and midnight, ocean and earth, share characteristics. The concluding image of the poem, the rolling sea tide which the speaker repeats is "everything" but which she

has not seen, heightens in Whitmanesque overtones the paradoxical message of the poem, and arguably of the volume as a whole: out of loss comes growth, out of death comes life, out of the unspeakable come words that pay tribute and transform.

The penultimate poem of the collection, "If This New Love Ends," is a variation on these paradoxical themes. Although it appears after "Kisses from the Inside," it again takes up the question of the speaker's capacity to love again when a powerful love has been lost traumatically to death, as the opening stanza demonstrates:

Someone to follow him? I don't think so.
It is like proposing a second heaven
as if it were attainable because you played
with angels in your childhood and believed
in the wings of their flesh. (*MCB* 96)

The lost loved one, identified here as like the angelic, is still not divorced from the speaker's earthly reality, a realm where it is possible for human children to identify angels with both wings and flesh. The speaker as well indulges in a wish to return to childhood's optimistic innocence, as she imagines herself as a girl "who received everything the world suggested / as if each moment were an ascension" (*MCB* 96). Nevertheless, the adult speaker cannot escape the dark realities of death that have recently wounded her, but she acknowledges that the grief she endured has taught her a new way of accommodating the inevitability of loss so that she is willing and able again to risk a new relationship:

And if this new love ends
it will have to go on in me
like a mountain behind a town
when the mountain is made to watch that town
enter flames and smoke
until it at last resembles the essence of love,
that impersonation of his heart's heart
which, one day in the girl's second memory,
became a little eye in moonlight
where he lived in her, imperishable
as anything offered to coexist
with the unreplaceable. (*MCB* 96-97)

If the love ends, the speaker claims, it will paradoxically do so by "go[ing] on" inside the speaker. The metaphor of the mountain and the town extends the paradox: as the town is destroyed in the flames, it resembles the creative intensity of passion, and the violence of the moment is tempered by the speaker's

description of it as both natural and mythical—the town rises like a phoenix inside the enduring presence of the mountain. So the speaker retains the spark of the old love even as she moves forward toward new love, which meshes with the old until both are rendered simply “the essence of love.” The identity of the “impersonation of his heart’s heart”—a phrase that unfolds itself—is deliberately ambiguous, since defining borders between identities seems pointless once the speaker has embraced the more global “essence of love.” Appropriately, the word “impersonation” can mean both an imitation of one who has gone before and an embodiment of a larger force. In contrast to traditional psychoanalytical theories, which suggest that grief is successfully “worked through” once a survivor has attached her emotions to a new object, “If This New Love Ends” offers a model of coexistence which positions the lost loved one within the identities of both the survivor and the new lover she encounters. Thus, again paradoxically, the “lost” is never fully lost, only transformed into a different shaping of love.

This concept of paradoxical inclusiveness carries into Gallagher’s second volume published in 1992, *Portable Kisses Expanded*. As the title indicates, the collection contains within it several poems published in 1978, before Carver and Gallagher began their long-term relationship.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, as Gallagher notes in her introduction to the volume, most of the poems in *Portable Kisses Expanded* were written from May to September 1991 and resulted in a volume characterized by contradiction: “I conceived of the book in mottled tones,” Gallagher writes, “the whimsical alongside the passionate, the panoramic with the close-up, and always the intimacy of the vignette, often simply a man and a woman speaking quietly to each other” (10). Many of the poems feature the daring yet tender personified figure of the Kiss, featured in poems whose tones vary as much as their titles: “The Kiss Joins the CIA,” “The Kiss in Her Bath,” “The Kiss Eats a Loaf of Bread,” “Motoring Toward Seattle the Kiss Considers Capital Punishment.” The liveliness of the Kiss poems evinces independence and individuality, but the collection is

⁶⁹The 1978 *Portable Kisses* was published in a limited edition and was inspired by Gallagher’s reading of Pablo Neruda’s *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, translated by W. S. Merwin, a book which Gallagher says “was something many books of poems are not—portable. I read it in lines at the bank and post office, while waiting for ferry boats, in lecture halls—those times when I got marooned, and needed a little poetry to yank me back to life” (“Introduction,” *Portable Kisses Expanded* 9). Ironically, Gallagher notes, the limited edition “turned out to be such a fine production that it wasn’t really portable. Nonetheless, the title of the book continued to haunt me, inviting me to attempt some later collection” (9).

not devoted exclusively to poems featuring the character of the Kiss. Much of *Portable Kisses Expanded* returns to the terrain of the poems near the end of *Moon Crossing Bridge*, texts that explore the ability of the speaker's altered self to create a new, transformed, independent life in the aftermath of loss. Three poems that demonstrate the struggles to achieve this goal are "Widow in Red Shoes," "Black Violets," and "Elegy with a Blue Pony."

"Widow in Red Shoes" is itself a vignette describing the speaker's mixed emotions upon rejoining, for the first time since his death, the social circle she had shared with her late husband. She both fears and requires the tearful, nonverbal expression of grief—the "unstoppable avalanche / none of us will release" which she expects all of the couple's "old friends" will experience, partly because she recognizes that she herself has delayed fully mourning for the loss of her husband. "Tsvetayeva was right / in mourning Rilke—" she declares, "to cry is / to accept: 'As long as I don't cry he hasn't / died'" (PKE 19; Gallagher's emphasis). Thus "Widow in Red Shoes" extends the philosophy underlying much of Gallagher's earlier grief poetry—Saint Teresa's insistence that "words lead to deeds"—to suggest that even the nonverbal expression of loss validates its irrevocable nature, thus causing the bereaved widow to delay all expression in an effort to forestall confrontation with the painful actuality of her loss. As such, the widow's condition in "Widow in Red Shoes" resembles the state of denial which many psychoanalytical theorists have identified as common to the grief process. What distinguishes the widow in Gallagher's poem, however, is the fact that she recognizes her own emotional delaying tactics, and as such she discovers a new nonverbal way for acknowledging the loss without invalidating the legitimate spiritual/emotional connection she continues to feel with her late husband:

Then I see them—
the red shoes, thrown into my bag
as afterthought, the spiked exclamation points
of the heels, the sharp toes out of the 60's.
They're a little worn. Not easy to replace,
a pair of shoes which went everywhere with
him. Already they have the look
of something misunderstood. I pull on
the black tights, some sort of low-waisted dress,
and slip on the shoes. He always loved
me in these red shoes. Defiant, sexy
and with him. (PKE 19)

The concluding strong two beats of the poem suggest confidence, despite the fact that the widow knows her unconventional homage to her lost lover is likely to be “misunderstood” by friends who would expect her to be wearing the muted colors and withdrawn expression traditionally associated in Western cultures with mourning. As in “Kisses from the Inside” and other later poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge*, the widow discovers that honoring the spiritual connection she feels with her lost loved one requires her to honor her own sexual self, a part of her personality that her late husband “loved.” Again paradoxically, the shoes represent both her own independent spirit and the mutual commitment she and her late husband shared with each other, none of which is “easy to replace.” Once more, as in much of Kenyon’s poetry, the material emblem of dress acts as a marker for the spiritual and emotional state of the mourner, but unlike much of Kenyon’s more somber-toned grief poetry, “Widow in Red Shoes” transforms the pain of grief and loss into a celebration of the life and liveliness of the one who is mourned as well as the one who is left behind.

“Black Violets” and “Elegy with a Blue Pony” are the final two poems in *Portable Kisses Expanded*. Each of these poems portrays the speaker making her fullest assertion of her own individuality and growth after the loss of her loved one by means of integrating his love for her and their past together into her ever-evolving self. “Black Violets” features the figure of a new lover whose identity once more is meshed with that of the old lover and integrated within the spirit of the speaker. As such, “Black Violets” proves to be a richly associative poem whose intent yet again is in part the erasure of false boundaries between loved ones. In the opening passage, the speaker invites a new lover—presumably for the first time since her mate’s death—into the bedroom she and her lost companion shared. The lovemaking she enacts with her new partner appears intended in part to evoke the love she shared with her dead lover, as the following lines indicate:

If I say “black violets” our first night
is nearly dark enough to draw this daylight rain
to memory’s nomadic glistening, and I can
be there again, carrying love
to love in that room where his last heart
gave over its invisible amber. It’s true,
he’s evergreen in me and I make green use of him
to love you all the way back through death
into life again. (PKE 98)

Not only does the lovemaking create this inclusive union of lovers, but the act of shaping the experience

into words appears crucial to accomplishing the growth and healing which the speaker here achieves. The poem gets its title from the opening line, in which the utterance of the phrase "black violets" appears to grant the speaker the strength she needs to begin a new relationship. The clouded meaning of the opening lines indeed achieves the mystery Gallagher claims as one of her goals in writing lyric poetry, but the image of black violets appears itself paradoxical, suggesting both death and life, obscurity and beauty, and as such proves indicative of the liminal emotional state in which the speaker finds herself. Once again, the personal pronouns of the passage are, at least on first reading, likely to confuse, emblematic of the collapsing borders between identities revealed in Gallagher's most recent love poetry. Indeed, the speaker makes "green use" of her new lover to reclaim her past love within the present moment, but the old lover as much, if not more so than the new, appears "evergreen" in her, incapable of fully dying away from her emotional life.

This confusion of referents appears again at the start of the second stanza:

In that pang of earth you cast into me
 he stepped forward, accompanied us
 a little way into the present, into the sweetness
 of so much yet to be lived out in this retrieval
 of my unretrievable heart. (*PKE* 98)

The "you" of the passage above could indeed be the deceased loved one, who "cast into" the speaker a "pang of earth" when he died such that the speaker bodily felt the shock and sorrow of her loss, as Gallagher has indicated in the "Reservoir" essay is necessary in her view for the proper handling of grief ("Reservoir" 103). If so, the "he" in the next line could refer to the new lover, who "stepped forward" in the midst of the speaker's grief and brought her self and her memories of the past "a little way into the present," accomplishing what seemed impossible before healing began to take place—the "retrieval" of the speaker's paradoxically "unretrievable heart." But the "you" could just as easily refer to the new lover, who (like the lover in "Kisses from the Inside" who "tears [her] back to earth") reminds the speaker of her physical/sexual self, recalling her from her isolation back to the world of those still living on earth. The "he" would then refer to the dead beloved, whose spirit encourages the speaker in advancing her life forward, therefore accompanying the pair of new lovers out of the past and "into the present," again allowing for the "retrieval / of [her] unretrievable heart" by sanctioning the emotion she never expected to feel again in the wake of such devastating loss. Perhaps Gallagher intentionally invited both readings of the situation, thus affirming

the malleability of identities as a signifier of healing and renewal in the aftermath of partner loss. This gesture toward inclusiveness and enrichment in the wake of disintegration is further indicated by the next two lines of the poem, in which Gallagher declares in her signature conditional, "If you were two men to me there / it was to make lucid a fresh outlasting" (*PKE* 98). One man becomes two, both of whom are enfolded back into the newly made self of the speaker, who finds the ongoing process of her grief and healing "fresh" in its everlastingness. The process is complex, its poetic articulation even more complex. That very complexity, however, allows for the absorption of the dead within the survivor. Not only is the lost never fully lost; he is continually rediscovered as the survivor's growth process progresses into the future.

This prospect of rediscovery is further developed in "Elegy with a Blue Pony." Addressed directly to the lost loved one, the poem acknowledges the love the couple shared physically and continues to share spiritually, but "Elegy with a Blue Pony," more so than perhaps any other Gallagher poem, extends a gentle farewell to the lost loved one that suggests finality even as it reaffirms the continuity of the couple's relationship. Early in the poem the speaker declares, "Somewhere a cemetery exists / for all the kisses I was going to / give you" (*PKE* 99). The poetic phrase once more affirms Gallagher's theories of the malleability of time in poems, as it figures an unrealized future ("the kisses I was going to / give you") as presently situated in a repository of the past. Gallagher goes on to compare the thwarted kisses to "[m]ultitudes of butterflies" asleep in the portion of her heart devoted to Carver, thus evoking in the butterfly figure one of her favorite symbols for delicate beauty and gradual rebirth after death.⁷⁰ The speaker proceeds to comfort her dead lover, who, she imagines, risks grieving over the loss of the kisses they might have shared even more heavily than she does:

If, in your travels in the spirit world,
you suddenly recall those kisses you
might have had, you won't have to
live again to enjoy them.

⁷⁰In addition to the butterfly image in "Bonfire," see the title poem of the *Amplitude* collection, in which Gallagher describes her brother comparing his daughter to a sleeping butterfly. For an analysis of "Amplitude" that specifically addresses the butterfly image, see Robert Peters, "Wide-Awake Butterfly: Tess Gallagher" in *Where the Bee Sucks: Workers, Drones, and Queens of Contemporary Poetry*. Santa Maria, Calif.: Asylum Arts, 1994. 105-112.

They are waiting. You will always
be expected by my kisses. (PKE 99)

Not only does the speaker take for granted her lost husband's immortality, but she likewise envisions the life they might have lived as surviving in a spiritual realm as well. Like the other writers examined in this study, Gallagher asserts sexuality/creativity as a valid counteraction to the devastation of loss, but even more so than the other writers, she envisions the gestures emblematic of sexuality and creativity as achieving an immortality of their own that questions the totality of partner loss without dishonoring the trauma of the experience. As such, Gallagher's poetry addressed to Carver's spirit reiterates in twentieth-century terms that death indeed should not be proud, as the final lines of "Elegy with a Blue Pony" illustrate:

Lie down. Let the nose
of my blue pony brush your neck.
Don't be sad I'm not with her, or
that the butterflies rise as a body
to let her pass. Don't be sad.
I'm still alive and have to follow
my kisses around. But you, you can
lie down and be enlivened, kissed
into yet another imperishable
collaboration on the way to me. (PKE 99)

Here Gallagher imagines Carver's spirit longing for her embrace, just as she after his death longed for the same from him. What she has learned in her grief process she offers to him for comfort, urging him not to be "sad," because the spiritual dimension of her love for him always awaits him at any time he wishes to "lie down and be enlivened" by it. The survivor, who still must "follow / [her] kisses around," appears more limited by her physicality than is the spiritual dimension of the lover, who can achieve an "imperishable / collaboration" at any time he wishes with Gallagher's spiritual dimension, represented once more by a horse figure, the image of the blue pony. Similarly, the concept of the "imperishable / collaboration" is evocative of Carver and Gallagher's collaborative creative work on *A New Path to the Waterfall* shortly before his death. Having progressed deeply enough into the process of her own spiritual healing by integrating Carver's spiritual dimension within her transformed poetic self, Gallagher's persona is capable now of offering the same comfort she previously sought in the early poems of *Moon Crossing Bridge* and in the early phases of her reconciliation to Carver's death.

Gallagher's most recent collection of poems, *My Black Horse: New and Selected Poems* (1995), was published by a small press in England and has not been widely distributed in the United States. It contains a small number of new poems, a few of which return to the subject of her life with Raymond Carver and her grief over his loss. "Laughter and Stars" in many ways summarizes what Gallagher aimed to achieve in the whole of her poetry commemorating the life and mourning the death of Raymond Carver. Here she attempts simultaneously to articulate the suffering and celebrate the triumphs Carver and Gallagher experienced in the weeks before he died. Again paradoxically, the poem's thematic base is language's limitations in accessing traumatic experience, as the opening lines suggests:

I didn't make present
those days he didn't complain
but I knew he was sick, felt
sick, and a look would pass between us,
a doomed look that nonetheless
carried streamers of light like a comet
scratching light across the tablet of the night sky.
We looked into each other
and like the comfort a small branch is to a bird
on a long migration, we took comfort in
the two-way knowing of that look. (*MBH* 241)

Language is far less useful here than the penetrating communication afforded by a brief look shared by the couple who have worked daily with words but who cannot—or will not—attempt to speak about the trauma they are enduring. The look, not the words, provides the "two-way knowing" they require and welcome, but it is paradoxically the poetic description of that look that allows Gallagher to share their experience with readers who may likewise have suffered through similar circumstances but need the words of the poem to achieve that "communion with other deaths and mythic elements" which Gallagher argues is necessary for healing ("Reservoir" 104). By articulating their experience for her readers, Gallagher also pays homage to Carver's devotion to his work as poet and fiction writer; as she describes in "Laughter and Stars," Carver, despite his illness, "fed the fire; he wrote / poems" (*MBH* 242).

The concluding scene of the poem also suggests the transition from the physical toward the spiritual. Gallagher describes Carver's final night alive as shared in laughter with Gallagher and a visiting friend, making light of "the clumsiness of the body, his body" (*MBH* 242) as he—seated in a wheelchair and hooked to an oxygen tank—decides he wants "to go out onto / the deck of the house to see the stars again"

ene, material things prove almost comically inhibitive as Carver and his
 ir way out into the open and the symbolic glittering freedom of the star-

The wheelchair
 the rug, the oxygen tank
 it loose, but somehow everything jangling along
 ing glass doors, and the sky huge
 man's moon, huge as a man's heart on its last
 so we had to shield ourselves
 way to find the
 stars. (MBH 242)

ver's imminent death through Gallagher's metaphorical description of it as
 ond the huge, blinding immediacy of the moon, connected as it is with
 y muted stars, whose light represents the afterglow of their own dying, the
 urn away. Gallagher describes their "plaintive, farewell hissing" and the
 bedded / in the blue-black breast of forever" (MBH 242), the natural world
 d-death human events the poet describes. "Laughter and Stars" then moves
 and everlasting spirit are celebrated as overwhelming the diminishing

ot up, stood up with everything still attached and we
 m hack open a bright crevasse in the night, to hurl
 beat like the red living fist it was
 time
 s the sleeping thresholds
 ing. (MBH 243)

world, Carver, with the help of the survivors he leaves behind, takes part in
 l space which exists, even if nowhere else, in the memories and the poems

of those he leaves behind; and Gallagher, through the mechanism of the poem, preserves not only the
 memories of the love she shared with Carver but also the capacity of her surviving self to continue living
 and writing after his death. The poem, and all of Gallagher's grief poetry, ends as a celebration of the
 richness of life rather than merely an exclamation of frustration with the robbery of death. As she declares at
 the end of another poem in *My Black Horse*, "For Certain Foreign Anthologists of Raymond Carver,"

Yes, as long as one of us
 is still above ground, our reconstitution,
 the impoverishment of aftermath
 will be delayed. Call me tyrant, usurper, despot.
 Then, open the book
 and read. (MBH 244)

It is, ultimately, the art of the poem that preserves and sustains. Gallagher suggests that those who would doubt her ability to survive after Carver's death, or their own ability to survive similar losses, need only "open the book / and read" to discover the comfort offered through their shared, all-but-unspeakable stories of life and death.

Writing about *Moon Crossing Bridge* and *Portable Kisses* in a cogently argued analysis of Gallagher's later poetry, Jeanne Heuving asserts that Gallagher's poems in these volumes "represent a significant departure from her earlier work in her capacity to take on far more dissonant dictions as well as disjunctive emotional states in composing her poetry of life-affirming, [sic] transformation" (158). Heuving argues that Gallagher's poetry in these volumes critiques and displaces traditional attitudes toward lyric poetry as emerging from "a sense that certain experiences are unspeakable or inexpressible" (Heuving 144). Indeed, Gallagher does speak the unspeakable in many of these poems, as the taboo-breaking scenarios of "Wake" or "Red Poppy" or "Widow in Red Shoes" demonstrate. Nevertheless, even Gallagher acknowledges the paradox of language that drives her grief poetry and thereby links it to the writings of loss of each of the writers examined in this project:

As an artist in words you only partly succeed. There's so much that got away from me, so much that has to stay silent. But the intricacy of how I do move in the language, that complexity and perverseness even was a necessary representation of the unsayable.... I keep trying to give that sign of partiality, of the unsayable. (Bachman 168)

Thus Gallagher's poems of mourning for Raymond Carver honor the pain of his death and the intensity of their shared lives together, including their shared love of the work of words. Perhaps only within the strictures of such intense emotion in the wake of loss could language be pushed to limits farther than even those who regularly tested its boundaries imagined it could go.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Joining the Fabric

*Like trying to blow a feather
from the bottom of a hat,
the trickiest of negotiations.
What voice do we use
to call the freshly-dead back?
Steve Gehrke, "Mouth to Mouth"*

We peer into the new poem with the old hope: that we might find there a few words to illumine more widely our passage through the dark woods and brightly lit cities of the fleeting, time-bound world. And the art of poetry remains a daughter of Remembrance—of our wish to feel joined to some fabric that both gives meaning to and is made meaningful by the part of it we are.

Jane Hirshfield, "Poetry as a Vessel of Remembrance"

Arguably, loss and the consciousness of its inevitability appear to undergird the whole of poetry. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, David's psalms of lament, Homer's heroic verse, Shakespeare's death soliloquies, Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Whitman's *Drum Taps*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Ginsberg's *Kaddish*—the examples are indeed too numerous to name. The elegy and its variations constitute one of the most common and most crucial modes of poetic composition, despite the fact that, as Harold Schweizer notes, suffering "remains the most unsharable, incommunicable mystery, the very epitome of secrecy and particularity" (*Suffering* 1). Few would argue against the difficulty involved in communicating to others the unique pain associated with individual loss; yet something compels the elegist (or the self-elegist) to make the attempt. Even the satiric or anti-elegiac elegy subtly acknowledges the power of the experiences that drive the creation of the art it deconstructs—otherwise, why would the anti-elegiac poet bother to critique an essentially inconsequential artistic expression of invalid emotions? Despite twentieth-century deromanticizings of the genre—many of which are admittedly powerful and valid in their own right, and certainly deserve more critical attention—the elegy remains a vitally useful poetic mode of expression, as even those critics who have identified recent radical changes to the form are forced

to admit.⁷¹ Because poetry routinely operates through the music as well as the meaning of language (or, in Gregory Orr's words, the "limitless" and the "limiting" impulses of verbal creation [270]), it is perhaps best suited of all forms of linguistic expression to articulating those experiences most difficult to communicate through words.

Each of the poets examined in this project regularly confronted his or her losses through poetry structured on paradox—statements that fold in on themselves, that contradict themselves in such a way that they often simultaneously succeed and fail at representing the multifaceted, complex experiences they describe. This paradox was intensified when the loss that the writers faced was the prospect of their own imminent deaths or the deaths of life partners inextricably associated with the work of poetry. The chief aim of this project was to examine the poems of Jane Kenyon, Donald Hall, Raymond Carver, and Tess Gallagher to explore ways in which their written texts revealed successes and limitations in translating loss from the writers' experience of illness and death to the readers' experience of elegiac art. Among the recurring manifestations of this type of paradox were the tensions between the material/physical and the emotional/spiritual absence and presence of loved ones threatened with death; the sexual/creative impulse asserted as a validation of life, even as its physical ramifications often proved reminders of the inevitability of death; myths of journeys, heroic quests, and death and resurrection invoked as resonant narratives linking the writer's predicament with broad paradigms of human experience; and the verbal act vs. the nonverbal gesture as modes of communicating what seems almost impossible to communicate.

Reflecting the self-reflexive art of these writers—interpreting poetry which itself struggles to interpret experience that often appears uninterpretable—has proven a constant difficulty in this study. Because the poems themselves repeatedly question their own ability to capture the complexity of loss experiences, readings of the poems run the risk of treating the poetry (and the experiences it reflects)

⁷¹As is indicated in the introduction to this project, the most thorough recent examination of the anti-elegiac mode in twentieth-century British and American poetry is Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994). See also Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) and Ronald Schleifer, *Rhetoric and Death: The Language of Modernism and Postmodern Discourse Theory* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990).

reductively. As much as possible this project has aimed to avoid this pitfall, a task that the author of this study hopes to have accomplished at least in some measure. Perhaps the single most important discovery that this project has afforded its author in the aftermath of the research and writing of this study is the extent to which the poets under consideration here repeatedly used their poetry to question the viability of language as an effective tool for communicating intense emotion and providing opportunities for the bereaved to heal in the wake of loss. Each of the four poets discussed in the previous chapters refused to endorse unequivocally the powers of language—including poetic language—to heal. Nevertheless, all of them returned ultimately to poetry as an artistic means toward and expression of the emotional healing they accomplished when confronted with terminal illness and death. The work of poetry was acknowledged to be an imperfect salve to emotional wounds resulting from personal loss, but its admittedly limited strengths as a remedy for deep emotional pain were affirmed by the fact that all four authors never renounced the work of words when confronted with the chaos of dying and death. Kenyon and Carver, in fact, despite their knowledge of the limitations of language and the nearness of their deaths, continued working for as long as they were physically capable to ensure that their final written artifacts were prepared to survive them. Similarly, Hall and Gallagher, despite personal struggles with their own individual forms of artistic silences after the deaths of their life partners, in time returned to poetry as a means of elegizing their lost loved ones and translating their own personal battles with loss for their readers, who likely have endured or will endure similar losses. Perhaps the fact that poetry in particular of all the written arts has access to linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of expression explains its fitness for expressing the otherwise inexpressible. Whatever the reasons, the works of the four authors central to this project confirm that the elegy survives as a valid, if imperfect, subgenre of poetry whose purpose—however solipsistic it may appear in each individual case—can strike a chord with all readers who have experienced loss and the need to express their resultant emotional pain.

The analysis of the poems in the previous chapters of this project have illustrated a number of similarities and differences among the poems of each of the authors of concern here. As noted, each writer interrogates the capabilities of language and art to describe and make meaningful the experiences of terminal illness and loss. Often in their poetry verbal statements oppose the nonverbal gesture as contending

methods for communicating emotions emerging from traumatic experience, thus illustrating the writers' struggles with the constraints of language in the wake of illness and loss. Likewise, each author has employed and/or transformed traditional poetic organizing myths to shape their elegiac and self-elegiac poetry. Many of these myths resonate with organizing narratives identified by Anne Hunsaker Hawkins in *Reconstructing Illness* as crucial to the structures of various pathographical writings. These myths include vegetation/fisher king myths and the evocation of the sexual/creative act as a stay against death; the figuration of illness, death, and mourning as a journey or quest that leads to the transformation of the personalities involved in the drama; and imagery evocative of the battle myth, featuring the ill/dying and their caregivers/survivors as courageous heroes struggling to defeat an almost invincible foe. Another similarity involves the survivors' uses of poetry to establish a dialogue with the lost loved one, often by revisiting the dramatic scene or even directly quoting from the poetry of the dead loved one, in order to preserve the voice of the lost within the poetry of the survivor.

Among the differences that characterize these poets' approaches to dealing with death and loss in their poems include Hall's and Kenyon's more traditionally Christian approaches to coping with loss, though it must be emphasized that their poetry neither imposes a Christian paradigm on their readers nor fully embraces the unequivocal hope characteristic of Christian concepts of death and resurrection. Poems such as Kenyon's "Pharaoh" and "Afternoon at MacDowell" or Hall's "Without" and "Weeds and Peonies" prove far from unequivocally hopeful, but their reliance on Christian myth in poems such as Hall's "Another Elegy" and Kenyon's "Eating the Cookies" evokes a largely (though not exclusively) traditional Western form of comfort in the wake of death and loss. Carver, by contrast, locates his hope for life after death in a community of friends and family who, he hopes, will remember him long and fondly after he dies. Though poems such as "No Need" suggest the possibility of an afterlife, the bulk of Carver's poetry creates his space for survival after death within the memories of his friends, family, and—equally crucial—his readers, as works such as "My Death," "In the Year 2020," and "Poems" indicate. Gallagher relies not only on memory and her concept of the malleable rather than linear quality of time; she draws from mythical imagery and narrative herself as well, though such myths are rarely easily aligned with traditional Western Judeo-Christian concepts of cosmic survival. Gallagher evokes Japanese myth and symbol as well as her

own personally constructed mythologies of the endurance of human love to provide comfort and healing for herself and other mourners after Carver's death. Though each writer's vision of an afterlife may vary, they all manage to carve a space for comfort in the wake of loss, once again illustrating that the consolatory functions of elegy and other forms of loss poetry is still alive and well at the turn of another century.

Still, despite these insights, several questions raised by this project deserve continued attention. One of the questions needing further exploration in future critical work involves interrogating the concept of the ineffability of suffering. If the poem is, as Raymond Carver insisted, "not just expression" but "communication" (McCaffery and Gregory 110), why does the poet adopt as subject matter something generally regarded as resistant to translation? Are illness, pain, and grief as "unsharable" as Schweizer and, indeed, many others claim that it is? The poems examined in this project would suggest that the answer to the second question is fittingly a paradoxical "yes" and "no." No individual's experience of pain, whether physical or emotional, can be perfectly duplicated and felt by another; this part of the foundation of Schweizer's thesis cannot easily be disputed. Similarly, just as the translation of a literary work may capture precisely certain aspects of the original while altering or obscuring others, so the artistic translation of experience—particularly painful, life-altering experience—often proves unavoidably incomplete. Even if the whole of what an individual experiences in a bodily or emotional sense could be easily assigned markers identically understood by every reader—itself an impossible task—recording the day-to-day experience of long-term, life-threatening illness and the grief of the survivors would require more of the writer and reader than space or time would allow. As long as any part of an experience becomes "lost in translation" (an unavoidable situation, especially if one accepts post-structuralist arguments the language cannot capture *any* experience), that phenomenon is, to some extent, untranslatable. And when that experience is as traumatically devastating as the terminal illness and/or death of oneself or of a life partner, it is not surprising if the harrowing events the couple endures appear largely ineffable.

Nevertheless, precisely because the experiences are of life-and-death consequence and necessarily absorb much of the couple's consciousness, the writers find that they have no choice but to confront their physical and emotional experiences through their poetry. Given the enduring popularity of elegiac and commemorative art, including poetry, it appears obvious that some important need is being filled by the

works these artists create, for audience and creator alike.⁷² It likewise appears obvious that communication of traumatic experience *is* to a great extent possible, although admittedly imperfect. The finest poems discussed in this study achieve a hard-won success by expertly communicating the difficulty of the act of communication, so much so that often the poems' roughest edges make their execution all the smoother. The poet uses the order of the poem to honor the chaos of the experience, which itself often threatens to break the surface of the order in such a way that it enriches and emotionally validates the experience the poem describes.

Of course, as this project has aimed to demonstrate, the poet likewise uses the order of the poem to honor the lost, or, in the cases of the writers who died, the people and places they were about to lose. The poem becomes a monument, a stay against the loss because of the written word's preservative—indeed, enlivening—power. The poem cannot replace the loved one, but, as Gallagher writes in the “Reservoir” essay, it can act as a “live-in church” where writer and reader alike may go to commune with the absent presences that populate their lives. As such, those people and experiences that serve as a launching-point for the poem become immortalized, held within the lives of the readers. Poet Mark Doty, who lost his partner Wally Roberts to AIDS complications in 1994, described this phenomenon to Bill Moyers:

What the poem makes is a version of a moment, a replica, a touchstone—something to keep, and to give away. ... Therein lies the marvel: The poet's little limited life becomes larger because readers enter into it. Wally really is gone, and yet he—and he and I together—figure into the imaginative lives of readers. That's an extraordinary thing, that something as small as a poem extends our lives. (Moyers, *Fooling with Words* 59)

An additional issue critical to this project that deserves further exploration is the impact on a writer's life and work of having another professional writer as a life partner. Because every individual artist

⁷²Many writers on the subject of cultural attitudes toward mourning and artistic expressions of loss point to recent phenomena such as the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt as examples of a recent shift in attitude toward culturally sanctioned, mass expressions of mourning. See Gallagher's “Reservoir” essay as well as Jahan Ramazani's conclusion to *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. For context, see also the essays collected in Margaret S. Stroebe, Wolfgang Stroebe, and Robert O. Hansson, *Handbook of Bereavement: Theory, Research, and Intervention* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), particularly the articles by Colin Murray Parkes (“Bereavement as a Psychosocial Transition: Processes of Adaptation to Change” 91-101) and Paul C. Rosenblatt (“Grief: the Social Context of Private Feelings” 102-11).

and every individual relationship is distinct from every other, extreme care must be taken not to overgeneralize, but an examination of the artistic ramifications of a long-term romantic partnership between two artists would prove remarkably useful to future scholars interested in the works of writers involved in these types of relationships. Worthwhile work has been done on individual partnerships, but this researcher was unable to uncover a more far-reaching study incorporating characteristics of a variety of life partnerships and the effects of these personal relationships on the artists' professional work. The most inclusive study available appears to be editors Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron's introduction to *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, a volume that contains thirteen essays on thirteen individual artistic and romantic partnerships, including Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, and Anais Nin and Henry Miller. The introduction adopts a Marxist feminist approach to reading the couples' lives and artistic influences on each other, noting particularly the difficulties that women in male-female relationships have often faced in asserting themselves as individual artists frequently viewed negatively as competitors or as "pale copies, imitators with little originality of their own" (10). Their argument certainly resonates with Hall's and Kenyon's struggle to avoid encouraging the belief that Kenyon achieved recognition as a poet only because of her relationship with Hall, and with the difficulty Gallagher faced in distinguishing herself after Carver's death as more than "a mothballed extension of Ray" ("Nightshine" 444). Nevertheless, this struggle was only a part of the much richer whole that constituted the relationship of each of the couples considered in this project. Theorists exploring a broader spectrum of issues regarding creative artists who are life partners could offer an invaluable resource to scholars interested in this area of study.

Another issue tangential to this project but deserving of further exploration involves what Jahan Ramazani refers to as the "economic problem of mourning"—the concern that besets many elegists who fear that "they reap aesthetic profit from loss, that death is the fuel of poetic mourning" (6). A similar issue at work in these texts is the poet's use of her or his own life and death as suitable subjects for poetry. This issue certainly nagged Raymond Carver, who frequently found himself fielding interview questions regarding his use of actual incidents in the lives of his family and friends as seeds for his poems and short

stories.⁷³ However, the only poem studied in this project that significantly highlights this issue is Hall's "Another Elegy," his powerful but often wry self-elegy published when Hall was combating colon cancer. Hall has built much of his widely acclaimed poetry on the life stories of himself, his family, and his ancestors, so it is not surprising that "Another Elegy" resonates with the actual events of his life. As noted in the third chapter of this project, that poem's central character, the fictional poet William Trout, both is and is not Donald Hall, and in that poem Hall confronts his own ethical and artistic concerns with "hook[ing] and land[ing] / himself and his own for his book" (*Museum* 9). It would, of course, be difficult for the poet accustomed to creating art from the experiences of his own life to avoid composing poetry related to the battles with terminal illness that he and his loved ones face. The extent to which poets, particularly contemporary poets, experience guilt for garnering artistic praise in the wake of the suffering of themselves and their loved ones is well worth exploring; if the writing of poetry in the aftermath of loss performs a therapeutic function for writer and reader, as many psychologists insist it can, what specifically causes the guilt Ramazani mentions in his study, and how do poets cope with that guilt when they feel compelled to write out their losses? A similar question involves the extent to which this concern relates to the larger debate about the fitness of the personal as subject matter for contemporary poetry. Alberta Turner offers perhaps the best response to those who would argue against personal experience as a base for the creation of poetry:

[Contemporary poets] are working on the same assumption that has always underlain both the making of fictional characters and the telling of autobiography—that the universally common experiences created by human psychology, physiology, and history insure that any cluster of specific, concrete details of any single human being's experience can be made to evoke similar responses from all human beings. ... It is this problem of presenting the data of one unique self so that other unique selves will recognize it as their own that poses the chief artistic challenge to contemporary

⁷³Carver routinely responded to these types of questions by insisting that his creative work, particularly in the stories, was not mere autobiography or transcription of historical events but involved artistic craft that cast his work in the realm of fiction, even though he acknowledged his opinion that "the best art has its reference points in real life" (Pope and McElhinny 18). The question became such an issue that it continues to spark heated responses from his friends who fear Carver's talent is belittled by the assumption that his literary works are precise replicas of his own experiences. See especially Sam Halpert's interviews with William Kittredge, Tobias Wolff, and Richard Ford in *Raymond Carver: An Oral Biography* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1995); see also Carver's responses to this oft-repeated issue in Gentry and Stull's *Conversations with Raymond Carver*.

poets who probe their own selves for the sake of transcending the individual in order to reveal the universal self. (136)

Studies of the recent phenomenon of pathography—biographical and autobiographical writings that chronicle the experiences of individuals with serious medical conditions and their caretakers—have proven a valuable resource for this project, but examinations of this relatively recent subgenre are still in their infancy. Scholars such as Anne Hunsaker Hawkins and G. Thomas Couser have mapped the mythological paradigms typically employed by pathographers and have examined to some extent the cultural contexts out of which these types of life writing have emerged. Further study is, however, merited, not only because of the growing popularity of pathographical writings but likewise because of the conventions they borrow and the influence they have on other literary genres, including poetry.

Finally, much more critical attention deserves to be paid to the poetry of each of the four authors examined in this project. Certainly Raymond Carver's short fiction has generated a fairly large body of criticism, but his poetry has remained largely ignored by critics, caught as it is in the shadows of his remarkable influence on the genre of the short story. Donald Hall's influence on twentieth-century literature in America is undisputedly large, but his prolific output as a poet has often been eclipsed by his work as an editor and anthologist of various influential textbooks and collections of critical essays on poetry. Tess Gallagher's reputation as a poet, essayist, and short story writer is still growing, and although she is indeed respected as an important figure among the poets of her generation, her work has been the subject of very few published critical articles. Jane Kenyon especially has received extremely little critical attention; aside from a few interviews and reviews of her books of poetry, this researcher found no published critical commentary on her poetry, despite the fact that her poems appear in several important literature textbooks. Granted, it always proves difficult for the critic to assess the long-term standing of the reputation of contemporary authors, but as this project has attempted to illustrate, each of these writers has made worthwhile contributions to the field of contemporary American poetry and therefore deserves further academic study.

The last text to appear in Tess Gallagher's *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray*, her recent collection of essays and interviews examining her life with Raymond Carver, is her poem "I Asked That a Prayer." It describes a memorial service at Carver's graveside on the tenth anniversary of his death, at which Gallagher, despite the fact that many of the mourners "were awkward about prayer" (245), requested that the gatherers observe "a moment / of silence in which we each / offer up a prayer." The final verse paragraph of the poem describes the result:

Silence then.
 And, while we were in the middle of it
 wind from the Straits rushed
 like a hand over the chimes above the stone.
 I thought: "he's here," and so did
 everyone else. We even spoke about it
 afterwards. Let ourselves know.
 That's how he came to be with us.
 Through a moment that was its own
 speaking. I heard all of him in that broken-open
 eternity. The bright metal
 of chimes fumbling the sea air. Then
 the wild precipice of peace
 in which the earth itself
 seemed to fall away to silence.
 Then the silence
 after the silence. (*Soul Barnacles* 245-46)

Once more, sound and silence, language and the nonverbal, coexist to animate the paradox of loss and communion. The music of the chimes, the "moment that was its own / speaking," communicates what literal speech cannot—the absent presence of the lost loved one. Still, interestingly enough, the importance of the moment is later validated through speech, an act of "communication" which Carver doubtless would have appreciated ("We even spoke about it / afterwards. Let ourselves know. / That's how he came to be with us"). The recollected moment is framed by evocations of silence, itself paradoxical in nature, suggestive both of positive, honorific quiet and the often painful long-term silence that proves emblematic of loss. "Then the silence / after the silence"—the closing phrase begs the question of which brand of silence endures. Is the peace of the commemorative moment followed by the hollow stillness of a continual recognition of loss, or is the acute pain of loss followed ultimately by the abiding peace the scene describes? The answer, of course, depends on the mourner, but is perhaps best summarized as, paradoxically, "yes" and "yes," "no" and "no." Indeed, the poetry of illness and death is as complex as the actual experiences it

derives from; that complexity is only compounded when those articulating the experience are expert enough at the work of words to know that what *cannot* be said *must* be said, through the devices of silence and speech alike.

REFERENCES

Primary Bibliography

- Carver, Raymond. *A New Path to the Waterfall*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1989.
- . *Ultramarine*. New York: Vintage, 1987. New York: Random House, 1986.
- . *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water*. New York: Vintage, 1986. New York: Random House, 1985.
- Gallagher, Tess. *Amplitude: New and Selected Poems*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1987.
- . *Moon Crossing Bridge*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1992.
- . *Portable Kisses Expanded*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1992, 1994.
- . *My Black Horse*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1995.
- Hall, Donald. *The Museum of Clear Ideas*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1993.
- . *Old and New Poems*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1990.
- . *The Old Life*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1996.
- . *Without*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998.
- Kenyon, Jane. *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1995.

Works Cited

- Bachman, Merle. "Taking the Kiss: Interview [with Tess Gallagher]." Gallagher and Simon 161-75.
- Blue, Marian. "Two Writers under the Same Roof: A Conversation with Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon." *AWP Chronicle* 27.6 (1995): 1-8. Rpt. in *A Hundred White Daffodils* 185-201.
- Boddy, Kasia. "A Conversation." Gentry and Stull 197-203.
- Boxer, David, and Cassandra Phillips. "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?: Voyeurism, Dissociation, and the Art of Raymond Carver." *The Iowa Review* 10.3 (1979): 75-90.
- Boym, Svetlana. *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Bradt, David. "An Interview [with Jane Kenyon]." *A Hundred White Daffodils* 172-84.
- Brown, Arthur A. "Raymond Carver and Postmodern Humanism." *Critique* 31 (1990): 125-36.

Caldwell, Gail. "Raymond Carver: Darkness Dominates His Books, Not His Life." Gentry and Stull 243-48.

Carver, Raymond. *All of Us: The Collected Poems*. Ed. William L. Stull. New York: Vintage, 2000.

-. *Fires: Essays, Poems, Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

-. "Meditation on a Line from Saint Teresa." *No Heroics, Please* 223-25.

-. "My Father's Life." *Fires* 13-21.

-. *No Heroics, Please: Uncollected Writings*. Ed. William Stull. New York: Vintage, 1992.

-. "On 'Errand.'" *No Heroics, Please* 123-24.

-. "On 'For Tess.'" *No Heroics, Please* 120-22.

-. "On Writing." *Fires* 22-27.

-. Unpublished letter to Mr. Hallstrom. *Carver Country* 105-17.

Carver, Raymond, Tess Gallagher, and Bob Adelman. *Carver Country: The World of Raymond Carver*. New York: Arcade, 1990.

Chadwick, Whitney, and Isabelle de Courtivron, ed. *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnerships*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

Chappell, Fred. "Attempts Upon Delight: Six Poetry Books." *The Kenyon Review* 4.3 (1990): 168-76.

Clarke, Graham. "Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence." *The New American Writing: Essays on American Literature Since 1970*. Ed. Graham Clarke. New York: St. Martin's, 1990. 99-122.

Corn, Alfred. "Plural Perspectives, Heightened Perceptions." *The New York Times Book Review* 24 Mar. 1991: 26-27.

Couser, G. Thomas. *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1997.

Cramer, Jeffrey S. "With Jane and Without: An Interview with Donald Hall." *The Massachusetts Review* 39 (1998-99): 493-510.

Dreifuss-Kattan, Esther. *Cancer Stories: Creativity and Self-Repair*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1990.

"Elegy." *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan.

New York: MJF Books, 1993.

Field, David, Jenny Hockey, and Neil Small, ed. *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological*

Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 14. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud. London:

Hogarth Press, 1957. 243-58.

Gallagher, Tess. "Again: Some Thoughts on the Narrative Impulse in Contemporary Poetry." *A Concert of*

Tenses 67-82.

-. *A Concert of Tenses: Essays on Poetry*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1986.

-. Introduction. *Carver Country*. Carver, Gallagher, and Adelman 8-19.

-. Introduction. *A New Path to the Waterfall* xvii-xxxi.

-. "My Father's Love Letters." *A Concert of Tenses* 1-23.

-. "A Nightshine Beyond Memory: Ten More Years with Ray." *Philosophy and Literature* 22 (1998): 438-56.

-. "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief." *A Concert of Tenses* 103-117.

-. "The Poem as Time Machine." *A Concert of Tenses* 90-102.

-. "Poetry in Translation: Literary Imperialism, or Defending the Musk Ox." *A Concert of Tenses* 45-66.

Gallagher, Tess, and Greg Simon, ed. *Soul Barnacles: Ten More Years with Ray*. Ann Arbor: U of

Michigan P, 2000.

Gentry, Marshall Bruce, and William L. Stull, ed. *Coversations with Raymond Carver*. Jackson: UP of

Mississippi, 1990.

Gordon, Emily. "Above an Abyss." *The Nation*. 29 Apr. 1996: 28-30.

Hall, Donald. Afterword. *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems*. By Jane Kenyon. Saint Paul: Graywolf,

1996. 217-20.

-. "Donald Hall on His Poetry: Looking for Noises." *American Writing Today*. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz.

Troy, N.Y.: Whitson Publishing, 1991. 366-75.

- . "Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird: The Psychic Origins of Poetic Form." *Goatfoot Milktongue Twinbird: Interviews, Essays, and Notes on Poetry, 1970-76*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1978. 117-29.
- . Introduction. *A Hundred White Daffodils* ix-xii.
- . Letter to the author. 2 August 1999.
- . Letter to Raymond Carver. 30 August 1984. Raymond Carver Papers. The Charvat Collection of The Ohio State University Library, Columbus.
- . *Life Work*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.
- . "Notes on the Image: Body and Soul." *The Weather for Poetry: Essays, Reviews, and Interviews, 1977-81*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1982. 309-12.
- . "Notes on T.S. Eliot." *Their Ancient Glittering Eyes: Remembering Poets and More Poets*. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992. 75-110.
- . "The Vatic Voice." *Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird: Interviews, Essays, and Notes on Poetry, 1970-76*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1978. 1-5.
- Halpert, Sam. *Raymond Carver: an Oral Biography*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1995.
- Hamilton, David. "Donald Hall's *One Day*." *The Gettysburg Review* 2 (1989): 268-78.
- Harris, Peter. "An Extravagant Three: New Poetry by Mitchell, Hoagland, and Gallagher." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 69 (1993): 690-705.
- Haskell, Dennis. "The Modern American Poetry of Deep Image." *The Southern Review* (Australia) 12 (1979): 137-66.
- Hawkins, Anne Hunsaker. *Reconstructing Illness: Studies in Pathography*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1993.
- Heuving, Jeanne. "'To Speak Aloud at a Grave': Tess Gallagher's Poems of Mourning and Love." *Northwest Review* 32.1 (1994): 144-60.
- Hirsch, Edward. *How to Read a Poem*. New York: Harcourt, 1999.
- Hoagland, Tony. "American Ecstasy." *The Ohio Review* 50 (1993): 141-53.
- Hockey, Jenny. "Women in Grief: Cultural Representation and Social Practice." Field, Hockey, and Small 89-109.

- Hoffman, Yoel, ed. *Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1986.
- Holley, Margaret. "Myth in Our Midst: The Multiple Worlds of the Lyric." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 32 (1993): 150-64.
- Idlet, Gabrielle. "To Go Naked on Horseback: Interview [with Tess Gallagher]." Gallagher and Simon 176-95.
- Jarman, Mark. "Journals of the Soul." *The Hudson Review* 46 (1993): 415-24.
- Kallet, Marilyn. "The Real Work of Grieving." *American Book Review* 15.3 (1993): 18, 31.
- Kemper, Teresa Ann. "Raymond Carver's Poetry: A Window to the Soul." M.A. Thesis. San Diego State U, 1995.
- Kenyon, Jane. "Childhood, When You Are in It..." *A Hundred White Daffodils* 61-69.
- . "Everything I Know about Writing Poetry." *A Hundred White Daffodils* 139-41.
- . Introduction. *Twenty Poems of Anna Akhmatova*. Trans. Jane Kenyon and Vera Sandomirsky Dunham. Saint Paul: Eighties Press & Ally Press, 1985. 1-6.
- . *A Hundred White Daffodils: Essays, Interviews, The Akhmatova Translations, Newspaper Columns, and One Poem*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1999.
- Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Lammon, Marty. "Something Hard to Get Rid of: An Interview with Robert Bly." *The Day I Was Older: On the Poetry of Donald Hall*. Ed. Liam Rector. Santa Cruz: Story Press, 1989. 22-36.
- Latimer, Robin M. "Jane Kenyon." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 120. Detroit: Gale, 1992. 224 vols.
- Lawler, Roxanne. "Carver's World." Gentry and Stull 169-76.
- Lindemann, Erich. "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief." *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 101 (1944): 141-48.
- McCaffery, Larry, and Sinda Gregory. "An Interview with Raymond Carver." Gentry and Stull, 98-116.
- McFarland, Ron. *Tess Gallagher*. Boise: Boise State University Western Writers Series, 1995.
- McGovern, Martin. "Recent Poetry from Independent Presses." *The Kenyon Review* 9.4 (1987): 131-37.

- McInerney, Jay. "Raymond Carver, Mentor." Stull and Carroll, 119-26.
- McNair, Wesley. "Craft and Technique: Four Poets." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 36 (1997): 668-82.
- . "A Government of Two." *The Iowa Review* 28.1 (1998): 59-71.
- Meyer, Adam. *Raymond Carver*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- Mills, Ralph J. Jr. "Donald Hall's Poetry." *The Iowa Review* 2.1 (1971): 82-123.
- Moffet, Penelope. "PW Interviews Raymond Carver." Gentry and Stull 238-42.
- Morrison, Morris R., ed. *Poetry as Therapy*. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1987.
- Moyers, Bill. *Fooling with Words: A Celebration of Poets and Their Craft*. New York: William Morrow, 1999.
- . *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets*. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Muske, Carol. "In the Heart of the Heart of the Country." *The New York Times Book Review* 5 Jan. 1997: 11.
- Nesset, Kirk. *The Stories of Raymond Carver: A Critical Study*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1995.
- Orr, Gregory. "Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry." *Richer Entanglements: Essays and Notes on Poetry and Poems*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993. 3-14. Rpt. in *Poets Teaching Poets: Self and the World*. Ed. Gregory Orr and Ellen Bryant Voigt. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996. 269-78.
- Peters, Robert. "Wide-Awake Butterfly: Tess Gallagher." *Where the Bee Sucks: Workers, Drones, and Queens of Contemporary Poetry*. Santa Maria, CA: Asylum Arts, 1994. 105-12.
- Pope, Robert, and Lisa McElhinny. "Raymond Carver Speaking." Gentry and Stull, 11-23.
- Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Rector, Liam. "Donald Hall: An Interview by Liam Rector." *American Poetry Review* 18.1 (1989): 39-46.
- Rodgers, Beth L., and Kathleen V. Cowles. "The Concept of Grief: An Analysis of Classical and Contemporary Thought." *Death Studies* 15 (1991): 443-58.
- Runyon, Randolph Paul. *Reading Raymond Carver*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1992.

- Sacks, Peter M. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.
- Schleifer, Ronald. *The Rhetoric of Death: The Language of Modernism and Postmodern Discourse Theory*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990.
- Schumacher, Michael. "After the Fire, Into the Fire: An Interview with Raymond Carver." Gentry and Stull 214-37.
- Schweizer, Harold. *Suffering and the Remedy of Art*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997.
- . "The Very Short Stories of Raymond Carver." *College Literature* 21.2 (1994): 126-31.
- Sexton, David. "David Sexton Talks to Raymond Carver." Gentry and Stull 120-32.
- Sexton, Megan. "Interview [with Tess Gallagher]." Gallagher and Simon 145-60.
- Simic, Charles. "Jane Kenyon." *Orphan Factory: Essays and Memoirs*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997. 72-73.
- . "The Trouble with Poetry." *Orphan Factory: Essays and Memoirs*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997. 32-35.
- Simpson, Mona. "The Art of Fiction LXXVI: Raymond Carver." *The Paris Review* 25 (1983): 193-221.
Rpt. in expanded form as "Raymond Carver" (with Lewis Buzbee) in Gentry and Stull, 31-52.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978.
- Stitt, Peter. "Objective Subjectivities." *The Georgia Review* 38 (1984): 628-38.
- Stroebe, Margaret. "Coping with Bereavement: A Review of the Grief Work Hypothesis." *Omega* 26 (1992-93): 19-42.
- Stroebe, Margaret, et al. "Broken Hearts or Broken Bonds: Love and Death in Historical Perspective." *American Psychologist* 47 (1992): 1205-12.
- Stroebe, Wolfgang, and Margaret S. Stroebe. *Bereavement and Health: The Psychological and Physical Consequences of Partner Loss*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Stroebe, Margaret S., Wolfgang Stroebe, and Robert O. Hansson. *Handbook of Bereavement: Theory, Research, and Intervention*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.

- Stull, William L. "Beyond Hopelessville: Another Side of Raymond Carver." *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 1-15.
- . "Matters of Life and Death." Gentry and Stull 177-91.
- Stull, William L., and Maureen P. Carroll, ed. *Remembering Ray: A Composite Biography of Raymond Carver*. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1993.
- Thompson, Dennys. *The Uses of Poetry*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1978.
- Thompson, Jeanie. "A Concert of Tenses." *A Concert of Tenses* 24-44.
- To Write and Keep Kind*. Videocassette. Prod. and Ed. Jean Walkinshaw. PBS Video, 1992. 55 min.
- Tomlinson, Bette. "Interview [with Tess Gallagher]." Gallagher and Simon 139-44.
- Turner, Alberta. "Not Your Flat Tire, My Flat Tire: Transcending the Self in Contemporary Poetry." *A Field Guide to Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*. Ed. Stuart Freibert and David Young. New York: Longman, 1980. 135-46.
- Viney, Linda L. "The Personal Construct Theory of Death and Loss: Toward a More Individually Oriented Grief Therapy." *Death Studies* 15 (1991): 139-55.
- Weber, Bruce. "Raymond Carver: A Chronicler of Blue-Collar Despair." *The New York Times Magazine* 24 June 1984: 36-50.
- Wolff, Tobias. "Appetite." Stull and Carroll, 241-50.
- Woodruff, Jay. *A Piece of Work: Five Writers Discuss Their Revisions*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993.
- Yamamoto, Joe. "Cultural Factors in Loneliness, Death and Separation." *Medical Times* 98.7 (1970): 177-83.
- Yamamoto, Joe, et al. "Mourning in Japan." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 125.12 (1969): 74-79.

Vita

Jo Angela Edwins was born 12 February 1970 in Augusta, Georgia, to Joe O. Edwins, a building contractor, and Beatrice J. Edwins, a registered nurse. She grew up in Belvedere, S.C., and attended Curtis Baptist School in Augusta, Georgia, throughout her elementary and secondary education, graduating in 1988. In 1992 she graduated valedictorian with a B.A. in English and Communications from Augusta College (currently Augusta State University) in Augusta, Georgia. For the following year she worked as a reporter and copy editor for the North Augusta, S.C., *Post* and the Edgefield, S.C., *Citizen-News*. In 1993, she entered the M.A. program in the English Department of the University of Tennessee. After her first semester in the program, Beatrice Edwins was diagnosed with lung cancer metastasized to her esophagus. She died on 2 February 1995, three months before her daughter received her M.A. In August 1995, Jo Angela began work toward her Ph.D. in English at the University of Tennessee. Her dissertation topic developed in the wake of her mother's illness and death from reading the writings of various authors confronting the terminal illness of loved ones. During her six years in the Ph.D. program, Jo Angela taught freshman composition and sophomore literature courses and worked during her final year as a First-Year Studies 101 teacher and an advisor in the office of the University of Tennessee's Arts and Sciences Advising Services. She received the English Department's John C. Hodges Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1998, the University of Tennessee's Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching in 1999, and three first-prize awards for the John C. Hodges Graduate Creative Writing Contest in poetry, the first in 1999 for "Incurable," the second in 2000 for "Ritual" and other poems, and the third in 2001 for "Her Cap" and other poems. In June 2001 she will begin a term as Acting Assistant Director of the University of Tennessee's Arts and Sciences Advising Services.