“TO TALK (WHY?) WITH MUTE ASH”:

MODELS OF MOURNING IN ANNE CARSON’S ELEGIES

by

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…the beauty of the world which is so soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder.
Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT……………………………………………………………………………...…iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……………………………………………………...………..v

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION……….……………………………………………....1

CHAPTER 2: EROS & APORIA…………………………………………………………7

CHAPTER 3: “APPENDIX TO ORDINARY TIME”…………………………………..17

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION: *NOX*..…………………………………………………...21

REFERENCES...……………………………………………………………….………..33

Abstract

The model for human desire that classicist and poet Anne Carson lays out in *Eros the Bittersweet* also serves as a model for the state of mourning—a state in which her speakers exist in elegies “Appendix to Ordinary Time” and *Nox.* In these two texts, mourning is an eroticized and inexorable space buzzing with desire; mourner and mourned are bound together, yet eternally separate. Eros is what Carson calls the force that divides and binds, but in mourning the edge between Eros and Thanatos is porous. In this thesis, I read Carson’s development of the idea of mourning as an eroticized space in the context of Jacques Derrida’s aporias of mourning. According to Derrida, such an eroticized space is an inevitable inclination for the mourner, but it is problematic because it denies the radical alterity of the person who died. A mourning that focuses solely on the mourned, however, denies that the dead, or their unalterably “other” images, live on in those who mourn. In her elegies, Carson uses her understanding of “the unlost,” the idea that that which is preserved is inseparable from the loss that is its necessary counterpart, as a means to navigate some of these aporias through bricolage methods such as intertext and fragmentation. In so doing, she creates “found epitaphs” that both mourner and mourned inhabit—new spaces in which aporetic mourning work can occur.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

To mourn is to encounter the most present of absences. Everything—physical and metaphysical—that a lost loved one leaves behind speaks to absence in a place once filled by a vital presence. An aura lingers, but its source has ceased. Statements of speechlessness in the aftermath of a loved one's death abound in the genres of eulogy and elegy. There are no words. Such declarations emphasize the profound failure of speech, the inability to articulate loss, at a time when the mourner often feels it is her duty to speak, whether to honour the dead or to begin the work of mourning. This thesis considers two family elegies by classicist and poet Anne Carson: "Appendix to Ordinary Time," an elegy for her mother; and *Nox*, an elegy for her brother. Both poems depict the scholarly and creative work of reading, writing, and translating as tools in the hands of the mourner. The poems understand mourning as an eroticized space, one characterized by desire, according to the model that Carson advances in *Eros the Bittersweet*. In Carson's depiction of eros, one desires another only as long as the object of desire remains elusive. As such, the emotional turmoil of desire is not truly about the unattained object of desire; it is about the lack that is only noticed in oneself when looking upon that object of desire. By this definition, mourning is erotic, but these elegies also challenge and attempt to circumnavigate this geometry of desire because of the ways that it can lead to a mourning that fails to recognize the uniqueness and alterity of a lost loved one. I use Jacques Derrida's aporias of mourning, developed in *Memoires: for Paul de Man* and *The Work of Mourning*, to explore how Carson constructs and navigates mourning. Derrida describes mourning in terms of "aporia," something inherently contradictory, possible and impossible at the same time. In Derrida's formulation, for mourning to succeed by psychoanalytic models, it must in fact fail, because filling the gap left when a loved one dies means failing to recognize the uniqueness and

otherness of what has been lost. On the other hand, a mourning that focuses solely on the mourned denies that the dead, or their unalterably "other" images, live on in those who mourn. Following Derrida, Carson's elegies can be read as aporic works of mourning in which the poet navigates the practical and ethical paradoxes of mourning through her use of bricolage methods such as intertext and fragmentation. As a result, these two elegies are highly citational – both of the dead, and of other authors. Carson uses intertextuality and the depiction of mental work and process as a means to construct herself as epitaphist – as one creating a physical space inhabited by both mourner and mourned.

In both her classical scholarship and her poetry, Carson often invokes the voices of those beyond the grave, from Sappho and Stesichoros to Emily Brontë and Gertrude Stein. Her engagement with these authors' texts is both translational and poetic, and she frequently places them in temporally juxtaposed conversation – for example, Simonides of Keos and Paul Celan in *Economy of the Unlost*, and Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil in *Decreation*. Both of the elegies considered in this thesis employ intermediating texts. In "Appendix to Ordinary Time," Carson draws on Virginia Woolf's manuscripts, and in *Nox* she translates a well-known Latin elegy by Catullus. Intertextuality creates a triangulated relationship between the poem's speaker, the intermediating text, and the lost loved one. In doing so, intertextuality works as a means to approach a mourning that respects the dead's alterity while refusing any attempt to sever mourner from mourned.

The word "elegy" is from the Greek *elegos*, meaning "lament," but classical elegies were not all laments or works of mourning. They were defined, instead, by form. In English literature, the elegy has become characterized by content rather than form. In *We Are What We Mourn,* Priscila Uppal writes that most contemporary critics consider the English pastoral elegy to be the

genre that defines the elegiac conventions to which many contemporary writers respond (16). These pastoral elegies emerged in the sixteenth century, with an early example being Edmund Spenser's *Astrophel* (1595). The poems are indebted to the classics, and indeed to genre expectations set out by Sicilian poets Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion (Cuddon 254). The English poets frequently make use of the myth of Orpheus, and indeed position the poet as the questing Orpheus. In such poetry, whether overtly or by default, the poet positions the dead as Eurydice in the Underworld. Other conventions include the depiction of nature participating in a cycle of death and renewal, or even joining in the poet's mourning, and motifs of funeral processions and flowers (Cuddon 254). Moreover, as Uppal writes, these pastoral elegies offer a concrete, if ethereal consolation: "that the living should experience joy at the deaths of their loved ones because the dead have transcended the earthly realm" (16). It is to this tradition that many elegists, and in turn their critics, have responded in the last century.

In *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*, Peter M. Sacks provides a Freudian interpretation of elegy, positioning it as a work of mourning that represents a re-entry into language that, for the mourner, prevents "a congealing of his own impulses" (22). He notes the elegiac trope of recurring questions posed to the deceased – questions without hope of being answered – and writes that these questions "set free the energy locked in grief or rage," and provide "movement in the form of a question that is not merely an expression of ignorance but a voicing of protest" (22). He comments on a problem in contemporary elegiac writing that many subsequent scholars have likewise approached: the challenges inherent to writing a "conventional elegy" in a society where the "generic resources of consolation" have lost their authority (299). As Uppal writes, "the traditional Christian consolation in the English elegy, the elevation of the deceased to an afterlife more desirable than life on earth, is a consolation that has

virtually disappeared from our poetic consciousness, if not from Western society as a whole in an arguably secular age" (11-12). At the same time as this resource of consolation dissipates, our understanding of death itself has shifted:

> Sociologists and psychologists, as well as literary and cultural historians, consistently demonstrate the ways in which death has tended to become obscene, meaningless, impersonal—an event either stupefyingly colossal in cases of large-scale war or genocide, or clinically concealed somewhere behind the technology of the hospital and the techniques of the funeral home. (Sacks 299)

This state of simultaneous alienation from and immersion within human mortality has resulted in elegies that seek different types of consolation, or no consolation at all. Sacks identifies within elegy a source of solace, however small, in "the crucial self-privileging of the survivors" achieved through the common tropes of journey, of movement, of "doing" (19). Elegies keep the living alive, if only literarily so, and provide some hope that the potential longevity of the written word can eclipse the brevity of life.

In recent years, critics have revisited elegy, a genre traditionally gendered male, through the lenses of feminist and gender studies. In *Beyond Consolation* (1997), Melissa F. Zeiger considers the influence of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in elegy and demonstrates ways in which writers have problematized its gender implications. Her work builds upon that of Celeste Schenk, Louise Fradenberg, and Juliana Schiesari, who have "directed attention to the elegy as a site of male bonding, power production, and authorial self-identification, and to the privileging of male melancholia and concomitant appropriation of mourning" (Zeiger 5). Zeiger's feminist critique centres on the Orpheus myth because the way it "encodes a set of recurrent elegiac problems and motifs" has made it elegiac fodder, but also "a singularly germinal episode for elegiac rewriting" (2). Tanis MacDonald likewise approaches elegy through a feminist lens in *The Daughter's Way* (2012), where she looks at elegies that Canadian women have written for

their fathers and considers the role of gender in the relationships and responses to death depicted therein. She reads these paternal elegies by female authors against the tradition established by John Milton's seminal elegy "Lycidas," and argues that "feminist and proto-feminist elegies are less concerned with identity and consolation than they are with subjectivity and inquiry" (15). She uses the father—daughter relationship as a frame for analysis in order to counter the conventions of classical and pastoral elegiac traditions that privilege and, indeed, canonize male mourning.

Uppal similarly considers the feminization of elegy, but her primary focus is on understanding and theorizing the elegiac tradition in Canada. Uppal considers elegy as both genre and ritual, and explores the "symbiotic relationship" she sees between elegy and the rites, ceremonies, and psychological work bound to mourning (7). Like Zeiger, Uppal considers contemporary elegy in terms of the Orpheus myth, but she posits that it is especially common for Canadian elegists to in fact "attempt to achieve what the mythic Orpheus initially set out to do: recover his dead wife and live with her again" (13). Uppal understands the contemporary Canadian elegies that she reads as rituals authors use to establish "active sites for reconnection with the dead" (13). She sees contemporary elegists resisting a Freudian model of mourning as detachment, as well as the English pastoral elegy's tendency to distance past from present, and instead clinging for consolation to a collapsed model of time in which elegies allow continued communion with the deceased.

Carson's *Nox* and "Appendix to Ordinary Time" both align with the movement away from a conventional psychoanalytic model of successful mourning as detachment and introjection that Uppal observes in the contemporary Canadian elegy generally, and in "Appendix to Ordinary Time," specifically. Drawing on Uppal, I suggest that reading "Appendix

to Ordinary Time" alongside *Nox* reveals the specific mechanism for this transition from the traditional Freudian work of mourning to the type of mourning that Uppal describes (13). Before analyzing this mechanism, however, I will demonstrate that Carson perceives the state of mourning as inherently erotic, much as Derrida's aporias of mourning respond to mourning as an eroticized space.

Chapter 2: Eros & Aporia

In the preface to *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson uses an image from Franz Kafka's short story "The Top" – that of the eponymous spinning top – to illustrate the tendency of erotic desire to dissolve once the desired is attained. In the story, a philosopher believes that if he can fully grasp any one detail, in this case a spinning top, he will attain an understanding of everything. He desires to catch the top as it spins, but when he catches it, it ceases to spin. His happiness dissolves and he leaves, but returns repeatedly to do the very same thing. Carson uses this story as an allegory for erotic desire, the "suspended moment of living hope," the state of being "running breathlessly, but not yet arrived" (*Eros* xi). Carson is sceptical that the philosopher in the story in fact seeks understanding; "Rather, he has become a philosopher (that is, one whose profession is to delight in understanding) in order to furnish himself with pretexts for running after tops" (*Eros* xii). The philosopher seeks to dwell in an erotic space; he pursues for the joy of pursuit.

The metaphor of the spinning top is useful to understand not only erotic desire, but the desire one encounters within a state of mourning – the pursuit of another whose "meaning spins" (*Eros* xi). To stop the top is to become disenchanted; it allows "the object of desire to disappear into itself" as it stops doing what made it desirable (*Eros* 145). Death locks eros in ways that desire between the living does not. In death, meaning never stops spinning; the dead evade the mourner's gaze and deny answers. This elusiveness drives the main project of much elegiac poetry – that of solidifying the identity of the dead, and simultaneously stabilizing the ways in which one identifies with them. Contemporary poets tend to understand this project as less viable than, for example, many English pastoral elegists of the nineteenth century, but it is still the

question at the heart of contemporary elegy. Carson demonstrates the difficulties inherent in this project by constructing mourning as erotic.

In *Eros the Bittersweet*, Carson develops a model of desire, of eros. In this model, she employs a Lacanian understanding of desire as lack, but this lack is not a noun. “Eros is a verb,” Carson writes; it is a force that actively binds the desirer and the desired together, yet simultaneously holds the two apart, “electrified by desire so they touch not touching” (*Eros* 17). The three form a triangle. When that which holds the two apart dissolves, so does desire. Carson uses the asymmetry of gazes in Sappho’s fragment 31 to describe this model. Therein, the speaker stares at a woman who is interacting with a man. The speaker thinks this man “equal to gods” for being able to be so close to the woman without experiencing the same symptoms she does at the mere sight of the woman. Carson writes that this “is not a poem about the three of them as individuals, but about the geometrical figure formed by their perception” (*Eros* 13). Moreover, Sappho’s poem illustrates the other key element in the definition of desire; it draws attention not to the desired, but rather to the absence within she who desires (*Eros* 33). Desire is not mere lack; it is a lack that leaps and draws attention to its own existence, making absence cripplingly present. Carson writes, “If we follow the trajectory of eros we consistently find it tracing out this same route: it moves out from the lover toward the beloved, then ricochets back to the lover himself and the hole in him, unnoticed before. Who is the real subject of most love poems? Not the beloved. It is that hole” (*Eros* 30).

By Carson’s formulation, difficulty is erotic. Mourning is permanently erotic. Its goal is unstable; its target never stops spinning. Desire for one who lives holds the hope, however frail, of fulfilment, whether or not this fulfilment is in fact what is desired. When one node of the geometry of desire is a person who has died, the present absence that person instills in the living

only instills a greater desire. The muteness of the dead resounds. In *Eros the Bittersweet,* Carson tells the reader to imagine a city whose inhabitants do not desire. In such a city, "They bury their dead and forget where," she writes (*Eros* 168). A city without desire, Carson writes, is also without imagination – a city in which "people think only what they already know" (*Eros* 168). In such a city, modern funerary rites and acts of mourning, the work of mourning itself, ceases. For Carson, desire and imagination shape the ways in which humans respond to death. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, she repeatedly discusses desire in the language of psychoanalytic mourning. This can be seen in her very understanding of desire as a force that renders absence present – her constitution of desire as lack. Eros draws attention to the hole in its subject; the desired object is merely a device that facilitates the movement of the eroticized gaze. Presumably, this focus on absence could allow the subject to "reincorporate his lack into a new and better self," Carson writes. But, "Is that positive picture what the lover wants from love?" (*Eros 67).* Desire and its way of making absence present triggers in the subject a process that Carson describes in psychoanalytic terms of mourning: "The presence of want awakens in him nostalgia for wholeness. His thoughts turn toward questions of personal identity: he must recover and reincorporate what is gone if he is to be a complete person" (*Eros* 30-31). In a state of desire, the self locates what she lacks in the other. If what she lacks ever is recovered and incorporated, however – if mourning work is successful – desire dissipates.

In mourning, desire can never dissipate because the absence created when a loved one dies can never be filled. Desire enshrouds death and the edge between Thanatos and Eros dissolves. In a state of mourning, the present absence is as consuming as it is in a state of being in love, but for the work of mourning as posited by Freud's or Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytic models to occur, the mourner must be able to fix the mourned in space and time.

She must be able to articulate her loss. And yet, to do so would be to collapse the triangle that holds her, separated but still connected, to the dead. Moreover, how can one fix or define another person, dead or alive, in all of her radical alterity? And yet, if the mourner is only truly mourning the hole left in her life by the violent silence of another's death, how can she avoid the indecent self-centredness of such a mourning? These are questions Carson shares with Jacques Derrida.

Derrida works with the basic psychoanalytic premise of mourning as incorporation, introjection, or consumption of the lost love object, as theorized by Sigmund Freud and, later, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Freud considers the work of mourning in terms of his libidinal economy model, where the mourner must gradually detach her invested libidinal energy from the lost or deceased love object, and recover this energy to escape the "restriction of the ego" that exists in a state of mourning (Freud 204). This work is "carried out piecemeal at great expenditure of time and investment of energy" (205). Upon the completion of mourning, Freud writes that "the ego is left free and uninhibited once again" (205). Freud's primary objective in describing mourning is to distinguish it from melancholia. Abraham and Torok further theorize this difference as incorporation (failed mourning) and introjection (successful mourning), in which incorporation results from "the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost; incorporation is the refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us" (127). This leads to a gap in the ego where libidinal energy should have been recovered, they write; a gap that introjection, or successful mourning, would fill. The key element of successful mourning for Abraham and Torok is the substitution of language for the lost love object; an identification of those things lost, and the act of "channeling them through language" (128).

In *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida describes mourning as a series of aporias in which for mourning to succeed it must fail according to psychoanalytic models. What Derrida calls "the unbearable paradox of fidelity" confronts the mourner – the Other cannot be interiorized in a way that is faithful and entirely respectful of his alterity and unique presence on this earth, and yet it is impossible to mourn without interiorizing the image and memories of a dead loved one (159). In *The Work of Mourning*, in which Derrida's writings and orations upon the deaths of friends are collected, Derrida repeatedly refers to the difficulty of speech following a loved one's death. He writes, "an homage in the form of a personal testimony always tends toward reappropriation and always risks giving in to an indecent way of saying 'we,' or worse, 'me'" (225). The mourner is forced into either a self-effacing mourning, a citational mourning that engages only with the corpus of the dead, not corpse, and that only "points to death, sending death back to death" (45); or a mourning that avoids identification with the lost loved one, only speaking in terms of "me or we," which, Derrida suggests, "risks making him disappear again, as if one could add more death to death and thus indecently pluralize it" (45).

In the wake of the death of a loved one, the bereaved are at a loss for words and yet are called upon to speak. Meanwhile, the object of mourning cannot speak. In response to the death of his friend Roland Barthes, Derrida writes:

> I would like to dedicate these thoughts to him, give them to him, and destine them for him. Yet they will no longer reach him, and this must be the starting point of my reflection; they can no longer reach him, reach all the way to him, assuming they ever could have while he was still living. So where do they go? To whom and for whom? Only for him in me? In you? In us? For these are not the same thing, already so many different instances, and as soon as he is in another the other is no longer the same . . . (35)

Here, Derrida approaches the challenge of articulating a loss, of identifying what was lost when another person died. After death, one's identity dissipates. It is stored, fragmented and

inconsistent, in the minds of others, or in one's life work. Even the act of naming the dead, Derrida writes, can only refer to the dead as located in the living – not to the lost person himself. The fragments remain, permanently and necessarily part of someone else, yet carried as images in the living or in the corpus. Derrida writes of Louis Marin: "He is no more, he whom we see in images or in recollection, he of whom we speak, whom we cite, whom we try to let speak—he is no more, he is no longer here, no longer there. And nothing can begin to dissipate the terrifying and chilling light of this certainty. As if respect for this certainty were still a debt, the last one, owed to the friend" (Derrida 159–160). Upon the death of Emmanual Levinas, Derrida describes the common tendency of funeral orators to address the dead loved one; "With tears in their voices, they sometimes speak familiarly to the other who keeps silent, calling upon him without detour or mediation, apostrophizing him, even greeting him or confiding in him" (200). To Derrida, this action is not merely performed out of obeisance to funerary customs; it arises from the floundering encountered as one straddles the two infidelities. The action of speaking to the dead is "to traverse speech at the very point where words fail us, since all language that would return to the self, to us, would seem indecent" (200). When those left behind open their mouths to speak, they are speaking of, and sometimes to, one who cannot speak back, resulting in what Derrida describes as a permanently asymmetric gaze, not unlike the structure of gazes in Sappho's fragment 31. The dead can only continue in the living, but in this continuity "in us," they exist only as images (159). These images, however, are not our own; they are Other, yet carried within us. For this reason, Derrida rejects the possibility of "successful" mourning work, of "interiorization or subjectification" (159), but this impossibility is necessary. As David Farrell Krell writes, "Mourning demands both a keeping in mind or memory and a releasing or letting

go. How could we mourn our friend if we forgot him? And how could mourning do its work if we adamantly refused to let her go?" (2).

In *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida repeatedly discusses re-reading the writings of his deceased friends. He describes reading Barthes' first and final books, *Writing Degree Zero* and *Camera Lucida*, "with the welcoming naïveté of a desire, *as if* by reading the first and last without stopping, back to back, as a single volume with which I would have secluded myself on an island, I were finally going to see and know everything" (37). Of Max Loreau he writes: "I am rereading him right now in wonder, better no doubt than ever before. I would like to quote everything, read or reread everything aloud" (99). Of re-reading Sarah Koffman, he writes that "such testimonies survive us, incalculable in their number and meaning. They survive us. Already they survive us, keeping the last word—and keeping silent" (171). Derrida models reading as a response to loss. In so doing, as the lost friend's corpse is buried or burned, her corpus rises to take its place. He does not advocate for a purely citational mourning, but presents the corpus as a form in which the lost loved one can be preserved and respected in her alterity. Corpus remains an active site of engagement. This site, however, is permanently eroticized. It is made bittersweet by the fact that while it exists, it both provides a nexus for communion with the dead and demonstrates the utter separation between living and dead because there is no longer a body to address or a person who can produce more words.

In her elegies, Carson recognizes and responds to the aporias that Derrida lays out—this is what she speaks of in *Economy of the Unlost*, wherein she writes that the "responsibility of the living to the dead is not simple. It is we who let them go, for we do not accompany them. It is we who hold them here—deny them their nothingness—by naming their names. Out of these two wrongs comes the writing of epitaphs" (85). Carson's "epitaphs," her methodology of elegy,

depict aporic mourning through her understanding of the "unlost." This is the idea that what is preserved is inseparable from the loss that is its necessary counterpart. Her work as a classicist, in which she frequently works with fragmented texts, informs this understanding. These fragments are unlost – they exist, they are known, but in their very presence they allude to the absence of that which is lost. In *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, Carson's translation of Sappho's extremely fragmented work typographically implicates the unlost. Carson uses open brackets (][) instead of the more typical closed brackets ([ ]) to indicate missing text (Sappho xi). Here Carson visually models an act that exists throughout her poetics; she uses presence to imply absence. The presence makes the absence visible. That which remains cannot avoid invoking that which no longer does. As absence and presence function reciprocally in erotic spaces, so do the lost and the unlost.

Carson reflects on the way that memory functions as the unlost; the way that it "brings the absent into the present, connects what is lost to what is here"; the way it "depends on void, as void depends on memory, to think it" (*Economy* 38). Writing works alongside memory as a way to summon the unlost. Carson uses this understanding of the unlost to perform a Derridean work of mourning. She communicates with and through the corpus of the dead, but avoids a mourning that is purely citational or narcissistic by acknowledging that the corpus is what is "unlost" following the loved one's death; as she writes, an epitaph is "a body that is made into a sign" (73). The "unlost" corpus, therefore, acknowledges that there is a lost corpse. Carson uses intermediary texts as devices to model this work of mourning and communication with corpus, presenting the "unlost" texts as fragments inseparable from the "lost," and thereby demonstrating the impossibility of sifting out absence from presence. She simultaneously turns elegy into epitaph in an attempt to create a physical site in which both mourner and mourned can dwell.

Carson uses the term "epitaph" to describe her work in both "Appendix to Ordinary Time" and *Nox*. Interestingly, in both cases she uses intertext as epitaph. In "Appendix to Ordinary Time," Carson describes cross-outs and marginalia from Virginia Woolf's manuscripts as an "epitaph for my mother" (*Men* 166). *Nox* physically alludes to both scrapbook and tombstone, and depicts the procedure of translating a well-known elegy by Catullus. The book is an accordion-folded continuous page housed by a box made to look like a bound book with covers of stone. On the back of the box is this quotation attributed to Carson: "When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as we could get." This mention of epitaph is anticipated in *The Economy of the Unlost*, where Carson tells a story that was told of Simonides of Keos. In this story, Simonides encounters a corpse while walking along the shore. He buries the corpse, and then writes for it an epitaph in which he assumes the dead man's voice:

> I pray those who killed me get the same themselves,
> O Zeus of guest and host,
> I pray those who put me in the ground
> enjoy the profit of life. (*Economy* 26)

Here we see an "epitaphic contract" established, in which the poet is compensated in exchange for preserving the memory of the dead. In this case, Simonides, the elegist, enjoys "the profit of life." Thus, the epitaph opens up a space in which the living and dead can share a prolonged existence and the poet can be understood as "someone who saves and is saved by the dead" (*Economy* 74).

Epitaph is a matter of time. Specifically, it is about the temporal space occupied by the mourner and mourned's relationship. As Carson defines it, epitaph is an "advertisement of death and a challenge to time" (*Eros* 134). Carson describes a lover's desire to "freeze the beloved in

time," a desire she describes as damaging (*Eros* 130). She compares this to the way a reader "sees in written texts the means to fix words permanently outside the stream of time" (*Eros* 130). This desire to "fix" things in relation to time is part of what Derrida describes in discussing the snares of a purely citational mourning. In epitaph, Carson sees a potential third space in which mourner and mourned may live together once more – in corpus if not corpse. In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson describes this transition from corpse to corpus by again defining the epitaph, this time as "a body that is made into a sign" (75). In specifically referring to "Appendix to Ordinary Time" and *Nox* as works of epitaph, Carson is also tying these texts to projects that challenge time and translate body into sign. As I will demonstrate, Carson constructs the epitaphist as reader, writer, and translator in both texts. Carson forwards the space of epitaph and the devices of mourner as reader/writer/translator as a model for approaching a mourning that does not attempt to fix the identity of a lost loved one by converting a unique life into language. Instead, it creates a space for continued dialogue; for continued co-dwelling, by interacting with the unlost that now serve as stand-ins for the dead.

Chapter 3: “Appendix to Ordinary Time”

"Appendix to Ordinary Time" is a prose poem and the final text of *Men in the Off Hours*, a book preoccupied with death and epitaph. It contains seven short poems titled as epitaphs, with a longer poem right before “Appendix to Ordinary Time” entitled “No Epitaph”. Three poems, two short and one long, use the Biblical figure Lazarus, which will be discussed in greater detail in the context of *Nox*. In “Appendix to Ordinary Time,” Carson's speaker reflects upon the recent death of her mother while describing the act of reading Virginia Woolf’s diaries and *Women and Fiction*, the manuscript for *A Room of One’s Own*. By depicting herself as reader and writer, and through heavy use of “unlost” intertext, Carson navigates the divide between mourner and mourned, and the aporias that characterise this gap.

Carson depicts herself as both writer and reader from the outset of the poem. “My mother died the autumn I was writing this,” the poem begins (*Men* 165). “I was turning over the pages of her [Woolf’s] diaries, still piled on my desk the day after the funeral, looking for comfort I suppose—why are these pages comforting?” she continues (165). This question of finding comfort in the act of reading, of reading as rite of mourning (Uppal 95), pertains to the ability to “unlose” the lost, an idea Carson articulates by comparing the crossed out words she finds in Woolf’s manuscripts to death itself. “Crossouts sustain me now,” Carson writes (*Men* 166). As Tanis MacDonald aptly observes, crossouts possess “a certain status as that which has been written and refused, but still exists *sous rature* as a wordly haunting with which to be reckoned” (“Night in a Box” 59). For Carson, this “haunting” is a source of comfort. She finds herself able to exhume words that Woolf chose to omit, sentences Woolf chose not to finish – a choice that resounds in Carson’s allusion to Woolf’s suicide, where she says the pages she is reading “led her to the River Ouse” (*Men* 165). The lost can be unlost. The divisions are permeable.

Before discussing Woolf's crossouts, Carson considers the ways in which memory can function as the unlost by making what is lost all the more visible. Memory establishes lacunae that life once filled, now characterized only by the silence of death. Carson describes scenes of her mother and of herself, as though they are happening before her eyes in the present:

> I see my mother, as she would have been at this hour alone in her house, gazing out on the cold lawns and turned earth of evening, high bleak grass going down to the lake. Or moving room by room through the house and the silverblue darkness filling around her, pooling, silencing. Did she think of me—somewhere, in some city, in lamplight, bending over books, or rising to put on my coat and go out? Did I pause, switch off the desklamp and stand, gazing out at the dusk, think I might call her. Not calling. Calling. Too late now. Under a different dark sky, the lake trickles on. (*Men* 165)

Here, the unlost memory serves to accentuate sites for regret, bringing past into present in such a way that it only makes the difference between memory and the fact that it hovers over a gaping absence all the more apparent. Carson asks a question of her mother that can never be answered: "Did she think of me?" In this state, how can comfort come from reading? Carson hints at this by describing how Virginia Woolf, in the process of reflecting on her father's death, "decided that forming such shocks into words and order was 'the strongest pleasure known to me'" (*Men* 165). For both writers, mourning is an erotic state; a source of both pleasure and pain. Carson uses intertext as a site of mourning here. It is an illustration of the possibility of continued connection with a loved one, if only through the edge of eros, the line of the crossout.

Carson pays close attention to sentences that Woolf crossed out, which Carson replicates in type with strikethroughs. "They are like death: by a simple stroke—all is lost, yet still there. For death *although utterly unlike life* shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time. Death hides right inside every shining sentence we grasped and had no grasp of" (*Men* 166). Carson pursues crossouts seemingly because they can be resurrected. "Crossouts sustain me now," she writes. "I search out and cherish them like old photographs of my mother in

happier times. It may be a stage of grieving that will pass. It may be I'll never again think of sentences unshadowed in this way. It has changed me" (*Men* 166).

Carson uses intertextuality and the depiction of mental work and process as a means to construct herself as epitaphist – as one creating a physical space inhabited by both mourner and mourned. These words, unlost, allude to the aporia of mourning that Derrida discusses regarding naming the dead. He identifies the proper name as an indicator of impending death; the provision of a corpus that will inevitably outlive the corpse. Derrida writes, "in calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and *already survives him*" (13).

The living, however, are not a name, a corpus, and in "Appendix to Ordinary Time" this problem overlaps in the writing of both Woolf and Carson. Meanwhile, Carson's construction of a "found epitaph" within a poem titled an "appendix" reflects on the acts of mourning and writing – acts that participate in the conversion of corpse to corpus and the impulse to somehow prolong that which is finished. This is something Carson does with her mother, but also with Virginia Woolf's resurrected words. As Uppal writes, that "Carson, as well as any reader or researcher, can rediscover the work of Woolf, composed before she died, printed in a foreign city, as alive and in the present time and in the future" is "a subversive act against time" (96). We see this also in Carson's choice to construct an epitaph – something she has called a body made into a sign; a challenge to time – from the crossouts of another writer.

Carson fashions Woolf's crossouts into a "found epitaph" for her mother that she reproduces in print:

such

abandon ~~Obviously it is impossible, I thought, looking into those~~

ment ~~foaming waters, to~~

such ~~compare the living with the dead make any comparison~~

rapture ~~compare them~~"

The use of Woolf's crossouts and marginalia is significant. If by reading, Carson can discover and resurrect words and sentences that were left out, perhaps there is hope that time can be changed; that an appendix may be a device for "adding onto the mother's life once it is deemed over" (Uppal 95). As Uppal writes, Carson is creating a textual space that can be inhabited by both the living and the dead by using the words of someone dead, words she herself has dredged from a manuscript – that she has actively unlost. This can be a source of solace because "If the cross-out can be understood as the textual equivalent of a death, then death merely revises life instead of permanently erasing it" (Uppal 98). These resurrected words, however, are unable to resurrect the lost person. They may provide a small solace, a hope of reconnection through corpus, but as they are unlost they draw all the more attention to the deadness of the person who was their origin.

Chapter 4: Discussion: *Nox*

Nox is an elegy for Carson's brother Michael who, following trouble with the law, lived as a fugitive overseas under assumed names from 1978 until his unexpected death in 2000. In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel for *Brick*, Carson discussed her brother's death and described elegy as "a difficult form," saying "it's hard to keep the dignity of the subject without getting your own fingerprints all over it." This issue of "fingerprints" alludes to the difficulties of posthumous fidelity that Derrida laid out: how can one mourn another without mourning what was lost in oneself, without shrinking another into a part of oneself and disregarding his alterity? But to say nothing at the death of a loved one would also be wrong.

Michael Carson left a paucity of remains, a fact that echoes throughout *Nox*. Carson did not hear of his death until after it occurred, so she neither saw a body nor attended a funeral. Several times in *Nox*, then again in her *Brick* interview, Carson refers to his being "laconic," sending her mother brief postcards and one letter. She has photographs of their growing up years. Bits and pieces collected posthumously. She has fragments. Pursuing and working with these fragments is perhaps what makes Carson say that "History and elegy are akin" (*Nox* 1.1). It is "the struggle and then the non-arriving" that makes these two brothers, she says (Wachtel). Carson echoes this concept of history as analog for elegy in her metaphor for translation as "a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for a light switch," a metaphor she extends to the process of elegy, for as we will see, in *Nox* the two are the same (*Nox* 7.1).

Formally, *Nox* is characterized by fragmentation. It contains cut-out and pasted-on pages, cut-up letters, fragments of photographs. It maintains an aura of grief through a realistic technique of reproduction. *Nox* represents a project of mourning, but the fragments contained in

this mourning reflect the content of the elegy – the fragmented, patchy nature of memory and the inability to know another in his radical alterity. The violent silence that characterized the relationship between the speaker and her brother is also in the silences surrounding the "unlost" texts, the fragmented photographs, the scraps of handwriting. Echoing throughout the text is a vehemently fugitive brother whose paucity of remains is no accident. It becomes obvious that he was a man who resisted being known.

In *Nox*, Carson uses a secondary text, Catullus' elegy 101, which she translates from Latin to English word by word throughout the book. In this poem, Catullus' speaker has arrived in a distant land to, as Carson translates it, "talk (why?) with mute ash," the ash of his deceased brother. The speakers of both Catullus 101 and *Nox* have intersecting quests; they both desire to speak with lost brothers through poetry. Carson frames *Nox* as a careful replication of a scrapbook she made for her brother—a textual model of the work of mourning. The book contains a long series of lexicographic entries, one for each Latin word in Catullus' poem. While most entries begin as traditional translation dictionary entries, they spiral into discussions of the meanings that undergird the Latin words. In this way they form not only a lexicography of mourning, but also a lexicography that "unloses" elements of Carson's brother's life and her complicated relationship to him that continues even after he is gone. Here, Carson models translation as mourning, in which she retrieves meanings that are lost or invisible. Her own story is translated onto that told by the speaker of Catullus' elegy, to such an extent that the two works become in many ways indistinguishable.

The choice of Catallus' poem was personal for Carson – she has long been drawn to the poem and has tried to translate it many times – and the story it presents overlaps effectively with Carson's own quest narrative in *Nox.* Elements of Catullus 101's historical context and reception

history also make this particular elegy an apt choice. According to Andrew Feldherr, Catullus 101 "appropriates the functions and thematic preoccupations of an entire funeral monument" – preoccupations that Carson, too, engages with through the presentation of *Nox* as artefact and her description of it as epitaph (Feldherr 225). Further, Feldherr argues that one of the ways Catullus 101 serves as funeral monument is through intertext. The first line of the poem, he writes, is an allusion to the beginning Homer's *Odyssey* that "'inscribes' the brother's epitaph in one of the most universally known passages of Greek literature," which leads the reader to remember the poem (and the brother) whenever they encounter the *Odyssey* (227). Carson does the same by layering her own narrative onto Catullus 101. Catullus also presents his elegy in a ceremonial role through allusions to *conclamatio*, a Roman tradition in which the name of the deceased was called out. Critics see this happening in Catullus' repetition of the brother word "*frater.*" The words "*ave atque vale*" at the end of Catullus' poem were common in funerary inscriptions and used to end funerals (Feldherr 210, Theodorakopoulos 157). Catullus' poem ties itself around Homer's *Odyssey* and is a funeral monument in its recreation of the function of funerary rites and epitaph. So is *Nox*. Carson makes this clear on the first page of *Nox*, alluding to *conclamatio* in the way critics note Catullus does with the five times repeated handwritten "Michael," overlaid with the words "NOX FRATER NOX," in the bolded all-caps that come to be associated with epitaph over the course of the text.

Elena Theodorakopoulos approaches *Nox*'s use of Catullus through the highly gendered (male) tradition of reading Catullus 101, and the way that translation rooted in women's writing alters and subverts that tradition. She notes that readings of Catullus have been, until recently, a "very masculine affair" (156), due in large part to the history of men being the primary recipients of a classical education, which made them "dominant readers" of the classics (151). Readings of

Catullus 101 have tended to focus on the notion of fraternity, whether with Catullus, or with one's peers (159). Theodorakopoulos argues that Carson is able to subvert this reception history by making her process of translation part of the story in *Nox*, which in turn becomes part of the translation. The original text, and dominant readings of it, are subverted by this action that takes "a famous poem by one of antiquity's most well-loved poets and [makes] it part of her own story, and part of the story of translation and all its meanings" (Theodorakopoulos 156).

Carson also subverts the text by breaking it apart; as *Nox* is characterized by fragmentation, Catullus 101 is broken by translation into independent lexicographic entries into language – entries that are in turn subverted as Carson manipulates definitions and provides leading sample phrases. This breaking of the poem is emphasized on a page where the elegy is cut into strips, covered in pencil marks, and pasted into *Nox* (opposite "fraterus"). The fragmentation of the poem and the book's status as a "collection of fragments" only underscores the difficulty of finding the perfect words to translate and the ways the text resists translation (Theodorakopoulos 157). In *Nox*, meaning spins.

The first sections of *Nox* deal with history – a practise that to Carson is about questions without clear answers, but also about death because of history's ability to draw attention to the difference between living and dead. "It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself," she writes (*Nox* 1.1). For Derrida, "the very being of a thing, its radiant coming to appearance, is invariably bound up with the withdrawal of the object into an irremediable absence, an absence so stark that it defeats any thought of presence" (Krell 8). Carson tells the reader that, in the opinion of the first historian, Herodotus, "by far the strangest thing that humans do - he is firm on this - is history. The asking" (*Nox* 1.3). The historian's craft is strange

because it usually fails to turn events or people into a coherent, singular, enlightened story. In an interview, Carson says the history that Herodotus "invented was a picture of history as all these chips of data that don't make sense. He collects them and hands them over" (Wachtel). The elegist—historian encounters fragments that never equal the desired whole. Throughout *Nox*, Carson uses the motifs of muteness and night to depict the ways people resist their own translation. The fragments of a person's life collected by an historian or elegist are, to Carson, "bits of muteness like burrs" in the hide of a "storydog" (*Nox* 1.3). One collects these "bits of muteness," but the one "about which one collects facts – it remains beyond them" (*Nox* 1.3). Facts cannot stand in for alterity, uniqueness, or fullness. They cannot fill a space with light. Carson writes, "I am looking into the muteness of my brother. It resists me" (*Nox* 1.3).

For Carson, history and elegy are one and the same. They are insufficient but must suffice. The muteness in a historian's pursuit is echoed in the *nox*, night, of the translator's vocation, as we saw in Carson's metaphor of a dark room for translation. In *Nox*, we see translation occurring as Carson dismantles the poem word by word. These words form lexicographic entries placed on the left hand pages, an allusion to the translated texts Carson often works with where the original Greek or Latin is on one side, the translation on the other. "You get used to thinking in the little channel in between the two languages where the perfect language exists," Carson says (Wachtel). In each of the lexicographic entries in *Nox*, Carson changes the traditional dictionary entries, adding new sample phrases, new interpretations, all in attempt to "put in more *nox*" (Wachtel). To Carson, fragmenting the poem into its "wild integers" is a means of dismantling what she calls "that myth at the bottom of language" – the idea that words mean something, and that that thing is knowable (Wachtel).

As with language, we want people to mean something that is knowable – to have "a centre, a history, an account that makes sense" (*Nox* 3.3). This knowledge would form a "lock against oblivion"; it would keep them present (*Nox* 3.3). Nowhere is this desire stronger than after a loved one's death. A cohesive narrative, a story that captured another person, is tempting but impossible. At another point in the text, Carson writes, "Always comforting to assume there is a secret behind what torments you" (*Nox,* opposite "tete"). Above this phrase is a fragment of a shadowy photo, the subject of which is unclear but looks something like a dark shed with the door open. The secret, "something that would make sense" if it could just be uncovered, is a desirable idea (Wachtel). But this is not what the elegist finds. Returning to the dark room, Carson describes the experience of the translator—elegist:

> Prowling the meanings of a word, prowling the history of a person, no use expecting a flood of light. Human words have no main switch. But all those little kidnaps in the dark. And then the luminous, big, shivering, discandied, unrepentant, barking web of them that hangs in your mind when you turn back to the page you were trying to translate. (*Nox* 7.1)

She speaks of herself as a hunter, prowling. Predatory. The fragments gleaned are "kidnaps in the dark." But, when light enters the metaphor, it is not when the prowler finally finds a source of light. The light is in a web – "luminous," large, and like Michael, unapologetically inscrutable.

This web emerges throughout the muteness and light in *Nox*. Stars form a node of the metaphor. Michael is described as a "starry lad" (*Nox* 1.0), and in lexicographic entry for "*per*" that follows, Carson provides the sample phrase "*stellae per noctem visae* stars visible at night." Stars are small points of light: fragmented light that we map into constellations, organized by invisible lines. They serve as a visual metaphor for the fragments of Michael's life that the

elegist tries to grasp, to trace, to map, and upon which to impose order. The night sky, however, cannot be opened. The pinpoints in the sky will not dilate to connect.

The web of fragments left behind by the dead can be considered their unlost. The fragments' presence suggests that which no longer exists. The tactility of *Nox* works to actively imply this phenomenon. Carson uses many photographic fragments that show bits of places and human shadows with their casters excised. These shadows are evidence of the people whose presence made them, but they are not the people. The shadows are, in these fragments, the unlost. Some of the fragments are accompanied by words that seem to refer to them – "Places in the world where you and I saw things" appears on a blank page several pages before "places in our bones, dear brother," written under a fragment of a photo that appears to include a swing (*Nox,* opposite "inferias"). The photos depict shared places, but in these images the places are devoid of human presence. Carson uses scratches and relief etchings to further this visual metaphor for unlostness. The scratches are invisible, but unlost when rubbed over with a crayon.

In *Economy of the Unlost,* Carson describes how Classical Greek poet Simonides of Keos, when writing his epitaphs, "understands that to make a mental space memorable, you put into it movement, light and unexpectedness" (85). In *Nox* she revisits this appraisal, writing, "I wanted to fill my elegy with light of all kinds. But death makes us stingy. There is nothing more to be expended on that, we think, he's dead. Love cannot alter it. Words cannot add to it. No matter how I try to evoke the starry lad he was, it remains a plain, odd history" (1.0). *Nox* is meant to be a very physical object. It comes in a box that resembles both a bound book and a headstone. The book itself is one continuous folded page, and its reproduction technique makes the pages seem three-dimensional. The wrinkles, staples, folds, and edges entice the reader to feel and see if the textures that look like they should be there really are. Carson's husband,

Robert Currie, is the one who found a way to achieve this effect. It involves letting extra light into the Xerox machine, making it "a bad Xerox" that allows for "all those edges and life" (Wachtel). So while Carson may not be able to fill her elegy with "light of all kinds," she was able to literally fill it with light. The physicality of the book invokes the physicality of an epitaph on a funeral monument alongside the physicality of itself as elegy and of the parts of it that represent Michael's corpus – his image and his letter.

Carson calls *Nox* an epitaph, which in *Economy of the Unlost* she defines as "a body that is made into a sign" (73), indicating the epitaph as part of the mortuary transferal from corpse to corpus. It is an artefact characterized by metamorphosis. This understanding is rooted in Roman tradition; as described earlier, Catullus 101 performs a very similar function. Traditionally, epitaphs were meant to be read aloud by passersby (Feldherr 219, Thodorokopoulos 157). The idea is that "When the *viator*'s eye rests on the tombstone, when he speaks the words he reads there, he has become a conduit for articulating the identity, indeed for reproducing the 'voice' of the dead" (Feldher 219). In Catullus' poem, the words are not supposed to be those of the dead themselves (as seen in Simonides of Keos' epitaph), but words that address the dead. This affirms the continuity of the dead in a slightly different way – addressing the dead in this way indicates that "at least, there is something there to address" (Feldherr 220). As we have seen, Carson envisions epitaph as a place of continued life for both elegized and elegist. It is a site in which the two are bound together; corpse becomes corpus, and the epitaphist is a necessary part of this element of the transition. Reviewers and critics alike have noted the box that contains the poem resembles a tombstone. Her brother's ashes were scattered on water; Carson learned of his death too late to attend the funeral or hear/deliver his eulogy. *Nox* is his tombstone; his funeral; his gift. It may only contain fragments, but what else can an epitaph be?

One preoccupation of *Nox*, which is also present in Derrida's work, is how to speak of or to the dead when they cannot return speech. Carson approaches this issue of what to say in one of her sample phrases in the "has" entry: "*laudatur ab his culpatur ab illis*: he is praised by some, reviled by others" (*Nox*). She reflects the ambivalence of popular opinion of her brother in a way that is later echoed in his widow's eulogy:

> I DO NOT WANT TO SAY THAT MUCH ABOUT MICHAEL YOU ALL KNOW HIM IN DIFFERENT WAYS.
> HE AND I LED A TURBULENT LIFE AND HAD
> NOISY ARGUMENTS.
> NEVERTHELESS WE NEVER DOUBTED OUR MUTUAL LOVE AND RESPECT.
>
> AND NOW SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT.
> YESTERDAY YOU CANNOT CHANGE.
> TODAY YOU MIGHT ALTER.
> TOMORROW DOES NOT GIVE ANY PROMISE.

These words, delivered in speech at a funeral, Carson presents bolded and all-caps, an allusion to epitaph that she makes several times throughout *Nox*. At another moment in the text, Carson inserts a scrap of paper on a page empty except for a translucent strip down the middle that reads "For lack of a better term a windswept spirit" (*Nox*, opposite "tradita"). These three statements presented about Carson's brother are all qualified; none pin his identity down; none fully articulate the significance of his loss. They are recognized as imperfect and respect his alterity alongside the ambiguity of his role in the world, yet Carson seems to protest the silence surrounding him with her sample phrase in the "*quae*" entry: "*quod homo est non est hoc nox* a man is not a night!" she writes. Because while she cannot define Michael, the person he was cannot be represented by the muteness and darkness that continues to surround him.

Carson is able to depict the significance of epitaph as a site where both dead and epitaphist cohabit by extracting an epitaph from her brother's description of his great love, Anna, upon her

death. Again, in bolded capital letters on fragments of paper, come the words "I HAVE NEVER KNOWN A CLOSENESS LIKE THAT" (*Nox* opposite "ad"). After the largest folded fragment of the one letter Michael wrote to his mother is this transcribed passage from the letter:

> LIKE WIND IN YOUR HAIR SHE HAD EPILEPSY HER LIFE WAS HELL SOMETIMES FLIPPING LIKE A FISH I GOT USED TO IT SHE LOST HER FEAR STARTED TO LIVE SHE MISSED A LOT AS A KID FELT SO DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS ANNA WAS TRULY A GIFT SHE DIED MARCH 24TH

In this epitaph for Anna, written by Michael, extracted from a fragmented letter we see the potential for continuity both through the corpus of the dead but also through the vocation of an epitaphist.

Carson uses two letters in *Nox*: the first is the only one her brother sent home in what Carson calls "that winter the girl died" (2.2). This letter is a fragment; what we can see reads: "(they bought the church on avenue road in Toronto just down from Anne's old place... millions / they are an out to lunch group of head shrinkers who take advantage of weak people. I'll never know how she met them. Six days later she was dead. I was] [I went crazy." Smaller fragments of the letter appear other places, but this letter contains almost all we have in terms of communication with Michael.

The second letter is a collaged version of Carson's mother's response to Michael's letter. It reads:

> My dear Michael: For five years four months and seven days I've prayed for you last thing at night and a good many odd times during the day no doubt you have been through a horrendous experience during the last year but if your feelings for Anna were as deep and good as I think no smallest part of it is wasted one of these years I hope I have an address for you where I could mail a box for Christmas love Mother.

Most of this text is typed out on a computer, but it is overlaid with fragments of a typewritten letter, and ends with a fragment on which "Mother" is signed in red ink. In this moment, the

corpus of the mother is in communication with the corpus of Michael, even beyond the grave. This is rendered particularly poignant through the single handwritten word “Mother,” written in red, in response to Michael’s earlier signature in blue. These handwritten words embody both the mother and Michael within the material book**.** The communication continues in the corpus, which is preserved and prolonged in *Nox*, but the aura of the handwriting and the fragments recognizes the lost corpses, the lacunae – the unrepresented and unrepresentable.

In *Nox*, Carson writes that “More than one person has pointed out to me a likeness between my brother and Lazarus” (8.3). Lazarus is also the subject of three poems in *Men in the Off Hours*. To Carson, Lazarus is characterized by repetition and muteness. She writes, “You can think of Lazarus as an example of resurrection or as a person who had to die twice. An historian will take the latter view. I don’t know how Lazarus saw it” (*Nox* 8.4). Like an historian, like an elegist, Carson doesn’t answer questions that cannot be answered. She does not know how Lazarus saw it because no one recorded how he saw it, or anything for that matter. Carson catalogues Lazarus’ muteness in the Gospels: “He is mute at the famous supper where Mary Magdalene spills spikenard on Christ’s feet (John 12). Mute in the ‘parable of the rich man and Lazarus’ (Luke 16) where, sitting in paradise, he hears a rich man lost in the flames of hell calling out to him for a drop of water. Mute also throughout his resurrection” (8.4). Like Lazarus, Michael is enshrouded in silence – a fact only emphasized by Carson’s inclusion of a simple black outline drawing of a supine man on a crinkly white scrap of paper. The paper folds inward upon itself, resembling a blank white shroud around the figure.

Unlike what was done to Lazarus, Carson tries to make Michael’s muteness audible. To her, Lazarus’ story is one of repetition and of appropriation. She writes:

> Repetition is horrible. Poor Lazarus cannot have known
> he was an
> imitation Christ,
> but who can doubt he realized, soon after being ripped out of his
> warm little bed in the ground,
>
> his own epoch of repetition just beginning. (*Men* 90)

Lazarus is resurrected, but not as himself. He is an image of Christ's power to resurrect and a walking premonition of Christ's own resurrection. His death repeated not only in life, but in the words that carry his story through time. His muteness is filled by things external to him; his identity is subsumed in an endless cycle of death and resurrection.

Throughout *Nox*, Carson reflects on history as the assemblage of fragments. As she concludes, she writes, "When Herodotos has got as far as he can go in explaining an historical event or situation he will stop with a remark like this: 'So much for what is said by the Egyptians: let anyone who finds such things credible make use of them.' Or: 'I have to say what is said. I don't have to believe it myself.'" In saying what it is that Herodotos says, Carson tacitly reinforces the difficulty of mourning, in which that which remains, that which is said, faces Derrida's paradox of fidelity. The final words of *Nox* are: "He refuses, he is in the stairwell, he disappears." This sentence alludes both to a fragmented story about a night they found Michael bloody in the stairwell, but also to the silence of the dead, a silence in which "he refuses" to respond to the questions asked of him, the words addressed to him. Carson allows Michael a final and familiar action: to refuse.

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