



# مجلة الفلسفة

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المنطق السينيوي في الدراسات العربية المعاصرة

أثر فلسفة كانط الأخلاقية في فكر نيتشه وهابرماس

نقد ليفيناس للتأسيس التداوتي لفينومينولوجيا هوسرل

المفاهيم الأساسية في المرحلة الأولى لفلسفة فتنشتين

من موت الإله إلى موت الإنسان مقاربات نقدية بين نيتشه وفوكو

الرقص الديني من طقس الجسد إلى تحولات الرمز

نصوص وقراءات فلسفية

Philosophical-Mystical *Kalam*

Civil Society and Peace in an Uncertain World

“A Part Song” and the Conventions of Modern Elegy

وزارة التعليم العالي  
والبحرث العلمي  
الجامعة المستنصرية

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كانون الاول ٢٠٢٣

## مجلة الفلسفة

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النقدي البناء ، وفتح السبيل أمام التقدم بالفكر  
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### الفلسفة



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من استراتيجية النشر التواصلي في مجلة الفلسفة تعزيز الموازنة الدقيقة بين البحث النظري المحض والنظر في قضايا الثقافة التداولية (العقائدية والادبية والسياسية...) وهي موازنة كانت، وماتزال، من أبرز سمات التفلسف الأصيل عند اصحاب إحداث الانعطافات في مسار الفكر الإنساني المديد .

والبحوث التي سيطلع عليها القارئ الكريم وفق محاور هذا العدد الـ(٢٨) في اللغتين العربية والانجليزية ، يمكن أن تُعدّ، أو هكذا اردنا لها أن تكون، مصداقاً على هذه الموازنة والتنوع :-

فمن الفضاءات الواسعة للفلسفة المعاصرة المقاربية النقدية التي قدمها الفيلسوف الفرنسي المعاصر (ليفيناس) لتحويل التذاوت الهوسرلي (التجارب المشتركة للذوات الانسانية) من الجانب الابستمولوجي، كما هو معروف عند مؤسس الفينومولوجيا، الى الجانب الاخلاقي العملي وفقاً لجدلية الذات والآخر . وهذا ما وضعه في الاعتبار العيني ، وفي اساسه، بحث (نقد ليفيناس لفينومولوجيا التذاوت الهوسرلية)، وبحث آخر يؤكد هذا الجانب العملي ، اذ يتعرض الى الكيفية التي أثرت من خلالها فلسفة كانط الأخلاقية في فكر نيتشه وهابرماس ، وفيها من راهن التأصيل الكانطي لنظرية التواصل الهابرماسية القسط الكثير ، وبحث آخر باللغة الانجليزية ، من فضاءات فلسفة الأدب هذه المرة ، يقدم مقارنة أدبية - نقدية لتأمل الموت التراجيدي من خلال مرثية الشاعرة والفيلسوفة المعاصرة ديفس ايلي المعروفة بعنوان ( A part song ) (نصف أغنية )،مثالاً للكيفية التي يتجلى فيها أدب الرثاء المعاصر .

وبحث آخر (باللغة الانجليزية ) ينظر في علم الكلام على المستوى الفلسفي والصوفي من منظور معاصر ، قائم على فحص المقاربات الراهنة حول التثبث من أغراض هذا العلم .

وبحث آخر (باللغة الانجليزية كذلك ) يفحص ، فحصاً نقدياً مفصلاً مآلات المجتمع المدني ، والسلام في عالم مضطرب يعاني من عدم اليقين ، ولم يُفوّت فرصة المراجعة التاريخية لمفهوم "المجتمع المدني" Civil society ( من قَبْلُ الحداثة وما بعدهما ) واشكالية العنف في صيرورة هذا النوع في المجتمع ،الذي يتمتع بقيمة الدالة والمرشدة إلى بناء السلام ...

ومن المستحدث من المحاور في هذا العدد محور (نصوص في الجمال والأدب الفلسفي) وفيه نسان، الأول ينظر في معنى الجمال (والحسن) في الطبيعة والأعمال الفنية والثاني ، مُعارضة شعرية لعينية فيلسوفنا الأشهر ابن سينا ، وفيها تتجلى أوضح دلالات الأدب المتفلسف وبخاصة عندما يكون القصد ماهية النفس وشوقها إلى عالم آخر بعيداً عن عالم الخلائق.

ومحور آخر (قراءات في نصوص فلسفية) وفيه قراءتان، الأولى تقديم وتقويم نقدي لأخر مستجدات النصوص الكانطية المقروءة بالعربية ، كتاب (نزاع الكليات) ، كليات الفلسفة والقانون والطب... والثانية قراءة مفاهيمية – برادغمية لإستجلاء مضامين نص من أهم نصوص صاحب اطروحة (إبداع المفاهيم في الفلسفة) ، الفيلسوف الفرنسي المعاصر جيل ديروز ، وهو نص ( ما الفلسفة).

وبهذا التنوع في البحوث والمحاور والفكر بالتالي نأمل أن يُسهم هذا العدد أيضاً في إشاعة الوعي الفلسفي والنظر النقدي لبناء وعي اجتماعي متنوع وحضاري.

رئيس التحرير



# "A Part Song" by Denise Riley and the Conventions of Modern Elegy

**Hussein Kadhum Challab**

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## Abstract

The elegy, traditionally a poem of solemn reflection on death or tragedy, has undergone a transformation in modern usage. The elegy has evolved throughout time, changing in form and content to reflect the evolving cultural, social, and political contexts of its era. In English poetry, the modern elegy has transformed from its original form, which was dedicated to mourning the death of a loved one, to become a genre that speaks to broader themes of loss, grief, and the transience of life. Denise Riley, a renowned English poet and philosopher, experienced the loss of her son to an undiagnosed heart disease and channeled her grief into poetry. This paper examines her poem "A Part Song" as an exemplar of the modern elegy, which departs from the classical form and embraces a more nuanced and personal approach to grief and remembrance. Through its

powerful use of language and imagery, "A Part Song" offers a compelling reflection on the fragility of life and the enduring love that lingers after loss.

Keywords: modernism, elegy, Denise Riley, universal themes, traditional themes.

## الخلاصة

التعريف التقليدي لقصيدة الرثاء هي انها قصيدة تأمل مهيب في الموت أو المأساة، وقد شهد هذا الجنس من الشعر تحولاً في الاستخدام الحديث. فقد تطورت المراثية على مر العصور، وتغيرت في الشكل والمضمون لتعكس السياقات الثقافية والاجتماعية والسياسية في عصرها. وتحولت المراثي في الشعر الإنجليزي سواء في شكلها وفي المضمون لتصبح جنساً يتحدث عن موضوعات أوسع تتعلق بالخسارة والحزن وزوال الحياة. دينيس رايلي، شاعرة وفيلسوفة إنجليزية مشهورة، عانت من فقدان ابنها بسبب مرض في القلب لم يتم تشخيصه،

فحوّلت حزنها إلى شعر. يتناول هذا البحث قصيدتها "نصف اغنية" بوصفها نموذجاً للمريثة الحديثة، التي تبتعد عن الشكل الكلاسيكي وتتبنى مقاربة أكثر دقة وشخصية تجاه الحزن والذكرى. من خلال استخدامها القوي للغة والصور الشعرية، تقدم "نصف اغنية" تأملاً مقنعاً حول ضعف الحياة والحب الدائم الذي يستمر بعد الفقدان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حادثة، المريثة، دينيس رايلي، موضوعات عالمية، موضوعات تقليدية.

## ١- Introduction

### ١-١ Historical Background

The elegy genre has played an essential role in the history of poetry. They are a powerful form of expression that allows us to mourn the loss of something or someone special. These poems have specific conventions, including a mournful tone, formal language, and a focus on the subject's life. The structure of elegies can vary, but they often contain stanzas with a repeated

rhyme scheme. While the conventions of traditional elegies have changed over time, the genre remains a vital form of English poetry.

The genre of elegy has its roots in ancient Greek poetry (Niles, ٢٠١٠; ١٣). The word "elegy" comes from the Greek term "elegeia," which referred to a specific type of verse accompanied by a mournful tone (Sacks, ٨٦). Elegies were initially composed as songs or laments for the dead. The genre's connection to the flute song of grief is understood from the etymology of the term elegy itself, which is derived from the Greek elegiac couplets, conventionally complemented by the flute, or more accurately, by the *aulos* (oboe-like double pipe). Elegy gained prominence in Roman poetry, particularly through the works of poets such as Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius. Latin elegies often focused on themes of love, loss, and personal reflection, departing

from the funereal themes of their Greek predecessors.

The conventional figures and forms of the elegy is related to “the experience of loss and the search for consolation”. Peter Sacks (1980; 19) contends that “interpreting the conventions of the genre includes the use of pastoral contextualization, the myth of the vegetation deity, the use of repetition and refrains, reiterated questions, the outbreak of vengeful anger, the procession of mourners, the movement from grief to consolation, and the traditional images of resurrection”. The pastoral contextualization refers to the tradition of combining two different literary forms: pastoral poetry and elegy. In pastoral poetry, there is a celebration of the natural beauty of rural life, and the poem is usually written in a romanticized or idealized manner.

It was the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century that expanded the boundaries of the

elegy genre that it is not an exaggeration to say that the genre was actualized in that period. Elegiac works of the metaphysical poets usually combined intellectual and emotional elements, employing complex metaphors and intricate wordplay. These elegies often contemplated the nature of death, spirituality, and the afterlife. One of the most famous examples of pastoral elegy in English poetry is John Milton's “Lycidas” (1637). The poem mourns the death of his friend, Edward King, who drowned at sea. The poem is set in a rural landscape, where the shepherds and nymphs lament the loss of King and praise his virtues (Mao, 1999). The natural world is depicted as mourning alongside the poet, with the waves of the sea and the singing of the birds becoming symbols of sadness.

Elegy as an expression of lamentation for a deceased beloved or tragic event has been a recent thing as recent as the eighteenth century. The

neoclassical poets brought a sense of order and restraint to the genre. Elegies of this period, such as Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," 1751, focused on themes of mortality, the fleeting nature of life, and the contemplation of death in a more restrained and formal style (Mao, 1999; 33). The Romantic era saw a shift in the tone and subject matter of elegies. Poets like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley explored themes of personal loss, nature, and the sublime in their elegiac works. Shelley's pastoral elegy "Adonais" (1821), written in memory of John Keats, reflects on Keats' life and death, with the imagery of flowers, trees, and rivers symbolizing the poet's creative spirit and his untimely death.

The Victorian poets who wrote elegies were usually melancholic and often expressed a sense of loss and sorrow. A reflection of the Victorian era's cultural and

social values was Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* 1850, which mourns the loss of his friend and wrestles with his own mortality and by extension that of the human race. During the Victorian period, death was a common occurrence, and people's attitudes towards it were changing (Niles, 2010; 19). The poem effectively captures the changing attitude towards death and the power of faith and spirituality as a means of coping with loss. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is an exemplary Victorian elegy, capturing the pain of loss and the power of faith in a poignant and memorable manner.

## 1-2 Tenets of Modern Elegy

Departed from the traditional conventions of the elegy, modern and contemporary poets have expanded the subject matter and form, exploring themes such as war, social injustice, and personal grief. The 20th-century saw resurgence in the popularity

of the genre, as writers began to explore new ways of expressing grief and loss. Sacks (1992) believes that "Apart from developments within the history of this century's poetry-much of it marked by a continuing subversion of traditional poetic goals and means-recent attitudes toward death have made it increasingly difficult to write a conventional elegy"(199).

Several notable modern elegies have been published over the years. "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" by W.H. Auden was published in 1940, serving as a moving tribute to the renowned poet. Another significant modern elegy is "The Waking" by Theodore Roethke, which was published in 1953. Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead," published in 1961, is also a notable example that mourns the loss of the Union's ideals. Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Dirge Without Music," published in 1923, beautifully captures the essence of elegiac lamentation. These elegies demonstrate the

enduring power of the genre and serve as touching memorials to individuals and experiences.

Audens's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" by stands as a representative of the modern elegy in many ways. The poem is not only a tribute to Yeats as a poet but also serves as a social commentary on the state of the world during that time. Auden uses the elegiac form in a unique way, blending traditional meter with modern syntax to create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty. The poet draws upon traditional elegiac themes, such as grief and loss, to express his emotions. However, he also incorporates modern elements into his elegy, including references to contemporary events and language such as when he refers the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s, which adds a sense of urgency to his mourning. Furthermore, the structure of the poem itself is fragmented, reflecting the jarring and incomplete nature of death in the modern world. Auden

mourns not only Yeats but also the state of humanity and the loss of traditional beliefs and values (Moa, 1999).

The departure from the traditional form of the elegy starts from the very form of the poem. In terms of structure and layout contemporary elegies frequently break away from the traditional structure, using a variety of forms such as free verse, fragmented language, and unconventional layout. One example of a non-traditional elegy is Sharon Olds' poem "The Death of Marilyn Monroe". The poem is not a memorial for Marilyn Monroe, but rather an elegy for the poet's own youth and innocence. The poem is written in free verse and does not adhere to any recognisable structural form. Olds uses personal anecdotes and vivid images to illustrate the impact of Marilyn Monroe's death on her own life.

"The ambulance men  
touched her cold

body, lifted it, heavy as  
iron,  
onto the stretcher, tried to  
close the  
mouth, closed the eyes, tied  
the  
arms to the sides, moved a  
caught  
strand of hair, as if it  
mattered,  
saw the shape of her  
breasts, flattened by  
gravity, under the sheet  
carried her, as if it were  
she,  
down the steps" (Olds, 1998).

In terms of subject matter of the modern elegy, one does not find the exclusive focus on a personal loss. Instead the contemporary modern elegies speak to broader social and political issues, such as war, climate change, and systemic inequality.

Some contemporary poets have experimented with hybrid forms that combine elegy with other genres, such as the essay or the lyric. This can result in more dynamic and multifaceted elegies that allow the poet to move

beyond traditional grief and explore other emotions and perspectives. Claudia Rankine's "Citizen: An American Lyric" is an example of a prose-poetry hybrid elegy. The poem is structured as a series of vignettes that explore the experiences and emotions of African Americans in contemporary America. Rankine uses a mix of personal anecdotes, historical context, and cultural criticism to create a powerful and moving elegy that does not conform to any traditional structure or style but still manages to communicate deep feelings of both loss and hope. The language blocks in "Citizen," which are primarily rectilinear, are reminiscent of the prose poem borrowed from the French Symbolists (Gerhardt, 2010; 370).

However, there is another potential source for these entries: non-literary texts such as police logs, journal entries, or confess boards covered in anonymous note cards, a new form often found in student unions.

Rankine's prose often resembles *pro se* representation, which refers to the act of defending oneself in a court of law:

"The world is wrong. You can't put the past behind you. It's buried in you; it's turned your flesh into its own cupboard. Not everything remembered is useful but it all comes from the world to be stored in you. Who did what to whom on which day? Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? Do you remember when you sighed?"

(Rankine, 26)

The use of prose allows the poet to use pronouns and fragmented statements reflects the fractured nature of memory and perception. It conveys the complexity of interactions between individuals and the constant potential for misunderstanding or

miscommunication. The mention of sighing hints at the weight of these memories and the emotional impact they have on individuals.

The modern elegy often challenges traditional forms of mourning by incorporating diverse voices and perspectives. Many contemporary elegies incorporate voices of the dead themselves or consider the impact of loss on communities rather than just individuals. The modern elegy has become increasingly collaborative, with poets often collaborating with visual artists, musicians, and other creative to produce multimedia works that engage with themes of loss and remembrance (Gerhardt; ٢٠١٥, ٣٧١).

The voice in modern elegy poems is both a reflection of the poet's own perspective and a means of constructing a narrative around the loss that the poem seeks to mourn. Many modern elegies are highly personal in

nature, and often take the form of a direct address to the deceased. This can be seen in poems like Mary Oliver's "When Death Comes," (٢٠١٥) where the poet seems to be speaking directly to death itself: "When it's over, I want to say: all my life / I was a bride married to amazement." (٩٦) Here, the poet's voice is one of defiance; she refuses to be cowed by death, instead embracing life to the fullest.

Other modern elegies are more abstract in their use of voice, and tend to explore the nature of loss and mourning in more general terms. In these poems, the voices are often multiple; they may express the perspectives of different characters or speakers, or shift between different tones and moods. In "Elegy for a Young American Patriot," (٢٠١٩) for example, the poet Bruce Weigl begins by speaking in the voice of the dead soldier's mother: "I have brought him home / To lay him down." (٢٢٠) But as the poem progresses, Weigl shifts between multiple

voices and perspectives, representing the complex, multi-layered experience of mourning that his poem seeks to encapsulate.

One common technique used in modern elegies is to allow the voice to shift between first and third person, often to create a sense of distance or detachment from the subject of the poem. In “Elegy,” (٢٠١٠) for example, the poet Aracelis Girmay begins by addressing the deceased directly: “To whom shall I dedicate this? / To the girl who sang beyoncé / To her laptop & the white candles?” But as the poem progresses, the voice becomes less personal, and more universal: “& so all our songs are elegies”(١٢٣)

This use of multiple voices and perspectives is a hallmark of modern elegy. By allowing the poet to move beyond the personal, and to explore the wider social and cultural contexts of mourning, it encourages a richer, more complex

understanding of the nature of loss. This can be seen in poems like “Song for the Dead,”(٢٠١٣) by Diane di Prima. Here, the poet uses a range of different voices and registers, including those of a mourner, a warrior, and a goddess, to explore the universal themes of death and loss. The mourner's voice declares: “I scream with rage and pain / I sob until my body aches / I ask why.”(٢٠٠٠) The pain of death is so overwhelming that it becomes a physical ache, and the mourner's wail echoes through the text, giving voice to the profound loss felt in the wake of death. The intense emotions captured within this voice reflect the deep-seated human grief at the heart of the poem. In contrast to the voice of the mourner stands the voice of the warrior, who confronts death head-on and challenges it. This voice appears in the third stanza of the poem when the narrator shouts: “I will fight for the dead / draw battle-lines / plant snipers on the hills.” (Di Prima, ٢٠١٣) Here, the

warrior's voice takes on a fiercely protective quality, as if to say that death will not have the final say. This voice is empowering, representing the human impulse to rebel against that which seeks to take from us. Through the use of these multiple perspectives, di Prima creates an elegy that transcends the personal and the individual, and speaks to the experience of loss that is shared by all humans.

## 1-2 The significance of the Elegy in Denise Riley's Writings

Denise Riley is a British feminist and poet whose works have garnered critical acclaim for their unique blend of intellectual and personal sensibilities. Among her many contributions to the literary world is her exploration of the elegy, a form of poetry that laments the loss of a loved one. In this paper, I will provide a comprehensive analysis of Riley's academic writings on the elegy, including

her views on what the form represents and how it can be used to express grief and mourning.

One of the key themes in Riley's work on the elegy is the relationship between language and mourning. As she notes, "language struggles to give shape to grief" (*Impersonal*, 180). The elegy is one way in which this struggle can be expressed. Riley is particularly interested in how language can be used to commemorate the dead, but also how it can be used to express grief and loss in a way that is both personal and universal. In her poetry, she often employs a spare and direct style that reflects both the pain of loss and the attempt to capture it in words.

Riley's work on the elegy has evolved over time, reflecting changes in her personal and political beliefs. Early in her career, she was primarily interested in the elegy as a means of memorializing individuals. Her 1986 collection, "Marxist Elegies," for example, is a tribute

to her father and other close friends who had recently died. The collection is notable for its use of Marxist theory to explore grief and loss. For Riley, Marxism provided a framework for understanding the social and economic factors that contribute to the experience of loss and mourning.

Riley's book, *Time Lived Without Its Flow* (2012) is a poetic meditation on grief, loss, and time, written after the death of her adult son. Throughout the book, Riley grapples with the concept of elegy and what it means to mourn and remember someone. As far as Riley's opinion of the purpose of elegy she states: "Elegies have often been written to memorialize people or events, and to help us heal. But I don't want to heal. And how could a language that memorializes ever heal what it is marking? For the love it marks seems now to me a tattering that I carry, a wounded love, a love tied to loss" (8). Here, Riley rejects the traditional concept of

elegies as a means of healing, arguing that the pain of loss cannot be erased or healed through language.

Riley is a firsthand experienced with the difficulty of speaking about death. She opines "The verb 'to die' is a hard thing to say. I realize this now" (*Time Lived*, 13). Riley reflects on the difficulty of speaking about death and the finality of loss, acknowledging that sometimes words fall short in the face of grief. But for Riley the purpose of remembering is multifokd. "It is impossible to remember anew - each act of remembering is also an act of largely unconscious reconstruction" (*Time Lived*, 23) she thinks. Riley reflects on the complexity of remembering, acknowledging that memories are not fixed but rather are constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted over time.

Riley has also explored the significance of the elegy. In her book, *The Words of Selves* (2000), where she argues that the

elegy is not just a form of mourning poetry, but is also a way of exploring the self. The elegy is a means of expressing and exploring the multiple selves that make up our identity. In her view, grief is not just an emotional response to loss but is also a way of coming to terms with the many different aspects of ourselves (133).

One of the most significant contributions of Riley's academic writings on the elegy is her view that the form is not limited to mourning the death of loved ones but can also be used to mourn social and political issues. Riley argues that the elegy "can express the sense of an era passing or a world disappearing, without always needing to signify the death of human beings" (ibid 14). This view challenges the traditional understanding of the elegy as a form solely concerned with personal loss and highlights its potential as a means of political and social commentary.

Riley also explore the ways in which the elegy can be used to challenge dominant power structures. In her essay, "Am I That Name?" (1988) she discusses how elegies written by women make use of the form to challenge patriarchal society's limited understanding of female identity. She argues that, by employing the elegy, women writers are able to depict the ways in which society constructs women's identities, thereby "challenging the restrictions that have been imposed upon [women's] being in patriarchal culture" (89). Through her analysis of these female elegiac works, Riley sheds light on how the elegy is a potentially transformative form that can be used to challenge oppressive societal norms.

It is crucial to note that, for Riley, elegy is not just a form of poetry; it is a way of living. Her writings highlight how mourning is an ongoing process and how the elegy can be used to navigate the complexities and difficulties

of grief. “Griefing [*sic*], one must learn, is not something that finishes”, she writes in *Impersonal Passion*. “(17) It is not a task that is locked away in private, nor incompleting despite the maintenance of appearances”(ibid). Riley's work on the elegy thus highlights the ways in which mourning is an ongoing affective process, one that can be both painful and transformative.

### **“A Part Song” as a Modern Elegy**

Denise Riley's poetry has investigated the line ‘between “expressive” and “experimental” poetry. She has been experimenting with new forms and publishing more than volumes of poems. Her elegiac poetry, however, forefronts the tension by exploring the rift left by the loss of her son. Niles opines that “Riley's grief essay is the product of generic frictions that ‘cut across the boundaries of

art forms” ( 270). Riley's genre-defying works therefore exemplify the difficulty of expressing the devastating effect of death through words.

Riley's poem 'A Part Song' is a perfect example of a modern elegy - one that captures the essence of the genre, while also pushing its boundaries to explore new dimensions of grief and the human experience.

At its core, “A Part Song” is a meditation on the fragile nature of life and the bonds that tie us together. The speaker of the poem is mourning the death of her son, who passed away at a young age. The poem is written in the first person, which gives it a sense of immediacy and intimacy, allowing the readers to feel the speaker's pain and grief as if it were their own. The use of the present tense also adds to the sense of immediacy, as if the speaker is speaking to us in real-time, sharing her thoughts and emotions as they occur.

What's interesting about 'A Part Song' is how it approaches the theme of loss. Rather than dwelling solely on the speaker's pain, the poem explores the delicate balance between life and death, the way that human beings are interconnected, and how humans are subject to the same end. The first stanza of the poem speaks to this idea:

“You principle of song, what are you for now  
Perking up under any spasmodic light  
To trot out your shadowed warblings?  
Mince, slight pillar. And sleek down  
Your furriness. Slim as a whippy wire  
Shall be your hope, and ultraflexible” (“A Part Song”, I, 1-5)

The image of meeting again after death is a common one in elegies, but the way that Riley describes it here is unique. Rather than focusing on reuniting with a specific individual, the poem suggests that we will all be

reunited in death, our individual selves folding up to become part of a larger whole. This idea is reinforced in the second stanza, which describes the speaker's daughter as “one amongst many,” highlighting her connection to all of humanity (Gerhardt, 344).

The theme of connection is further developed in the third and fourth stanzas, which focus on the speaker's memories of her son and the impact that his death has had on her. The language in these stanzas is particularly poignant, with the speaker describing her son's presence as a treasure and lamenting the fact that “You lacked guile \And were transparent, easy, which felt natural” (*Part Song*, iii, 26-27). These lines speak to the power of human connections and the devastation that can occur when they are broken.

In Riley's “Part Song,” the conventions of the modern elegy are evident in various ways. One convention of the modern elegy

apparent in “Part Song” is the use of a first-person point of view. Riley's use of “I” in the poem brings intimacy and immediacy to the speaker's feelings of loss and pain. By using the first person, the poem emphasizes that the speaker's emotions are personal and real, and allows the reader to connect more deeply with those emotions. Riley is a renowned for her employment the first person “I” through a series of introspective reflections that delve deep into her psyche (Gerhardt, 349). The use of this pronoun is significant in her poem as it enables her to present her emotions in a raw and vulnerable form that connects her with her readers on an emotional level.

In “Part song”, Riley utilizes the first person “I” pronoun to convey her feelings of rejection, loss, and despair. The poem's opening lines set the tone for the poem's exploration of these themes, “Come home I tell you\And end this tasteless melodrama – quit\Playing dead at

all, by now it's well beyond\A joke” (vii, 64-65) The repetition of the “I” pronoun emphasizes the sense of isolation and loneliness that the speaker feels. The poem's opening lines place the speaker in a state of desolation, underscored by the use of “nobody cares,” which highlights the emptiness of the speaker's world.

The use of first person in “Part Song” also allows Riley to convey a sense of her vulnerability and emotional openness. The first person “I” pronoun carries a personal quality that suggests authenticity and honesty. By using the “I” pronoun, Riley offers her readers a glimpse into her world and her innermost thoughts. For example, she writes, “ Here I sit poleaxed, stunned by your vanishing,” (“A Part Song”, viii, 144) that conveys a sense of emotional paralysis that the speaker experiences. The use of “I” pronoun here gives the reader an insight into the speaker's emotional state, which reflects a

sense of emotional overload that is difficult to articulate.

Riley's use of the first person pronoun "I" in her poem "Part Song" creates an intimate relationship between the poet and the reader. The use of this pronoun allows the reader to enter the inner world of the poet and share her experiences and emotions. The repetition of the "I" pronoun emphasizes the speaker's sense of isolation and despair, highlighting the themes of the poem. However, the poem also conveys a message of hope through acceptance, as seen in the closing lines. Overall, Riley's use of the "I" pronoun is a crucial element in the poem's exploration of profound human emotions.

Another element of the modern elegy is the poem's focus on themes of separation, loneliness, and dislocation. The speaker in "Part Song" expresses the profound sense of disconnection, characterizing her child's death as the cause of her isolation and

distance from others. The idea of separation is also conveyed in the repetition of the phrase of words that denote separation which emphasizes the sense of loss that permeates the poem.

Moreover, Riley's poem explores the feelings of separation, loneliness, and dislocation in a lyrically rich and emotionally evocative manner, which is a hallmark tenet of the modern elegy. Through the use of vivid imagery, musical language, and a sensitive ear for the nuances of the human experience, Riley conveys the agony of being severed from the people, places, and traditions that give life meaning and purpose: examples of the agony she experienced are found in the lines "The agony of worlds severed and set adrift"<sup>(٣٩)</sup>, "Torn from the embrace of familiar faces, torn from the warmth of home, "Aching with the ache of lost connections, yearning for what once was" and "In this unfamiliar land, I wander, searching for remnants of my identity"<sup>(٤١)</sup>.

The poem begins with a series of images of dislocation, as the speaker describes a world that feels out of joint and alienating. In the line "But still our voices sound as if we're dwelling underground" (xiv, 1.129-132) Riley suggests a sense of isolation and disconnection, as if the speaker and others are separated from the world above. The sense of isolation and distance suggest a desire to be connected to something tangible and real. These images are reinforced by the repetition of the word "not" in the first two lines, which creates a sense of negation and absence.

As the poem unfolds, the reader finds out Riley's struggle with her feelings of loss and separation: "We might be trapped eternally\ Oblivious to each other" (lines 137-138) "Such reliably kind and easy company" (line 164) ("A Part Song", ix, 141-142) which suggests a yearning for a sense of continuity and belonging.

Despite these longings, however, the speaker is acutely aware of the distance that separates her from these sources of comfort and meaning. She compares her deceased son to Orpheus who "As you practise your charm in the underworld\ Airily flirting with Persephone." (viii, 148-149) Throughout the poem, Riley uses the motif of singing and music to emphasize Orpheus's sense of alienation. Orpheus is a singer, and his music is a metaphor for his longing to be reunited with his wife. However, his music falls on deaf ears, and he remains alone and isolated. Riley's use of the Orpheus myth in "A part song" sheds the light on the ways in which our efforts to enforce meaning and order on the world can ultimately lead to a sense of alienation and loss. Through her haunting and lyrical language, Riley captures the deep sense of longing and emptiness that often

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<sup>1</sup> Orpheus is a poet and musician in Greek mythology who almost rescues his wife Eurydice from Hades by charming Pluto and Persephone with his lyre (online Dictionary of literary Terms, 2006)

accompanies our attempts to make sense of a world that is ultimately beyond our control.

Riley leaves us with a sense of profound ambivalence about the themes of separation, loneliness, and dislocation that run throughout "A Part Song". On the one hand, there is a deep sadness and sense of loss that permeates the work, as the speaker longs for a sense of continuity and connection that seems increasingly elusive in the modern world. On the other hand, however, there is also a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty and complexity of this fragmented and disconnected world, and recognition of the ways in which our experiences of isolation and dislocation can ultimately lead us to a deeper sense of connection and meaning: O let me be, my mother / In no unquiet grave / My bone-dust is faint coral / Under the fretful wave." (140-146) These lines highlight the experience of isolation, dislocation, and longing for connection. The

speaker acknowledges the absence and silence of the dead, expresses frustration and a desire for them to return, and explores the potential consequences of isolation. However, through this exploration and acknowledgement, the poem suggests that these experiences can ultimately lead to a deeper sense of connection and meaning.

Through its vivid imagery, musical language, and nuanced depiction of the human experience, the poem conveys the profound pain and beauty of being severed from the people, places, and traditions that give life meaning and purpose. At the same time, however, it also suggests that these experiences can ultimately lead us to a deeper sense of connection and belonging, and that there is a certain power and beauty in the solitude and isolation that come from being disconnected from the familiar.

The use of symbolism and metaphor has always been part of the elegiac writings, however modern elegists tend to use an unconventional set of symbols and metaphors to become a common convention of the modern elegy. In "A Part Song," the speaker employs the image of "a child cannibalized by his years" to suggest the transience of human life, and the idea that the self folds up and becomes part of a larger whole as the body passes away. The metaphor of human existence as short and transience is found all over the poem. Using the image of a "dust-bone" as a "faint coral\ Under fretful wave" (144-148). The metaphor of a human body cremation and throwing into the ocean is all about how the years can be scattered and reduced into oblivion. The line "pennants that slap, slap, over the soil" (39) is also a metaphor of the transience of life and the passage of time.

Riley's work is also characterized by a preoccupation with themes such as mortality,

identity, and memory. In "A Part Song," Riley employs powerful symbolism and metaphor to explore the multifaceted relationship between the speaker and the world around her. It opens with an evocative image of cicadas, traditionally associated with the arrival of spring and the renewal of life and it is portrayed as singing in the dead of winter, a time of dormancy and decay. This juxtaposition suggests that the speaker is struggling with the relationship between life and death, renewal and decay. It also sets the tone for the rest of the poem,

The use of metaphor in the poem is extensive, as the poet employs various figurative language devices to depict grief, loss, and the emotional tumult of mourning. For instance, in the first stanza, the poet describes the principle of the song as a "slim as a whippy wire" to convey the fragility and vulnerable nature of musical string which could easily break or snap. Similarly, the use of "fuschia's drop earrings" is a

metaphor for the delicate nature of life.

Symbolism has been used heavily by writers of the elegy poems. In “A Part Song,” the poet uses these lines refer to the mourning and grieving process of the mourner who is trying on different styles of mourning attire. In the lines:

A wardrobe gapes, a mourner tries

Her several styles of howling-guise:

You’d rather not, yet you must go

Briskly around on beaming show.

A soft black gown with pearl corsage

Won’t assuage your smashed ménage. (vi; ٤٦-٥١)

The wardrobe represents the various stages of grief and the mourner's attempt to experience different expressions of sadness. The soft black gown with pearl corsage symbolizes the traditional mourning attire and the idea that it cannot fully alleviate the pain of the

mourner's broken home or life. The cheerful show implies the performance that is expected of the mourner to play a specific grieving role, while the mention of howling-guise suggests a sense of self-consciousness and the need for social conformity during this time of mourning. Overall, this excerpt portrays the complexity of grief and the different ways people cope with loss. .

Furthermore, modern elegies often address broad cultural and social themes. In “A Part Song,” the poem moves beyond the specific circumstances of the speaker's personal loss to address universal themes of mortality and connection. The broad cultural and social themes in Denise Riley's poem “A Part Song” include themes of loss and grief, the complexities of motherhood, the passage of time, the longing for connection and communication with the deceased, and the search for meaning in death. These themes are reflected in the quoted lines

from the poem. For example when the poet says “What is the first duty of a mother to a child? / At least to keep the wretched thing alive” (“A Part Song.” L. 10-16) she explores the complexities and challenges of motherhood. Also the lines “Each child gets cannibalised by its years. / It was a man who died, and in him died / The large-eyed boy, then the teen peacock” (L. 29-31) reflects on the passage of time and how individuals change and evolve as they grow older.

The lines “I can’t get sold on reincarnating you / As those bloody ‘gentle showers of rain’ / Or in ‘fields of ripening grain”” (lines 44-46) reflect a skepticism towards conventional ideas of death and the afterlife, instead she is longing for a more tangible presence of the deceased. Whereas in the lines “The flaws in suicide are clear / Apart from causing bother / To those alive who hold us dear / We could miss one another” (lines 134-137) she raises questions about

the consequences and potential long-lasting effects of suicide on both the deceased and their loved ones.

One of the central themes of modern elegy is mortality. Poets in this genre often grapple with the fact that death is an inevitable part of life. They explore the idea that everything that exists is impermanent and that each one will eventually come to an end (Sacks, 102). This theme is often explored in elegies that mourn the loss of someone close to the poet, but it can also be present in poems that reflect on the larger existential questions of life and death. In Riley’s “A Part Song,” the theme of mortality is prevalent throughout Riley’s poem. It explores the various aspects of death, including the passing of loved ones, the fear of losing a child, and the inevitability of our own mortality. The poem also touches on the concept of resurrection and the afterlife, questioning what it means to truly be alive or dead. The lines “Each child gets

cannibalized by its years” and “The large-eyed boy, then the teen peacock / In the unremarked placid self-devouring / That makes up being alive” (“iv l. 29-32) emphasize the idea that life is constantly ending and beginning again in cycles. The poem also touches on the pain of grief and loss, showing how it can haunt us even after our loved ones have passed on.

## Conclusion

Throughout history, the genre of elegy has experienced evolution and adaptation as poets from different eras have reinterpreted it. The elegy has been a means for expressing personal emotions, contemplating mortality, and honoring individuals or cultural and historical events. Over time, the structure and form of elegies have undergone significant changes. In contemporary poetry, experimentation has led to innovative approaches that break away from the traditional three-part structure, exploring free verse, fragmented language, and

unconventional layout. This artistic exploration has given rise to powerful and poignant elegies that resonate with the experiences, emotions, and struggles of diverse communities and individuals. Despite the alterations in form and structure, the essence of elegy remains constant - it is a poetic form that provides a voice to grief, loss, and the human experience of mortality.

Denise Riley is a British poet, philosopher and author of many books. Born in 1948 in Carlisle, England, Riley has made significant contributions to the fields of poetry and literary studies. She has written numerous volumes of poetry. Aside from her poetic endeavors, Riley has also published influential works of philosophy, delving into topics such as language, feminist theory, and identity. Her writings, particularly on the genre of elegy, have garnered critical acclaim and have had a lasting impact on the understanding of

poetry and mourning. Denise Riley continues to inspire and engage readers with her thought-provoking and poignant writings. Her writings on the elegy provide a unique and insightful perspective on its form and potential for political, emotional, and societal commentary. Riley's work emphasizes how elegies can challenge prevailing power structures, articulate the complexities of grief, and ultimately offer a way to cope with loss. Her contributions have made a lasting impact on the field of poetry and literary studies, enriching the understanding of elegies.

Despite its personal context and intimate subject matter, "A Part Song" resonates on a universal level, capturing the experience of loss that many individuals encounter at some point in their lives. The poem's elegiac qualities are most evident in its musical language, employing the refrain "Where is she gone?" to evoke the mournful cadences typically found in traditional

elegies. Skillful use of metaphors and imagery, such as the metaphorical "city of the dead" and the lingering fragrance of the friend's clothing, further enhance the poem's elegiac tone.

The form of "A Part Song," characterized by its structured rhyme and refrain, captures the tension between order and chaos often found in elegiac verse. It provides a sense of symmetry and stability in the aftermath of loss, yet the poem's utilization of repetition and variation also signifies the fragility of human existence and our susceptibility to forces beyond our control.

Finally, "A Part Song" can be seen as a modern elegy through its departure from conventional religious motifs. Instead, it focuses on the transient nature of the material world, depicted through the fading scent of the friend's clothes. By centering on the everyday, the poem reaches a wider audience and resonates with readers regardless of their spiritual beliefs. Through its

evocative imagery, musical language, and elegantly structured form, "A Part Song" commemorates the loss of a dear son and speaks to the universal experience of grief. It serves as a reminder of life's frailty while affirming the enduring power of friendship and the memories of those we have loved.

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