

Descent and Ascent in Hayden's Symbolic Elegy "The Diver"

**Associate Prof. Dr. Saad Najim
Al-Kafaji**

**Nour Abdul-Kadhim Abdul-'Alli
Auda Al-Rikabi**

**UNIVERSITY OF AL-QASISIA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

Abstract

Mourning and suffering are central topics within Robert Hayden's oeuvre. He has introduced into the canon of elegy a special kind of mourning – intractable work of mourning. Hayden colours his poetics of loss with the special working and dilemmas of his black consciousness. Therefore, this paper gives an interpretive analysis of one of his most important elegies "The Diver," which would serve as a methodological paradigm for the literary analysis of Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts in general.

Key words: The diver, detachment, engagement, melancholia, racial melancholia, transcendent consolation, resistant consolation.

Swam from
the ship somehow;
Somehow began the
measured rise.
-Robert Hayden, "The Diver"

The elegy and elegiac mode of writing preponderate in "Hayden's oeuvre, thereby illustrating a poetics of loss at the heart of this writer's life and artistic achievement."¹ For a careful analysis of Hayden's poetry, it would be of great importance, first of all, to understand his elegiac matrix.

The poetics of loss, importantly, is not restricted to the study of elegy, but as well elegiac expression (the poet under study has written both elegies and elegiac texts). Written texts generally concerned with loss appear "to be strongly oriented not only toward commemoration and mourning but as well toward what Gerald Vizenor has called the *continuance and survivance*" notions². The elegiac mode, John Frow writes, "is a matter of tone – of reflective melancholy or sadness." Frow quotes Morton Bloomfield's view that since the early romantic period, elegy "is not a genre but a mode of approaching reality."³

Hayden's texts written in the elegiac mode approach reality with a vision of continuance and survivance – this latter term is compound of the notion of survival through resistance.⁴ Elegiac texts, and hence Hayden's, could

include land loss, ceremonial loss, language loss, culture loss, loss of the young to drugs, alcohol and suicide. There is also the loss of names; some of the names bestowed by the whites upon African people were not merely entangling but painfully derogatory. William Bright has noted that this pattern seems to group black people with animals (e.g., horse: stallion, mare, colt) rather than with other human groups.⁵ It is unusual for ethnic groups to be called by names the group finds offensive, e.g., the persistent use of offensive names as catalogued by Hayden in his "Words in the Morning Time":

is neither gook nigger
honkey wop nor kike
but man
permitted to be man.
(CP, 98).

Native Americans, slaves and other casualties of America's imperial history become increasingly prominent in the literary language of loss from the second half of the eighteenth century till the contemporary era.⁶ As such, elegy was part of the long racialized drama of sorrow and resistance that characterized the mourning culture of black Americans.⁷ The violence and political upheaval, racial ideology, and unvoiced political rage (grievance) highlight elegy's vicarious mourning of a bereaved collective to gain qualified

social as well as ideological acceptance.⁸

Therefore, Hayden and other African-American elegists must struggle to preserve, restore, or recuperate a sense of the severed affiliations from which blacks suffered disproportionality. For many people, and particularly the slaves, "to mourn publically at all was to consecrate ties of feeling and of blood that often lay under the heaviest interdictions."⁹ Admittedly, the African-Americans are deprived by their white oppressors to mourn or express their suffering. This point has been intelligently explained by Peter Sacks:

[T]he act of mourning quite simply *included* the act of inheritance...The connection between mourning and inheritance has remained a close one throughout history. Most interesting for any reader of the elegy is the fact that... the right to mourn was from earliest times legally connected to the right to inherit.¹⁰

The African-Americans did not have the right to possess or inherit (this theme of dispossession has been partly explained in the Section of the Meaning of Literary Pastoral) something in their New American World, so they were not acknowledged to continue their rituals of mourning and ceremonies.

In spite of that unjust prohibition, however deeply veiled, "African

Americans wrote and published elegies of their own in English, helping to determine the cultural role that mourning would play in the oppositional consciousness of both blacks and whites."¹¹ It is worth noting, here, a very special thing about the African-American elegy: despite their production of elegiac expression, African-American elegists employed elegiac conventions and techniques to manage and direct their anger at the injustice of society, the injustice, that is, of their own ungrieved, unacknowledged losses,¹² "mouth of agony shaping a cry it cannot utter" (CP, 113).

Among these conventions and techniques is the concept of *departicularization*. The lack of particularizing detail in African American elegy, in general, "is a sign of more than mere poetic economy or the universalizing language of mourning." The indirect expression of the story of slavery, childhood trauma, castration, sectarian conflict, and serial loss is the strategy followed by African American elegists to reflect on their own uncompleted mourning.¹³ In addition, departicularization technique enables a form of reflexivity based on a shared experience of deracination and collective traumatized experience of the blacks in general. African American

elegists "perform threatened continuity as a form of identity."¹⁴

Admittedly, the kinship relations of slaves and free blacks were profoundly and repeatedly disrupted via kidnapping and transportation. "Social death" or "natal alienation," as described by the sociologist Orlando Patterson, means that all of a slave's social relations, such as might exist with parents, children, siblings, spouses, fellow workers,¹⁵ for example, "were never recognized as legitimate or binding."¹⁶ Torn away from all claims and obligations, the black person becomes what Patterson calls "a genealogical isolate":

Formally isolated in social relations with those who lived, also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of ancestors.... Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory Unlike other persons, doing so meant struggling with and penetrating the iron curtain of the master, his community, his laws, his policemen or patrollers, and his heritage.¹⁷

As a result, African American elegists discovered possibilities for managing the unmitigated alienation, marginalization, and privation of slavery and the ungrievable – because largely unknown – losses.¹⁸ Therefore,

one of the salient themes of antislavery elegy is the curtailment of mourning, either through direct suppression or as a consequence of general privation.¹⁹

The elegy as a transmissible cultural heritage and as a site for the development of the African-American genealogical imagination instead of genealogical ties, could help constitute an African-American poetic genealogy.²⁰ The extravagant idea, here, "is that the telos of American elegy is not consolation for the deaths of others, but fulfillment, rather, of a specifically political, shared happiness that loss misnames."²¹ Louise Fradenburg had developed a properly political reading of the elegy, of theories of elegy, and of elegiac theory as an explicitly utopian project:

If we can grieve for our particular losses, *and* admit futurity to our interpretation, we can perhaps begin to outline an alternative to the hermeneutics of transcendence. In doing so we could perhaps recognize that the seeking of community in the form of undifferentiated unions or of unions predicated on identity can never be anything other than a defense against loss; we could also consider the possibility that historical community might be re-imagined as the promise of relationship between irreducible particularities.²²

Even when driven violently toward a humiliated and powerless solitude typical of most African-Americans'

lives, grief may bring "to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility."²³ Figuring elegy within this particular framework, Hayden was able to articulate a more nuanced and culturally grounded understanding of the elegy and elegiac poetry "as a medium, an instrument for social and political change."²⁴ By transgressing religious, literary, and cultural norms, Hayden's poetics of loss "braves the world's intractability, thus articulating the negotiation of loss within a dynamic context of interpersonal, textual, and social transformation."²⁵

Gwendolyn Brooks, most noted among the reviewers, rightly distinguished Hayden's technique of departicularization (discussed above) from the "bare-fight boy's," poets who pour out raw emotion, their "wounds like faucets above his page."²⁶ She designates Hayden as a type of poet who "finds life always interesting, sometimes appalling, sometimes appealing, but consistently amenable to a clarifying enchantment via the powers of Art," a poet who has a "reverence for the word of Art."²⁷

"The Diver," which would serve as a methodological paradigm for interpreting subsequent elegies, is a highly symbolic elegy which most critics consider very crucial to Hayden's

major themes and elegiac tropes descent and ascent). The elegy is quite ambiguous and, "consequently, there are various opinions as what exactly is being represented by this highly imagistic piece, but it is clear to every serious reader that it prefigures the spiritual journey [particularly that of an African-American person]."

On a literal level, the elegy presents a first-person description by a scuba diver of his descent, his near-fatal experience with nitrogen narcosis ("rapture of the deep"), and his "measured rise" to the surface. Symbolically, the work has been variously interpreted as implying a death wish, as depicting a sublimated desire for sexual union with a person of another color, as implying a desire to escape from racial prejudice through subterfuge, or simply as a figural treatment of a personal depression. This elegy, importantly, "has been deemed influenced by or having parallels to Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium," Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask," Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Hayden's own "Veracruz."²⁸

Most scholars –like Hatcher, Wilburn Williams, and Pavlic – agree that the diver's decision to rise from the underwater depths is a positive thing, a return to life, a decision like that of the persona in "Veracruz" to overcome death drive and participate in reality.²⁹

The diver's descent is a conscious act, a matter of deliberate choice, a strong longing for death. The appeal to death here "is paradoxically felt as a profound intensification of life. Death takes, or at least seems to promise to take" the man to the very core of life.³⁰ In this way, the poem recalls Keatsian fascination for death as a vitalizing transcendence. Hayden's diver's longing to be united with "those hidden ones," his passion to "have/done with self and /every dinning/ vain complexity" (*CP*, 4), "can be satisfied only if he tears away the mask that sustains his life."

The knotty and puzzled climax of the elegy brings an overwhelming extremity of feeling to the critical moment that finds the diver poised between life and death. After the bitter (yet necessary) confrontation with the labyrinthine and potentially annihilating swirl of contradictory instincts, perceptions, and the frightening under water realm of "lost images/fadingly remembered" (*CP*, 3), the diver rises liberated, consoled and confirmed. He "somehow" begins the "measured rise," "no nearer to winning the object of his quest but presumably possessed of a deeper, more disciplined capacity for experience." ("Measured" is decidedly meant to make the reader aware of the poet's subordination to the rules of his poetics of loss).³¹

In the majority of Hayden's works of mourning, there is a necessary negotiation between transcendent consolation and resistant consolation. Thus, Hayden negotiates "a precarious yet vital balance between, on the one hand, acknowledging a desire for transcendence and, on the other, subverting that possibility for atemporal solace and subordinating it to the poem's ongoing engagement with the wayward course of human action."³² The consolatory concept in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts can be found in his mystical view of Baha'u'llah. Many scholars have noted that 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 postcolonial³³ poetic consciousness (especially for the African-Americans, who find in that religious doctrine a deep racial prejudice).

The reconciliation of "anger and grief through an institutional theology that posits continued life in a transcendent realm (as exhibited in elegies by Milton, Donne, and Tennyson, for example) has diminished considerably as such religious consolation has become increasingly problematic." Problematic as well as is the traditional Orphic consolation.³⁴

In his elegies and elegiac texts about losses both personal and public, Hayden writes "against conventional Western mourning practices (that celebrate transcendent spiritual remedies to affliction and suffering) in order to shape his own private grief into an aesthetic form of oppositional cultural work and a linguistic mode of social resistance."³⁵ According to Hayden, then, the process of reconciliation and transformation as depicted in the Baha'i Writings becomes increasingly important unifying theme in his poetry of loss. While the Baha'i Writings exhort one to "turn away from thyself," to focus on the essentially spiritual nature of life, they also ordain that faith be expressed in deeds – knowledge and faith – through working daily in the physical world."³⁶ These concepts thus parallel the vision (underwater) and return, descent and ascent of the diver. Importantly the prophet Baha'u'llah argues that: "Men who suffer not attain no perfection." He further adds.

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering... Just as the plow furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment.³⁷

Yet, "complete detachment" is not enough to lead a meaningful life. In "the Diver," for instance, the speaker

says that he strives against the conflicting desires to live and to die.³⁸ Hayden often accentuates images of such a tension (between a desire for transcendence and an acknowledgment of historical contingency) with the technique of chiaroscuro – "auroral dark"; "languid frenzy"; "brightness/so bright that it was darkness"; "covenant of timelessness and time"; "morning and mourning" – "oxymora that underscore the knife edge... that drives his work's tenacious (if paradoxical) commitments to aesthetics, politics, and human conditions."³⁹

A similar struggle marks the attempts of the old man to fly again in the poem "For a Young Artist": After many painful attempts, he succeeds: "the angle of ascent/achieved"⁴⁰ (*CP*, 133). And while, the poet denotes, "that flight itself has not yet been achieved, the angle of that ascent has been."⁴¹ Rising, whether from the bottom of the sea to its surface or from the earth to the sky, depends upon the struggle to establish the proper balance between the contradictory feelings.⁴² The diver, then, "somehow, though... began the "measured rise," finding in order the means whereby to contain his chaotic, opposing feelings."⁴³

Symbolically, the diver's descent is representative of the descent of man into slavery and his "measured rise" to

freedom and emancipation of body and spirit⁴⁴:

I yearned to
find those hidden
ones, to fling aside
the mask and call to them,
yield to rapturous
whisperings, have
done with self and
every dining
vain complexity.
(CP, 4).

In this regard, Hayden's "process does not surrender entirely to secluded indeterminacy. Hayden's poems seek to share the deeply sought. His is a solitary poetics of communion." Such a poetics, according to Michael Harper, "is political."⁴⁵ From the diver's depth, the "measured rise" "becomes a satellite's scope on American culture."⁴⁶ John Hatcher has explained careful this process of representation:

The effect of this structure is a dramatic progression from the subtle indirection... to the intimate, personal groping journey of the persona as he descends in to *mourning* and searches for his 'true voice,' his human[lost] identity. He wends back up in 'measured rise' empowered from within by free will, his 'courage leonine,' and assisted from without by Bahá'u'lláh's 'transilluminating word,' just as the Afro-American people and mankind in general are similarly empowered and impelled.⁴⁷

Importantly, "the Driver" is the poetic preface to Hayden's best work,

from A Ballad of Remembrance to American Journal.⁴⁸ Melancholically driven the persona "plunges beneath the street-level reality in search of an immediate and secluded sense of freedom." The underwater spaces "mitigate aboveground forces – rational, racist, positivist – which distort consciousness and confine African-American experiences of space and self within abstract ["Monsters of abstraction"], normative structures."⁴⁹

In "Latin-American poetry," Octavio Paz discusses the pitfalls of abandonment, renunciation, capitulation, and withdrawal. He argues the need to remain actively in contact with social and historical concerns because abandonment "can only withdraw into itself... [and the] dangers attendant upon [it] are irresponsible song or silence."⁵⁰ Seen from this angle, Hayden's method of a deeper engagement through withdrawal set forth in "The Driver" offers a combination of Paz's modes⁵¹ – detachment and engagement. Evincing the costs and dangers of the descendental path, Hayden wrote a hauntingly confessional letter to Harper:

The driver had to admit that he couldn't surface again Alone, without help.... Certainly, for me, an admission of almost complete defeat.... Well, this sounds like melodrama, sure enough, but it's ice-cold reality of which I speak.⁵²

Unfortunately, this "ice-cold reality" demonstrates "the alignment of white supremacist above-ground and the slippery slopes of descendent process"⁵³ (by the blacks), which is a real and past-present danger. Historically, the American State encourages the formation of political identities founded on injury and is in fact invested in maintaining that injured status⁵⁴ or, according to Hatcher, forming what is called "unfinished self" (*CP*, 71) – which alludes forcefully to all the Afro-American problems with identity and the conundrums which are a natural ingredient in man's existence.⁵⁵ For contemporary political discourse, political health (as in freedom or liberty) is paradoxically defined through and relies on injury and illness⁵⁶ – it is really the "bitter juices of justice, law, human rights, and peace."⁵⁷

The subject of injury (denigration and segregation) is under the dirty bondage of racism. In many ways the question of race, what Gunnar Myrdal called the American dilemma in 1944, continues to present the central site of national grief till today.⁵⁸ That grief is more complicated one, because the barrier between who is mourning and what is being mourned for is dissolved.⁵⁹ Since the opening decodes of the 20th century, it has become increasingly more urgent to consider

how mourning might establish shared forms of cultural memory, cultural trauma, and then, fostering the aims of social justice and collective shared happiness.⁶⁰ In a fashion similar to his notion of sustained individual mourning, Jacques Derrida offers an account of cultural loss:

something that one does not know...
not out of ignorance,
but because this non-object, this being
– there of an
absent or departed one no longer
belongs to knowledge.⁶¹

Here, mourning has emerged as a way to address different forms of oppression, violence, enslavement, and marginalization. Concerning African-Americans, that non-object of loss is primarily the slave's denied abstract status as person without absolute differentiation or racial discrimination.⁶²

As Eric Smith writes, "Elegy is specifically about what is missing and also about what is more certainly known to have been formerly possessed."⁶³ ["We mourn what we wish we had not lost and what we wish we could have"].⁶⁴ This configuration, already explored in terms of its relevance to families and to nationalist, regionalist, and local identities, is undoubtedly relevant to elegies for cultural losses and displacements. Then, what consolation can be offered, for

example, for cultural losses that may be irretrievable?

For many African-American elegists, "mourning cultural losses is a matter not only of grief but of cultural survival."⁶⁵

The Psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan has theorized the role of narratives of victimizations to national identity as a people's "chosen trauma" – a historical wound – made to serve as a source of group identity.

Volkan writes:

As injured self – and internalized object – images pass from generation to generation, the chosen trauma they carry assumes new functions, new tasks. The historical truth about the event is no longer of Psychological moment for the large group; what is important is the sense of being *linked together* by the shared chosen trauma, which usually becomes highly mythologized.... [T]ransgenerational transmission of chosen trauma provoke[s] complicated tasks of mourning and/or reversing humiliation; since all are carriers of unconscious psychological process of past generations, chosen traumas bind group members together more powerful [than chosen glories].⁶⁶

As such, the collective mourning is often fundamental in the formation of group identity. And the recursive or echoic quality of poetic language of mourning can, indeed, foster the sense of simultaneous community.⁶⁷ A

chosen trauma – or collective trauma – reflects the existence of "perennial mourning" within society, whether it is actively experienced or hidden under the heavy interdictions.⁶⁸ According to psychoanalytical studies, a "loss may be traumatic in its own right, especially when it is sudden and unexpected, but the combination of loss with actual trauma associated with the mourner's helplessness, shame, humiliation, and survival guilt seriously complicates the mourning process."⁶⁹

Consequently, the ethic and ethical mourning taking place in Hayden's elegies and elegiac texts demands the necessity to rethink the relationship between Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."

Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915) supplies the groundwork in searching for a theoretical vocabulary for the experience of loss and the sense of destruction.⁷⁰ With regard to Freud's definition that mourning is the reaction to "the loss of a loved one, or... some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal so on." The "and so on" suggests that the list of possible substitutes for the loss of a loved object is open-ended. According to Freud, successful mourning necessitates detaching one's self from the lost object and eventually reattaching affection elsewhere. For Freud, mourning entails the detachment

and withdrawal of libido from that lost object or ideal. The healthy work of mourning does not "impels the ego to give up the object," but also the subject attempts to reinstate the death sentence "by disparaging the object, denigrating it, even as it were, by slaying it"⁷¹ once more. On the other hand, melancholia is pathological. In other words, the melancholic cannot "get over" his loss, cannot work out his loss in order to invest in new objects.

Concerning African American (and other groups of color), the lost abstraction is the ideal of whiteness. Because such ideals – as being fully assimilated into the "melting pot" of America – remain unattainable, processes of assimilation and integration are "suspended, conflicted, and unresolved. The irresolution of this process places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework."⁷² For the most cases, the Afro-American subject – marginal man – desires to assimilate into mainstream American culture at any cost. The marginal man "faithfully subscribes to the ideals of assimilation only through an elaborate self-denial of the daily acts of institutionalized racism directed against him." At the same time, indeed, the marginal man finds it "difficult to admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he [or she] aspires to join a racist society." Caught in this

conflicting contradiction, the marginal man must necessarily become a split subject –one who exhibits a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time he "displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals."⁷³

When an Afro-American leaves his country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, he or she must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract. These include homeland, family, language, ancestors, identity, property, status in the community, and so on. the history of hypocritical juridical exclusions of African American reveals a social structure that prevent the immigrant to find closure to these losses by investing in new objects – in the American Dream, for example. If the libido is not refreshed by the investment in new objects, new communities, and new ideals, then the melancholia that ensues from this condition can be transferred to the subsequent generations⁷⁴ – "transgenerational transmission of trauma,"⁷⁵ to borrow a phrase from Vamik Volkan. At the same time, The hope of assimilation and integration can also be transferred to the coming generation

Here, assimilation might be said to characterize a "process involving not just mourning *or* melancholia but that intergenerational negotiation between mourning *and* melancholia. Configured as such, this notion begins to depathologize melancholia by situating it as... The outcome of the mourning process that underwrites"⁷⁶ cultural losses and displacements. This continuum between mourning and melancholia allows to understand "the negotiation of *racial melancholia* as *conflict* rather than *damage*." In their studies on racial melancholia, David L. Eng and Shinhee Han are "dissatisfied with the assumption that the minority subjectivities are *permanently* damaged – forever injured and in capable of ever being whole." Instead, the focus here is on the melancholic's absolute refusal to relinquish the other at any costs.

Racial melancholia, in this regard, is a structure of feeling, a structure of everyday life, and part of daily

existences and survival.⁷⁷ This melancholic process is to be seen as one way in which socially disparaged objects – racially and sexually deprived others – live on in the psychic realm. This behavior proceeds from an attitude of *revolt* on the part of the ego. It displays the ego's melancholic (withdrawal) yet militant refusal (engagement) to allow certain objects to disappear Into oblivion. The militant refusal on the part of the ego – better yet, a series of egos – to let go – is at the heart of "melancholia's productive political potentials. Paradoxically, in this instance, the ego's deathdrive may be the very precondition for survival, the beginning of a strategy for living and living on."⁷⁸ The threat of ambivalence, anger, and rage that characterized the preservation of the lost object should not be seen as a "result of some ontological tendency on the part of the melancholic"; rather "it is a *social* threat."⁷⁹

The following diagram draws in more precise terms the differences between melancholia and racial melancholia:

Melancholia	Racial Melancholia
disease (pathology)	Depathologized
loss that affects one-person psychology	loss that affects social group identity
Despair	hope for fulfillment and redemption across generations
turning form inside to outside (intersubjective), hence having apolitical bases	turning form outside to Inside (intrapsychic), which threatens to erase the political bases of melancholia by rendering the social invisible
necessary conflict and, hence	damage, and, hence destructive; the erasure of the

productive	psychic identity in addition to, in certain cases, the physical suicide
inhibits activism	encourages political activism
pathology, a self – absorbed Mood	a mechanism that (re) constructs Identity
passive static remembrance	active mourning and memory creation
It is the ego that holds Sway	the loved object (not the ego) holds sway
loss can be nihilistic, complete alienation from the outside world	loss can become productive ethical and political project

According to Ann Parry, Gillian Rose, in his *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (1996), rejected “everlasting melancholia” in the face of cultural suffering “because it provided no ground for learning, growth and knowledge.”⁸⁰ As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian outline in their introduction to *Loss: The politics of Mourning* (2003):

Indeed the politics of mourning might be described as that creative process mediating a hopeful or hopeless relationship between loss and history... To impute to loss a creative instead of a negative quality may initially seem counterintuitive...[but] we might say that as soon as the question “What is lost?” is posed, it invariably slips into the question “What remains?”... This attention to remains generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.⁸¹

The rejection of “everlasting melancholia” for a politics of mourning that advocates action and social transformation is preferred by Hayden,

Who tries to “and restore recreate memories and ties to present, past, and future generations, rather than to give in to despair.”⁸² The decline of traditional mourning rituals and elegiac consolation –the conventional Orpheus-Eurydice and the Freudian work of mourning model – “in secularized Western societies might very well reflect the inadequacies of institutions, including the traditional elegy, to provide adequate means to mourn the losses of identity.”⁸³ These conventions, indeed, are complicated by the needs of modern post-colonial mourners and cultural and historical circumstances.⁸⁴

Thus, the modern experience of loss, according to Hayden, is no longer that of a conventional elegy – what is missing and is sure to have been formerly possessed is a loved one who has died. Instead, “suffering is inherently political and ethical for Hayden.”⁸⁵ Hayden's great determination for hopeful balance, as in his symbolic elegy “The Diver,” “engenders what may be the most impossible (and essential) work of

mourning: to accept the want of deliverance from worldly suffering – [the melancholic acceptance of death as a redemptive, transcendent consolation] – and yet relinquish such wished-for consolation, “somehow began the/measured rise” into the half-light of human time.”⁸⁶ The melancholic withdrawal is curtailed by the poet's determination to be engaged in life, accepting the struggle as a means of ethical responsibility for freedom and emancipation.

Notes

¹. W. Scott Howard, “Resistance, Sacrifice, and Historicity in the Elegies of Robert Hayden,” in *Reading the Middle Generation A new: culture, community, and form in twentieth-century American Poetry*, ed. Eric Haralson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 134.

². Arnold Krupat, ““That the People Might Live’: Notes Toward A Study of Native American Elegy,” in Weisman, 343; italics in original.

³. John Frow, *Genre* (London: Routledge, 2006), 132.

⁴. *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵. Max Cavitch, *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 38.

⁶. *Ibid.*

⁷. *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸. *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰. Sacks, Peter M., *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1985), 37.

¹¹. Cavitch, *American Elegy*, 180.

¹². *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³. *Ibid.*, 184; italics mine.

¹⁴. *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁵. Cited in Cavitch, *American Elegy*, 185-186.

¹⁶. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A comparative study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 6.

¹⁷. *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸. Cavitch, *American Elegy*, 187.

¹⁹. *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁰. *Ibid.*, 194.

²¹. *Ibid.*, 24.

²². Louise O. Fradenburg, “ ‘Voice Memorial’: Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry,” *Exemplaria* 2, no. 1(1990): 182-83; italics in original

²³. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and violence* (London: verso, 2004), 22.

²⁴. Hayden, *Collected Prose*, 11.

²⁵. Howard, “Resistance,” 135.

²⁶. Gwendolyn Brooks, rev. of *Selected Poems*, by Robert Hayden, *Negro Digest* (October, 1966), 51.

²⁷. *Ibid.*

²⁸. Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 145.

²⁹. *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁰. Wilburn Williams, Jr., “covenant of Timelessness and Time: Symbolism and History in Robert Hayden's *Angle of Ascent*,” in Bloom, 69.

³¹. *Ibid.*

³². Howard, “resistance,” 135.

³³. The experience of colonialism has significant effects on personal and collective identity:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is

here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being ... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality ...

See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 8-9.

³⁴. Priscila Uppal, *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English – Canadian Elegy* (Montreal and Kingston: Mc. Gill- Queen's University Press, 2009), 11-12.

³⁵. Howard, "Resistance", 135.

³⁶. Quoted in Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 147-48.

³⁷. 'Abdu'l – Baha in *The Divine Art Of Living: Selection from Writing s of Bahá'u'lláh and "Abdu'l-Bahá'*, compiled by Mabel Hyde Paine (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i publishing Trust, rev. edn. 1960), 89, 90.

³⁸. Constance J. Post, "Image and Idea in the Poetry of Robert Hayden," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 202.

³⁹. Howard, "Resistance", 136.

⁴⁰. Post, 202.

⁴¹. Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 207.

⁴². Post, 202.

⁴³. Ibid.

⁴⁴. Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 147.

⁴⁵. Edward M. Pavlic, *Crossroads Modernism: Descent and Emergence in African-American Literature Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 231.

⁴⁶. Edward M. Pavlic, " "something patterned, wild, and free": Robert Hayden's *Angles of Descent and the Democratic Unconscious*, " in Bloom, 252.

⁴⁷. Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 207; italics mine.

⁴⁸. Pavlic, *Descent and Emergence*, 146.

⁴⁹. Ibid., 95.

⁵⁰. Quoted in Pavlic, in Bloom, 250.

⁵¹. Pavlic, in Bloom, 250.

⁵². Xavier Nicholas, ed., "Robert Hayden and Michael Harper: A Literary Friendship," in *Callaloo* 17 (1994): 997. (Bibliography: 976 – 1015; italics mine.

⁵³. Pavlic, *Descent and emergence*, 173.

⁵⁴. Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Greif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

⁵⁵. Hatcher, *Auroral Darkness*, 168.

⁵⁶. Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*, 105.

⁵⁷. Eliot Katez, qtd in Uppal, *Canadian Elegy*, 266.

⁵⁸. Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*, 170.

⁵⁹. Ibid, 169.

⁶⁰. Tammy Clewell, *Mourning, Modernism, postmodernism* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 14.

⁶¹. Quoted in Clewell, *Mourning*, 14.

⁶². Keith D. Leonard, *Fettered Genius: The African American Bardic Poet from Slavery to Civil Rights* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 20.

⁶³. Eric Smith, *By Moring Tongues* (Ipswich: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 2.

⁶⁴. Uppal, *Canadian Elegy*, 263.

⁶⁵. Ibid., 189.

⁶⁶. Vamik Volkan, "Large-Group Identity and Chosen Trauma," is *Psychoanalysis Downunder* 6 <

http://www.psychanalysis.asn.au/downunder/backissues/6/427/large_group_vv>. [Accessed 30 nov. 2015]. See also Erikson Kai, *A new Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster*,

Trauma, and Community (New York: Norton, 1994), 28; *italics mine*.

⁶⁷. Jahan Ramazani, "Nationalism, Transnationalism, And the Poetry of Mourning," in Weisman, 605.

⁶⁸. Vamik D. Volkan, "Not letting go: from individual perennial mourners to societies with entitlement ideologies," in *On Freud's* 107.

⁶⁹. *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁰. David Johnson, "Theorizing the Loss of Land: Griqua Land Claims in Southern Africa, 1874 -1998." In *Loss The politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng. and David Kazanjian, Afterword by Judith Butler (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003), 281.

⁷¹. Quoted in Cheng, *Melancholy of Race*, 104.

⁷². David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia." in *Loss*, 345.

⁷³. *Ibid.*, 348-49

⁷⁴. *Ibid.*, 352,353.

⁷⁵. Volkan, "Not letting go", 106.

⁷⁶. Eng and Han, in *Loss*, 353; *italics in original*.

⁷⁷. *Ibid.*, 363.

⁷⁸. *Ibid.*, 365.

⁷⁹. *Ibid.*

⁸⁰. Quoted in Uppal, *Canadian Elegy*, 194.

⁸¹. Eng and Kazanjian, in *Loss*, 2.

⁸². Uppal, *Canadian Elegy*, 195.

⁸³. *Ibid.*, 264.

⁸⁴. *Ibid.*, 191.

⁸⁵. Howard, "Resistance" 141.

⁸⁶. *Ibid.*, 146.

Whitman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Cheng, Anne Anlin (2001), *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Greif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Clewell, Tammy (2009), *Mourning, Modernism, postmodernism* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan).

Eng, David L., and David Kazanjian (2003), "Mourning Remains," in their David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (eds.), *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1-28.

———, and Shinhee Han (2003), "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia" in Eng. and Kazanjian, 343-371.

Fradenburg, Louise O. (1990) " 'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," *Exemplaria* 2, no. 1: 182-83.

Frow, John (2006), *Genre* (London: Routledge).

Hatcher, John (1984), *From the Auroral Darkness: The Life and Poetry of Robert Hayden* (Oxford: George Roland).

Howard, W. Scott (2006), "Resistance, Sacrifice, and Historicity in the Elegies of Robert Hayden," in Eric Haralson (ed.), *Reading the Middle Generation A new: culture, community, and form in twentieth-century American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), 133-150.

Johnson, David (2003), "Theorizing the Loss of Land: Griqua Land Claims in Southern Africa, 1874 -1998" in Eng. and Kazanjian (eds.), *Loss The politics of Mourning*, Afterword by Judith Butler (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press), 278-299.

Bibliography

Brooks, Gwendolyn (1966), rev. of *Selected Poems*, by Robert Hayden, *Negro Digest*.

Cavitch, Max(2007), *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to*

Krupat, Arnold " 'That the People Might Live': Notes Toward A Study of Native American Elegy," in Weisman, 343-363.

Leonard, Keith D. (2006), *Fettered Genius: The African American Bardic Poet from Slavery to Civil Rights* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press).

Meredith, William (1985), foreword to *Hayden, Collected Prose* (New York: Liveright).

Nicholas, Xavier ed. (1994) "Robert Hayden and Michael Harper: A Literary Friendship," in *Callaloo* 17, 976-1015.

Paine, Mabel Hyde (1960), 'Abdu'l-Bahá' in *The Divine Art Of Living: Selection from Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá'*, compiled by (Wilmette, Illinois: Baha'i publishing Trust).

Patterson, Orlando (1982), *Slavery and Social Death: A comparative study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

Pavlić, Edward M. (2002), *Crossroads Modernism: Descent and Emergence in African-American Literature Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Post, Constance J. (2001), "Image and Idea in the Poetry of Robert Hayden," in Goldstein and Chrisman, 194-204.

Ramazani, Jahan (1994), *Poetry of Mourning: the Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago press).

Sacks, Peter M. (1985), *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre form Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

Smith, Eric (1977), *By Mourning Tongues* (Ipswich: Rowman and Littlefield).

Uppal, Priscila (2009), *We Are What We Mourn: The Contemporary English – Canadian Elegy* (Montreal and Kingston: Mc. Gill- Queen's University Press).

Volkan, Vamik D. "Large-Group Identity and Chosen Trauma," in *Psychoanalysis Downunder*

http://www.pschoanalysis.asn.au/downunder/backissues/6/427/large_group_vv (accessed November 30, 2015).

Williams, Jr., Wilburn (2005), "Covenant of Timelessness and Time: Symbolism and History in Robert Hayden's *Angle of Ascent*," in Bloom, 67-86.