

Haverford College Department of Philosophy

From Mourning to Melancholia: Voicing Authorship in its Loss

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The [authorial] subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies.

-- Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," page 137

What is an author? At least since Nietzsche, philosophy has faltered in recognizing the authentic doer behind authorship's linguistic deed.¹ At stake is the normative assertion that authorial agents originate a text's intentional and determinate meaning. Against the backdrop of authorship's reified authority, Wayne Booth, Michel Foucault, and Alexander Nehamas then parse a distinction between an authorial persona and the writer's person. As counter-mythology to the normative reading of this schematization, Roland Barthes argues that writers experience "The Death of the Author" insofar as their author-function is produced by the reader's interpretive practice. Of course, the opening passage from Foucault warns that although writers may engender an authorial self-alienation, this "death" should not call into question their very existence as writers. More suitably, my project will inquire how writers mourn for their unconscious loss of authorial voice. In answer, Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," and its more recent applications to psychoanalytic trauma theory, illuminates the latency of the writer's melancholia, whose alienation cannot be experienced in the moment that the writer produce their authorial persona. For just this reason, Freud prescribes *against* melancholia as grief's privative disorder to which mourning is a recuperative process. Contra Freud, my essay works to recover the writer's melancholia from Freud's reading of its lack as unredeemably debilitating. The initial inquiry into why writers suffer melancholic loss will then proceed to ask how melancholia addresses its authorial other within the writerly self. How does authorship fashion its mode of self-relation vis-à-vis loss? The latter project focuses itself through an analysis of elegiac poetry and Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (*Elegy*) as the paradigmatic mode of relation in and through which writers confront their authorial self-

abstention. Here, Gray's poem grounds my study of the call and response between self and absent other, which defines the rhetoric of *prosopopeia*. In particular, *prosopopeia*'s dialogic imperative to tell and be heard begins to re-envision how melancholia can rehabilitate the writer's unconscious loss.

To begin, let us turn to Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" in examining the mechanisms of elegy's prosopopoetic address:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day
 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea
 The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me (lines 1-4).

From the opening verse, Gray's *Elegy* disrupts the voice's univocal embodiment in an authorial presence. On a literal level, the "parting day" is brought to a close by the tolling of church bells. Yet, church bells are not the only sound conveyed by these verses, nor the only voice of address. In medieval Europe, "curfew" was itself the ringing evening bell signaling that countryside fires must be covered or extinguished (*Oxford English Dictionary* [OED], "curfew"). The parting day's liminal, dusk-time setting is thus complemented by the dampening of all firelight out of doors, such that the solitude and darkness of the speaker's environs (line 4) represents a harmony between nature's diurnal course and the activity of human culture. But because the ringing of curfew bells precedes the "tolling" we hear in the opening verse, it is less redundant to read the verb, toll, in its secondary connotation as a lure or enticement.² Curfew then serves as an address in its own right, which not only communicates with the far-flung cottagers, but also lures, entices, or even seduces the parting day's movement toward darkness. And like many other religious invocations (religious, as suggested by the churchyard setting), the tolling curfew bell implicitly requests a response, whose appropriate rejoinder is the "knell of parting day." In reply to the

¹ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, First Treatise, §13.

² As in 'he tolls us on with fine promises.'

human agent, who sounds curfew, the “parting day” announces a leave-taking with the knell, or ringing, of its own funereal signal.

The call and response of Gray’s opening verse traces what Paul de Man describes in his essay, “Autobiography As De-Facement” (*De-Facement*), as the rhetoric of prosopopeia:

It is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech (*De-Facement* 75-76).

To characterize prosopopeia as the fiction of an apostrophe rings doubly true in Gray’s opening verse. Not only is the “parting day” *not present* to the curfew call by virtue of the day’s parting gesture, but even more literally, a parting day is not the kind of thing one addresses with the expectation of a response. Prosopopeia introduces these contradictions through its personification, which lends a living voice to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity. Yet, what de Man describes as the “fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave” always implies the latent threat that in bestowing voice upon an other, the living could be “struck dumb, frozen in their own death” (*De-Facement*, 77-78). Specifically, de Man locates an asymmetrical transfer of voice in the exchange between apostrophe, which addresses an absent person, and the classical understanding of prosopopeia as a response from the personified entity. De Man collapses the definitions of apostrophe and prosopopeia as inseparably linked by their call and response. The result is that the apostrophic address itself occasions both the possibility and actualization of prosopopeia’s reply.

Gray’s opening verse, “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,” itself enacts prosopopeia’s blurring effect between its invocation and the invoked. Assumedly, a human agent would ring the curfew bells (rather than some mechanized system). Yet, the curfew is indirectly pronounced by church bells as a mimetic amplification of the vocal address. In other words, the church bells serve as a metonymic signifier for the call of a human voice. But although the sounding *knell* (direct object) receives the action of the *curfew toll* (subject / verb), the funeral

knell is modified by the possessive case of the “parting day.” My reading suggests that the prosopopoetic “knell of parting day” steals from and speaks in place of the human agent’s voiced curfew call. From de Man’s perspective, the address’ lure or enticement precipitates this dislocation of voice. Thus prosopopeia forfeits the audibility of its own speech in positing a response from “the knell of parting day,” a response from the other.

Thomas Gray’s *Elegy* then compels a re-examination of such elementary and vital questions as who speaks Gray’s opening verse, and from where does its prosopopoetic address originate? More generally, how does Gray’s poem reconsider the normative conception of language’s communicational function? Significantly, Gray’s poetic framework will not marginalize Roland Barthes’ infamous claim that “it is language which speaks, not the author” (Barthes 143). In voicing its own knell, prosopopeia destabilizes the writer’s relation to an author-function, which is taken to both originate and master the linguistic performance. Replacing the unquestioning assumption that authors are the self-sufficient authorities over *their* works of language, elegy engages a dialogical structure of address, which requires that the self speak in and through its other.

I. Meaning is an affair of consciousness... but whose line is it anyway?

My analysis will be articulated in sympathy with Barthes and de Man, who resist the normative evaluation that authorial presence produces an unequivocal and univocal embodiment of voice. Emblematic of the opposing view is E.D. Hirsch’s Validity in Interpretation, which argues that texts function as communicational acts directed from author to reader. Along these lines, Hirsch rallies behind his pithy slogan: “meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words” (Hirsch 4). A text is never merely the words on a page. Rather, these inscriptions stand as an authored missive from one person to another:

Meaning is an affair of consciousness and not of physical signs of things. Consciousness is, in turn, an affair of persons, and in textual interpretation the persons involved are an author and a reader (Hirsch 23).

Textual meaning transmits the author's intentions via the linguistic "guides and norms for construing the meaning of his text" (Hirsch 224), which are socially conveyed via an interpersonal dialogue. For Hirsch, authorship serves as the "only compelling normative principle... [and] viable normative ideal" (Hirsch 5) that can effectively regulate textual meaning:

For if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to *the* meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning (Hirsch 5).

The uniquely certifiable, authoritative meaning is driven by the author's intentionality as its telos. At stake in Hirsch's normative stance is a humanistic frame of reference, which refuses to disassociate semantics from syntax, authorial intentionality from the function and performance of language. Only human agents make the intentional connection between meanings and the words that convey their designs (Hirsch 4).

Implicit for Hirsch and explicit in M.H. Abrams' essay, "What is Humanistic Criticism," is an argument against the "de-humanizing" efforts "to dispense with [language's] operative reference to human beings – conceived as purposeful agents capable of initiative, design, intention, and choice" (Abrams 15). Abrams' case in point is Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," which seeks to dissolve textuality's link to the author's supposedly monological intentionality (Abrams 22). Here, Barthes prescriptively envisions "the text [that] is henceforth made and read in such a way that at all its levels the author is absent" (Barthes 145). Barthes liberates the play of language via a textual dynamism, which does not require the normalizing recognition of an authorial authorization:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash (Barthes 146).

By Barthes' definition, textuality's multivocal and polysemous nature destabilizes the "author's" language. At issue is the closed interpretive status that the author-function bestows upon a work of literature: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 147). Consonant with Michel Foucault's essay, "What is an Author," Barthes charts the author-function's effort to "circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses" (Foucault 130). Abolishing authorship's supreme status over literature instead opens up the "multiplicity of writing, [in which] everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*" (Barthes 147). Above all, Barthes seeks to collapse the monological edifice of textual meaning grounded in the author's normative intentionality:

It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary) (Barthes 161)...

The author has not disappeared or died per se. What dissolves is the author-function's ability to reify the text as a unified whole, which conveys its determinate meaning. The paper-author is thus situated within a text that is no longer the exclusive property of a human agent. The paper-author lives his life as literature, never stepping outside or beyond the play of language, which delimits the purview of his existence qua author.

In opposition to Barthes and de Man, Abrams broadly defines a struggle between the humanistic and anti-humanistic readings of authorship's normative function. Here, even the etymology of the word "author" marks an investiture in Abrams' conception of the human *agent* (from the Latin, *auctor*), whose verbal function (*augere*) is "to make to grow, originate, promote, [and] increase" (OED, "author"). In addition to establishing itself as the normative authority over textual meaning, authorship denotes a determinate and historically situated human agent. In this second connotation, Barthes urges a re-evaluation of the relation between the text and its scriptor.

Is the writerly agent identical to the text's author? If not, what is the disjunction between the historical writer, who penned the text, and his author-function?

Keeping these questions in mind, Wayne Booth, Michel Foucault, and Alexander Nehamas parse a crucial distinction between author and writer. The starting point for their separate analyses is a Barthesian skepticism towards the unquestioning assumption that authors are fully present as the given origin, which precedes every text. Booth, Foucault, and Nehamas intervene against authorship's normative function in arguing that the author figure is a product of interpretation. Only by virtue of *readers'* interpretive processes and their willingness to assign attribution do we identify *the* author.

In this vein, Foucault's essay, "What is an Author," asserts that authorial intentionality is subservient to and decentered by the reader's hermeneutic activity: "These aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author... are projections, in terms always more or less psychological,³ of our way of handling texts" (Foucault 127). The author becomes a figment of the readerly consciousness, which exists within a reciprocal relation between authorship and textuality:

[The authors'] nature guides interpretation, and interpretation determines their nature. This reciprocal relationship can be called, not simply for a lack of a better word, *transcendental* ("What an Author Is" 686).

As Nehamas notes here, interpretation implicitly postulates the figure of an *implied author*, to use Wayne Booth's term, who in turn confirms the Work's fixed domain of meaning for the reader. Like Barthes, Nehamas examines how readers ascribe meaning to and receive meaning from the author's *transcendental* agency, which "impose[s] a limit on that text, furnish[es] it with a final signified, close[s] the writing" (Barthes 147). The interdependent relation between postulated

³ Here, Foucault does not seem to take the term psychological as a manifestation of the historical unconscious. Although authorship norms are articulated differently over time, literary convention must make these standards self-conscious for author and reader, not only in retrospect but also in real time.

author and reified work of literature establishes the reader's interpretive practices as a self-fulfilling prophesy, which constructs the very authority it takes as given.

Nehamas and Foucault intervene in the transcendental reading of the author-function by arguing that the postulated author's hypothetical identity situates him as a character within *his own* text. Along this tact, Wayne Booth's Rhetoric of Fiction is instrumental in identifying the "implied author" [who] chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal literary, created version of the real man" (Booth 74-75). The conception of the author's "second self" is a distinctly *literary* ideal. Hereby, Booth takes a step towards Barthes' more radical position that the implied author operates wholly within the play of textuality.

In defining the implied authorial agent as a construct of our interpretive practice, Nehamas subverts the reader's author-centricity, if you will. Nehamas' analysis then corresponds with Barthes' evaluation that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148). Yet, Nehamas also sympathizes with Hirsch and Abrams' line of humanistic criticism, which emphasizes the reductive nature of this thinking. What becomes of the flesh and blood person, whom Barthes inscribes within the play of language? Certainly, Barthes would be loath to recognize the Boothean "real man," who serves as the implied author's exemplar. In embracing "that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (Barthes 143), Barthes' textuality has no place for authorship's living, breathing human agent. Implicitly, to even make such a criticism of Barthes would be to fall back into the well-worn assumption that authors are unequivocally defined by their status as origin and authority over meaning. But on my reading, Nehamas is too much of a humanist at heart to accept Barthes' disassociation of syntax from semantics, sense from reference, human agents from their language use. Instead, the Hirschean view that "meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words" (Hirsch 4) prompts Nehamas to distinguish the reader's postulated author from the agency of the text's historical writer:

Writers [as opposed to authors] are actual individuals, firmly located in history... They often misunderstand their own work and are as confused about it as we frequently are about the sense and significance, indeed the very nature of our actions. Writers truly exist outside their texts. They have no interpretive authority over them (“What an Author Is” 686).

While Nehamas acknowledges, a la Barthes, that the historical writer has no interpretive authority over the text, he yet salvages a place for the human being, who scripted the words on a page during a particular historical moment. Nehamas reinstates the writer as a concrete, historical individual, whose acts engender the text’s existence. In doing so, he resists Barthes’ impulse to polarize the views of authorship as either an operative norm or an incapacitated (dead) textual function.

Nehamas thus situates authorship as both a subject position in which the writerly agent scripts the text, as well as an object upon which readers (and well as writers) place their desire for meaning. As Judith Butler crisply noted in a different context, authorship then resides in the disjuncture between

The norms without which I cannot be,
But those that do not fully determine me.⁴

Here, the liminal boundary between norm and agent, the writer’s subject position and his objectification as author, conditions what I will call the elegiac.

Of course, Nehamas is careful to make clear that the writer’s intentionality does not continue to nourish the text in vivifying the norms he must inhabit. Rather, this function is fulfilled by the reader’s construction of an implied author. But whereas, broadly speaking, Barthes offers a critique of authorship’s ontological status, rejecting the view that the authorial agent can be fully present within the play of language, Nehamas fine-tunes an epistemological question -- what exactly can the reader know about the writer’s historical contingency:

⁴ From Judith Butler’s lecture, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” *Philosophy* 399, Haverford College, Haverford, PA. March 21, 2002.

The author... is a plausible historical variant of the writer, a character the writer could have been, some one who means what the writer could have meant, but never, in any sense, did mean. Writers enter a [textual] system with a life of its own ("What an Author Is" 689).

While the author is a virtual entity produced by the reader's interpretive faculties, the writer possesses both historical and personal depth. The author is postulated as a figure the writer *could have been*. Yet, because the author is engendered by the *reader's* interpretive position and not the writer's, the implied author serves as a persona, or mask, which covers over the writer's identity. As a result, the authorial norm generates a textual domain with a life of its own -- that is, a life which is not the writer's own. Despite Nehamas' willingness to limit the purview of our insight into the writer's psyche, the historical personage yet maintains its position as the text's creator. Thus Nehamas stymies Barthes' divestiture of authorship's *authentic* status as a first-hand authority and original -- someone who does a thing himself, a principle, a master, an autocrat (OED, "authentic"). Implied authorship then becomes a shadow, which obscures the reader's view of the writer, who yet remains original and primary in his plenary substantiality. While readers may retain their fixation on the implied author as a normalizing influence that centers linguistic meaning (contra Barthes), Nehamas cautions that a recognition of the writer's postulated persona *does not* exist independently of the reader's interpretation.

But rather than emphasize the ways in which Nehamas ends up speaking past Barthes' intervention against the dominion of authorial significance, it is more helpful to split their difference. On the one hand, Barthes makes the prescriptive claim that the author's transcendental authority over the Work of Literature must end in order to open up the play of language. Yet, Nehamas reveals that although the historical writer cannot re-enter "his text" as its authority, this does not mean that the reader will cease to construct the figure of an implied author. Along these lines, Barthes is fully aware that

the *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs (Barthes 143).

Regardless of the author's current hegemony over how we read, Barthes seeks to disrupt the author-function's ability to identify the human agent, who "nourish[es] the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (Barthes 145). Nehamas reverses the argument in responding that although authors are never the transcendent authorities over linguistic meaning readers take them to be, Barthes' objection does not somehow cancel the normative force that readers bestow upon the authorial persona. In sympathy with Foucault's observation opening my essay, Nehamas notes that "literary texts are produced by agents and must be understood as such. This seems to me self-evident" ("Postulated Author" 145). So at the intersection between Barthes and Nehamas, my conclusion is that the author's death should not jeopardize the validity of his existence as a writer. Holding the terms "author" and the corresponding "author-function" under erasure, as Foucault or Barthes might envision, demands revision and rearticulation, not an outright deletion or repudiation of the text's foundational premise.

Here, we can rework Barthes' prescribed "Death of the Author" to ask what becomes of the writer who acknowledges his disjunction from the implied author's textual persona? How does the writer cope with, recover from, or merely find the terms by which he can recognize such a loss? On what basis does authorship's self-alienation constitute a mode of self-relation?

Wayne Booth implicitly poses these questions in analyzing how writers engender their implied authorship:

Only if he [the writer] imagines himself temporarily as his own reader, approaching his work without special knowledge, can we think of him as troubling to write this scene for "himself." Yet, if he postulates himself as reader in this sense, what is he doing that is different from writing with "the reader" in mind (Booth 109)?

Booth describes how the writer envisions a double that is no longer “himself,” but is rather the *implied author’s* self generated by the reader. In imagining the reader’s perspective, the writer must then think of himself as an other. Authorship becomes a self-alienating activity through which the writer envisions his separation or distance from an implied authorship.⁵ Consider even Plato’s accusation that writer’s do not possess mastery over the linguistic meaning ascribed to their authorship.⁶ Yet, because the writer is “present in the mode of having been the agent of his absenting, and therefore present in his absence,”⁷ he never dies, but instead effacing himself with the vision of how his writing will establish the *text’s* authorship. Loss thus fashions the self. Writers encounter their death-like self-abstention in imagining an authorial persona that cannot be their own.⁸ The reader’s author-centric norm postulates the position of authorial mastery that is necessarily other to the historical writer. Ironically, the normative conception of authorship itself engenders the split between author and writer it seeks to preclude.

II. Grieving for the death of the author

Booth only heightens the awareness of what remains an unanswered question: if the historical writer finds self-alienation insofar as he recognizes his authorship as an externalized (readerly) norm, how does he go about grieving for his loss? In answer, Barthes offers a starting point in characterizing authorial loss as “The Death of the Author.” If authorship is the kind of thing that can die or pass away, it seems appropriate to continue the metaphor by asking how the writer mourns for their lack. Indeed, Sigmund Freud’s essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,”

⁵The writer’s self-estrangement ironically occurs in the paradigmatic moment of his creative self-fashioning.

⁶ “Poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say” (*Apology* 22c).

⁷ This was Professor Kosman’s comment to me on an initial reading of Barthes’ “Death of the Author.”

⁸ The ancients were well aware of the disjuncture between author and writer, and often distrusted writing as a result. Yet, the efficacy and authenticity of their agency was not called into question in the ways that

account for how writers (or the bereaved more generally) would engage the work of mourning for their alienated authorship. Most basically, Freud describes the work of mourning as a narrative retelling or re-collection, in the etymological sense of gathering together one's memories. It is through the process of remembering that the mourner releases his or her attachment to the now lost love-object:

The task [of mourning] is now carried through bit by bit... Each single one of the memories and hopes [for the lost object] which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-catheted, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished (Freud 126).

Mourning's process of conscious remembrance, which painstakingly examines the mourner's expired connection to the lost love-object "bit by bit," does not seem to account for the writer's *unarticulated* dispossession of authorial mastery. Currently, writers continue to write *as if* they remained an unquestioning authority over textual meaning.⁹ The result is that authorship's normative standard is held under erasure without being abolished. Authorial alienation is thus characterized by a latency, which cannot readily come to know its insufficiency. Instead, the writer sustains a traumatic loss that never fully works through or completes the task of mourning.

In this light, Freud contrasts mourning with melancholia's unconscious loss of the love-object (Freud 127). While it is clear that the melancholic has experienced loss, the patient "cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost" (Freud 127). As an alternative model to mourning, melancholia's latent experience of loss provides an apt means for measuring the effects of the writer's dislocated authorship. Freud traces the following development of (writerly) alienation within the psychic economy of melancholia's unconscious loss:

First there existed an object-choice, the libido had attached to a certain person; then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the person, this object-relationship was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one... The free libido was

even a pre-modernist, like Gray, and certainly the more recent trauma theorists, mark modernism's fractured self-consciousness with a parting knell.

⁹ The pretension of authorial mastery is only *sometimes* a product of the writer's self-deception. Yet, the effect is *always* upheld by the reader's willingness to center the text's meaning in an authorial presence.

withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there... but served simply to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification (Freud 130-131).

Freud maps how melancholia displaces the writer's libidinal attachment to "his" postulated authorship. Because the activity of writing is taken as a self-fashioning process (since the Renaissance, says Barthes), the writer's resulting loss of his postulated authorship cannot transfigure itself through a new attachment. Accordingly, while authorship may serve as a mask for the writer's identity, in so playing the author's part the writer is not free to be other than what he is qua author. This conclusion does not mean to deny that multiple implied authors can arise out of a single text. Rather, the writer's mode of authorial identification operates via what Nehamas understands as the normative "conception of the author as owner and of authority as possession" ("Writer, Text, Work, Author" 268). By this principle of ownership, the writer's libidinal attachment to the authorial persona cannot simply re-affix itself onto another. The writer's subsequent failure to work through his authorial loss causes his identification to *revert back* upon his self in the moment when his identity would formerly have been *transferred onto* his authorship. Hence the psychological basis for why writers are so eager to "unite their person and their work" is derived from the power of their self-identification (Barthes 143). Ironically, it is in the very moment of writer's *transference* that he realizes he has become a mere *shadow* of the text's postulated author. Indeed, the relation between author and writer always operates in a negative economy of exchange, which constantly re-creates its constitutive lack.

The crucial moment for Freud is then melancholia's self-alienation, which arises out of the subject's self-critical mental faculty (i.e. conscience or more generally, the power of critical self-reflection). Applied to Nehamas' author/writer distinction, the writer's identification with a forsaken object (i.e. his authorship) allows the writer to conversely judge *himself* critically as

such an object. In explanation, Freud notes how melancholia's violent self-deprecations betray an ambivalence toward the lost love-object (Freud 130). The melancholic's "complaints are really 'plaints' in the legal sense of the word" (Freud 130) – both an audible expression of sorrow or lamentation as well as a statement of legal grievance (OED, "plaint"). In superseding the writer's textual ownership, the implied author elicits the writer's lament for his lost love-object, which doubles as a demand for legal redress. But for the analyst, however transparent (or subtle) the melancholic's thinly-disguised "self-recriminations" and misdirected grievances may be, the patient does not conceive his loss as such. Rather, "the loss of the object becomes transformed into a loss in the ego" (Freud 131), evidenced by the marked decline in the melancholic's self-regard. In allowing his identification to revert back onto the self, the writer judges himself as an externalized object -- as the postulated author towards whom he sublimates his deep-seated ambivalence. Via Nehamas' author/writer distinction, Freud here clarifies how the melancholy writer envisions his self as both the subject and object of loss. Indeed, only through the writer's *self*-recriminations and *self*-alienation does he express his plaint against the implied author, who has defaced and thus effaced the textual manifestation of the writer's identity. The writer's grievances and griefs are thus registered at the linguistic level. Yet, the plaint remains solely a figure of conscious, not self-consciousness. The writer is thus marked by an unconscious loss, which renders him blind to any understanding of his self-wounding behavior.

To say this differently, the writer's authorship inflicts melancholia's traumatic wound that is never fully apprehended as the antagonism between writer and author. As a result, the writer's function qua authorship settles into a repetitious structure through which his loss rearticulates itself in varying permutations:

First one, then another memory is activated and that the laments [sic] which are perpetually the same and wearisome in their monotony nevertheless each time take their rise in some different unconscious source (Freud 137).

Melancholia induces an unconscious stuttering effect, which constantly reconfigures its grievance. Within the larger framework of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," the wearisome and monotonous nature of the melancholic's experience¹⁰ sharply contrasts with the work of mourning, which makes a narrative passage *through* the many memories of the lost beloved. As melancholia is to mourning, so repetition is to progress.

Significantly, Freud gives an uneven weighting to the contrast by identifying mourning as the recuperative ideal to which melancholia is a privative disorder (Freud 132). For Freud, mourning allows one to work through the loss of a libidinal attachment in order to move on and liberate the now untenable psychic investiture. Mourning serves a normalizing and recuperative function, whose completion enables "the ego [to] become free and uninhibited again" (Freud 127). Freud's implicit understanding is that the psyche must return *again* to a healthy state, which allows the patient to form his libidinal attachments free of loss' paralyzing inhibitions. Melancholia conversely exhibits a privative stuttering effect and non-linearity, which does not allow the subject to find another love-object in compensation or replacement for the past loss. In his comparison, Freud simply does not question his "assured" understanding of mourning as a self-formative and self-liberating work (Freud 125) against which melancholia inflicts trauma's unnamable loss.

In light of the normative valuations loading Freud's analysis, we must then reconsider the viability of the writer's effort to work through the death of "his" authorship via a process of mourning. Frozen within melancholia's monotonous repetition of what is not fully understood, the writer is doomed to reinscribe his trauma in the act of writing qua author. The writer's melancholia forecloses the possibility of fully recognizing his authorial self-alienation. Thus, as an unconscious loss, authorship is held under erasure, but never fully abandoned as the site of the writer's libidinal investment and desire for presence. In other words, authorship's mode of self-

¹⁰ Again, an evaluation made from the analyst's perspective.

relation is achieved only through a process of self-alienation. Yet, to reiterate my earlier conclusion, while authorship may mark the writer's textual death, such an estrangement does not nullify his very existence as writer or abolish the reader's attachment to this norm.

III. Freud, trauma theory, and their discontents

To continue following out Freud's characterization of melancholia unconscious lack as a "painful wound" (Freud 140) harbored within the psyche, contemporary trauma theory elucidates the structures of blindness and insight through which traumatic loss is experienced and communicated. In particular, Cathy Caruth's book, Unclaimed Experience, gives careful attention to the temporal dimension of trauma's dislocating effect. In her discussion of traumatic latency, or the belatedness by which a psychic wound is experienced over time and out of time, Caruth writes:

The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all (Caruth 17).

Caruth situates her comments within Freud's framework for understanding trauma as a psychic wound that is "experienced too soon, and too unexpectedly to be fully known" (Caruth 4). To specify the writer's trauma as melancholia is to argue that authorship constantly stutters over the alienating experience of telling what it means not to see (Caruth 105), belatedly marking the breach between historical writer and postulated author. Yet, in missing the moment of his authorial alienation, the writer's "traumatic neurosis," to use Freud's term, does not allow him to somehow escape or ignore the loss. Instead, melancholia "emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2).

Broadening Caruth's account of traumatic belatedness, Dori Laub's book, Testimony, contextualizes trauma's latency as a problem of communicability. More specifically,

melancholia's alienation confronts the *impossible necessity* of giving full expression to a past that is never fully known. Trauma thus engenders "an imperative to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself (Laub 78). Yet, the imperative is stymied by melancholia's latency, whose voice stutters over and in trauma's communication:

The imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet, no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory, and speech* (Laub 78).

Rather than supposing that the melancholic can offer a testimonial transparent to both himself and the listener, trauma speaks from the limits of its communicability in delivering what my analysis of Gray's *Elegy* will term a *speechless invocation*. Failing to express and mark melancholia's unconscious loss, the speaker voices his loss from the silences that frame his voice. On this count, I will temporarily bracket my inquiry into the mechanism of relation between speech and silence, voice and loss, speaker and hearer, in order to consider the theory of language, which grounds the writer's authorial alienation.

At issue is Laub's quasi-instrumental view of language, which could lead to the misguided belief that the insufficiency of trauma's testimonial is *merely* a failure on language's part. While Laub defines melancholia's psychic wound by its elusiveness to "thought, memory, and speech" (Laub 78), the lack is too often exemplified through a linguistic problematic that cannot find the right words or enough words to describe the speaker's unconscious loss. Laub is one step removed from falling back into a Hirschean author-centricity, whose platonistic view would mistakenly rely on the speaker's determinate intentionality *if only* language did not somehow suffer from a pervasive insufficiency and incommunicability. Clearly, Laub's crucial point is that the problematic of expressibility is built into the latency of traumatic self-knowledge. On my reading of Laub, language only deepens trauma's communicational frustration, which can

never fulfill the imperative to tell and be heard. Yet, this difficulty should suggest that authorial alienation is *solely* caused by trauma's ineffability. Stated differently, melancholia does not remain an unconscious or untold loss merely because language lacks the adequate means of expression.

As counterpoint and corrective to a possible misreading of Laub, Paul de Man's seminal essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," investigates language's temporal dimension, which is likewise ruptured by the dislocating structures of traumatic belatedness. Crucially, de Man clarifies how loss and difference figures the formation of linguistic meaning. Primary for de Man is his understanding of language's temporal condition, which "consists only in the repetition... of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority" (de Man 207). *Coincidence* is the key term, whose etymology denotes the moment when two bodies *fall together*, upon or into one another. The root of "coincidence" (incidere) likewise connotes an occurrence or happening, and with the prefix, a co-occurrence or co-happening (OED, "coincidence"). The etymological origins of "coincidence" then conjoin a gravitational phenomenon, by which objects fall towards one another, with a temporal metaphor in which happenings necessarily diverge as time proceeds. Here, the focus of de Man's essay is to describe "the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning" (de Man 222) as a fundamentally temporal phenomenon. The result is a resistance to the gravitational pull that would synchronize language with meaning. For de Man, language is directed towards a meaning that is always removed to an *impossible site of witness*. The text's postulated authorship thus divides off from the writer along language's temporal *and* linguistic lines of rupture. Indeed, voice emerges in and through the dislocations that nullify the possibility of coincidence between language and meaning, writers and "their" postulated authorship.

IV. Voicing melancholia in its loss

Having carefully specified our account of the linguistic, psychic, and temporal conditions that give rise to a writer's authorial alienation, we must return to our earlier question: what is the mode of relation linking writer to author, agent to norm, language to the site of its meaning? While it may be clearer why authorship alienates the historical writer, it is less readily apparent how, or by what means, writers address and interact with an implied authorship that is no longer their own. In other words, how is the authorial self formed out of its melancholic loss? As answer, my de Manian reading of prosopopeia will provide a figure that concretizes the operation of melancholia's unconscious loss. The investigation will take place at the site of Gray's poem, because elegy is none other than the paradigmatic occasion for prosopopeia's call and response between self and absent other. To talk about the writer's authorial alienation is to trace prosopopeia's asymmetrical transfer of voice. Yet, in choosing elegy as the ground for my inquiry, the intention is not to limit or delimit the ubiquity through which prosopopeia lodges itself within a wide array of discourses.¹¹ The caveat aside, elegy itself, as both a poetic genre and a mode of address, explicitly confronts the poet's experience of difference and alterity. Here, the reading of Gray will proceed in consonance with my developing exploration of the writer's prosopopoetic relation to his departed authorship, which would seem to literalize the death of the author. Nevertheless, the objective is not to interpret the characters within Gray's poem as some kind of analogue to Nehamas' author/writer distinction. Rather, my reading of the poem will play out the prosopopoetic transfer of voice as a model for the writer's authorial dislocation. Because Gray's poem commemorates the mortality of its own speaker, this literary "death" figures the writer's alienation from his authorial self. Via Gray's poem, we can then envision a critique of

¹¹ In this regard, I am more interested in prosopopeia's proliferation and dissemination among various discourses, rather than its exclusive specificity to any one domain (if such containment were even possible).

Freud that inquires how the prosopopoetic dialogue between self and other might rehabilitate the frame of its melancholic loss. Asked differently, how does melancholia reposition and rearticulate the terms by which writer's experience their authorial self-alienation?

In answer, we should continue reading Gray in further examination of its prosopopoetic address: "Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, / And all the air a solemn stillness holds" (lines 5-6). Ironically, the landscape's quiescent status is immediately contravened by the many natural voicings of the churchyard scene. First, wildly careening beetles breach the solemn stillness, followed by a "moping owl [who] does to the moon complain / Of such, as wandering near her secret bower, / Molest her ancient solitary reign" (lines 7, 10-12). Clearly, the offending "wanderer" is the poem's speaking voice identified as "me" in line four. So from the owl's vantage within the natural scene, the solemn stillness' saving exception is neither beetles, nor his own moping complaint, but rather the poem's perambulatory speaker. Said differently, "solemn stillness" (line 6) is solely the speaker's evaluation, such that the inhabitants of the natural scene must always speak for him or in his place in order for the assertion to remain true *of the speaker*. In lending the power of speech to the owl's "complaint" and the beetle's "drowsy tinklings" (line 8), the human agent accordingly finds himself struck dumb. The exception to this silencing is, of course, the poem's own poetic address, which was assumedly penned or "written" (title) within the somber, but certainly not silent, churchyard scene. Localized within the paradox of a *speechless invocation*, the poem's silence is transgressed by the prosopopoetic voicing of the other. But does the transfer of voice between speaker and personified object then disable or possibly empower the speaker's central effort to voice his authorship in its loss? Thus far the question remains open.

Gray's speaker directly confronts the problem of communicability in commemorating the "rude forefathers" (line 16) buried within the country churchyard's "narrow cells" (line 15). Specifically, the speaker admonishes the "proud" (line 37):

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor (lines 29-32).

The passage suggests, and properly so, that *hearing* serves as the crucial connective link between elegy's ability to voice its testimonial and the reader's own understanding of the "useful toils, / their homely joys," which define elegy's commemoration. Yet, Gray's speaker observes how the imperative to tell and be heard faces a fundamental insufficiency that threatens to stymie its dual-focused necessity. On the one hand, the speaker delivers what is ostensibly a social critique of the pride, ambition, grandeur, and disdain polarizing England's 18th century class structure. As indicated by the stanza's opening subjunctive, these sources of social division threaten to hamper the speaker's address to his (seemingly) upper class audience. The speaker's charge is that the various social significations marking grief will prove insufficient for the task of honoring these country forefathers. Thus, sociality itself is constituted through a prosopopoetic lack, which always fractures the communicational dialogue between self and other, living and departed. It is then in addition to Gray's social critique that his speaker faces the task of recollecting these "obscure" destinies (line 30). Exactly what kind of elegiac testimony can disclose an "obscure destiny" that is, by definition, dark and unclear? My thesis is that the opacity and impenetrability of subject matter actually *enables* Gray's speaker to relate these "short and simple annals of the poor." In this light, Gray's speaker struggles with the problem of addressing the unknowable beyond of an *impossible witness*.

Of course, the limitation of Gray's speaker is that his prosopopoetic call and response does not carry over to ambiguate the rigid boundaries defining class difference. To give voice to the "short and simple annals of the poor" (line 32) or the "applause of listening senates" (line 61) identifies both the poor and the powerful alike with an implicit sociological coherence. Yet, by the second half of the 18th century, Gray would himself have witnessed the burgeoning Industrial

Revolution, which drew England's rural populations to the nation's growing industrial centers. During Gray's lifetime, the "rude forefathers of the hamlet sle[pt]" (line 15) in a social environment that was increasingly subject to change. Nevertheless, the speaker does not recognize the widening fragmentation of his social constructions, which attempt to both address and give voice to a distinctly individuated conception of England's class division.

At least initially, the speaker's social critique emphasizes how death's unmediated otherness would seem to deny the efficacy of his elegiac address:

Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
 Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flattery sooth the dull cold ear of Death (lines 41-44)?

Directly rejecting any prospect of hearing the "short and simple annals of the poor" (line 32), the speaker claims that narrative, whether captured on "storied urn or animated bust," cannot give breath (or voice) to the departed. Elegy's animation or *lifelike* vitality is ontologically distinct from the silent dust of the deceased, to the extent that the poem's elegiac commemoration does not have the power to provoke, or call forth, the living voice. In emphasizing the incommunicability of death's absolute otherness, the speaker suggests that elegy's prosopopoetic address must fall on dull, cold, senseless ears. Again, the impasse is exacerbated by the social critique of monumentalization's over-determined opulence. The excessive wealth displayed by the storied urn, animated bust, and rich mansion, only emphasizes literary (read: upper class) language's inadequacy to the task of commemorating the rustics' fleeting breath.

Identical to melancholia's stuttering effect, Dori Laub describes how the speaker's imperative to tell and be heard constitutes itself vis-a-vis trauma's inability to definitively name its loss. Here, the declared inefficacy of elegy's "storied urn or animated bust" (line 41), quickly evolves into the speaker's effort to reconstitute his impossible witness: "*Perhaps* in this neglected spot is laid / Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire (lines 45-46, my emphasis)." The

penury (line 51) of the prosopopoetic voice-from-beyond-the-grave (*De-Facement* 77) finds a supplement in the fictive hypothetical of a “perhaps.” The identity of the deceased buried in “this [particular] neglected spot” is first generalized as “some heart”, and then broadly historicized by the indefinite past tense of “once” (line 46). The end result is that the speaker surmounts the barrier of death’s otherness with prosopopeia’s impossible witness.

Throughout, the speaker’s rhetoric is similarly propelled by the unknowability of a life that nonetheless bears telling. Here, an exemplary moment is the speaker’s speculation that buried within the country churchyard may be

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country’s blood (lines 57-60).

Although the speaker (as well as the reader) may sympathize with the noble traits and great, but unknown deeds attributed to the inglorious villagers, the purview of the speaker’s elegy does not afford full historical disclosure. As a result, the speaker’s account, however complimentary, necessarily fictionalizes its chronicle. To say that “Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest” (line 59), does not pay homage to the actual soul, who is “in his narrow cell forever lain” (line 15). In this manner, the fictive hypothetical of a “perhaps” serves as a rhetorical strategy for addressing the nameless rustics who moved “Along the cool sequestered vale of life / [And] kept the noiseless tenor of their way” (lines 74-75).

Gray’s *Elegy* is continually faced with the possible impossibility of giving voice to “nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is,” to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens. But if the void or vacuous space of death’s otherness precipitates elegy’s silent address, on what terms does elegy fashion prosopopeia as a vision of the unperceivable other:

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air (lines 53-56).

The speculative description of a past life's unknowable richness gestures toward the beyond via an impossible witness. If the ocean's dark caves are truly unfathomed, on what basis can the speaker claim that therein lies "full many a gem of purest ray serene?" If the desert is truly deserted, how can anyone know that a flower blushes unseen? Here, the negative prefix, 'un', indicates a beyond without naming it. Describing the "noiseless tenor" of an unseen life is a narrative passage of pure possibility, which embarks upon the movement toward the unfathomed without ever reaching its goal.

By Laub's analysis, it is the very recognition of this insufficiency, coupled with the imperative to tell and be heard, which serves as an enabling externalization of the traumatic loss. Following Freud, Laub describes how a subject is entrapped by the trauma "that cannot be known, cannot be told, but can only be repeated" (Laub 69). Such a loss remains latent until the subject engages the therapeutic process of reconstructing and re-externalizing the traumatic event. The dialogical structure of elegy's address then links the self to its loss as a productive lack that must be first articulated and thus acknowledged:

This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside (Laub 69).

Speaker and hearer recollect and in this way externalize melancholia's unconscious loss through their dialogue. Yet, for Gray's speaker, both social division and the limitations of language's expressibility stymie his efforts his loss. In the absence of an suitable listener, Laub then describes an alternative situated in the speaker's effort

[to] establish and maintain an internal witness who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life... [ultimately] augmenting his ability to create a cohesive, integrated narrative of the event (Laub 87).

Prosopopeia's lack, which threatens to silence the subject, instead opens the rehabilitative possibility of self-witness, whereby the speaking subject can both tell and hear the recollection of

his traumatic loss. Thus, prosopopeia begins to rehabilitate the other's voice speaking from within the self. Indeed, melancholia operates through the logic of its self-formation via alienation, which is built in to the writer's function as both acting subject and authorial object of the reader's interpretation. The writer, in other words, must always voice his authorship in its loss. Here, Freud's appraisal of this lack as exclusively non-productive is at the heart of my intervention against his "Mourning and Melancholia."

Added to the discussion, Jacques Derrida's Memoirs for Paul de Man describe grieving as an oscillation between the externalization and interiorization of loss, which constantly crosses-over and cancels its constitution of the self:

We can only live this experience [of mourning] in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where *success fails*. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a *part* of us, between us – and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him *in us*, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, the *failure succeeds*: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us. (Derrida 35).

Derrida describes an undecidable play between interiorizing the other's death and renouncing all attempts to do so. On the one hand, faithful interiorization, through which the other's death is subsumed within the self, "takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally and quasi-ideally devouring them" (Derrida 34). Conversely, mourning also renounces its desire to interiorize the other, instead sanctifying this past as unretrievable. Accordingly, "the other [is left] alone, outside, over there, in his death" and implicitly behind, in the past tense. For Derrida, mourning enters into melancholia's unceasing oscillation between distancing the other as a *not I* while simultaneously attempting to subsume this other within the self. The implication is that the melancholic subject must constantly construct and reconstruct his identity out of a loss that can never fix its lack. In this light, I will

argue that the death of the author confronts an alienation that both conditions its instability and offers the promise of rehabilitating or coming to terms with an unnamable bereavement.

Following Derrida, Gray's *Elegy* specifies prosopopeia's vocal transfer as the mechanism that establishes a rupture between author and writer, the externalized other and the other as *something outside within* (Derrida 34). In this way, the poem's "solemn stillness" (stanzas 2-3) dispossesses the speaker of voice only to create an internal witness for whom his trauma *can* be told. Melancholia's testimonial is thus articulated as a function of its unconscious loss. Continuing with Gray's poem, the speaker's effort to then locate and determine the origin of elegy's text seems suspect:

Their name, their years, spelt by the unlettered Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die (lines 81-84).

The stanza should be read in sharp contrast with the speaker's ongoing critique of various high-cultural modes of monumentalization. In particular, Gray's speaker insists that overwrought grandeur and excessive ambition not only fail to capture the fleeting human spirit, but also threaten to block any empathy with "the short and simple annals of the poor" (line 32). Here, the wisdom of an "unlettered Muse" offers the promise of greater communicational transparency in delivering the teachings of fame and elegy. Because the unlettered Muse has no use for the more sophisticated (read: upper class) and primarily literary modes of elegiac address, her "holy text" is cognate with the rustic's "cool sequestered vale of life" (line 74). Accordingly, the speaker can unquestioningly wonder how anyone would leave "the warm precincts of the cheerful day, / Nor cast *one longing lingering look behind*" (lines 87-88, my emphasis). The poetry emphasizes the seemingly untroubled intentionality that characterizes elegy as *merely* a matter of casting a deliberate, drawn-out, alliterative, nostalgic gaze back towards the past. My belief is that Gray's speaker expects his unambiguous social critique to mask, or at least pacify the earlier concerns

that elegiac address cannot help but pass outside its purview and into the fictive space of an impossible witness.

Whatever his designs, the speaker's retrospective glance clearly does not offer a sustained vision of transcendence. Instead, the dialogical nature of elegy's prosopopoetic address returns to compromise the speaker's reminiscence:

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
Even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
Even in our ashes live their wonted fires" (lines 91-92).

Living and departing, speaker and hearer become specular images of the other. To say that the "parting soul *relies*" on the sympathetic fondness of living suggests that the speaker's pious tears grieves for his *own* demise.¹² Emphasizing that "even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries," prosopopeia transports the voice of Nature into its beyond. De Man describes this phenomenon as "the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave," which freezes the living in their own death (de Man 77-78). Continuing this effect in recollecting the familiarized ("wonted") spirits of the departed, prosopopeia allows the speaker to recognize a similar fate for his own ashes. That is to say, the very process of mourning is a metaphorical fire, which consumes the speaker in the act of commemorating the churchyard's "rude forefathers." The speaker's account then intertwines itself with the listener's, the living with the departed, as elegy fails its unlettered Muse, on whose behalf the speaker claims to convey the "short and simple annals of the poor" (line 32).

It is the dynamic of exchange between living voice and the voice from beyond that so markedly displaces the speaker's attention. Instead of relating memories of the country villagers, the speaker continues to refocus his elegy on his own living ashes, and what becomes his *posthumous life*:

¹² Cf. Milton's "Lycidas": "Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string... / So may some gentle Muse / With lucky words favor my destined urn" (lines 17, 19-20).

For thee, who mindful of the unhonored dead
 Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
 If by chance, by lonely contemplation led,
 Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
 "Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn (lines 93-98)..."

Who is the "thee" addressed here? Many have noted the remarkable twist in Gray's poem by which the speaking voice address *itself* from an external perspective as the subject of its own address.¹³ The reversal constructs the speaker's "artless tale" as an entry-point into his own life. Here, remember that writers undergo exactly the same kind of inversion, which transforms the agency of their subject position (i.e. as the text's scriptor) into the authorial object or icon out of which reader constitute the text's normative meaning. In both cases, writing's self-formative process is constituted via an alienation that transposes the self into the place of its other.

Helpfully, Paul de Man's seminal essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," draws on Friedrich Schlegel's understanding of *parabasis* as the moment when an author *appears to* intrude into the textual world and disrupts the fictional verisimilitude. While the writer may *already* stand at a distance from his postulated authorship, parabasis "prevent[s] the all too readily mystified reader from confusing fact and fiction" (de Man 219). But what is more, in the moment that the author's voice erupts into the text's fictional world, he simultaneously loses his status as the text's external master and creator:

The moment... [of parabasis] is precisely the moment when the author does not return to the world. He asserts instead the ironic necessity of not becoming the dupe of his own irony and discovers that there is no way back from his fictional self to his actual self (de Man 219).

De Man's analysis offers a telling commentary on the fate of the writer's authorial disjunction. In the instant that the writer attempts to re-enter the text and claim authorial mastery, or conversely, in the moment that the authorial voice references its life, each faces the ironic realization that they

themselves have severed the desired connection between their historical and textual selves. Gray's poem exemplifies how the speaker may enter his text, only to meet his demise there, without returning to the "real" world of his historical selfhood. Yet, de Man's larger point is that parabasis only emphasizes how writers are, to use a popular buzzword, *always already* alienated from their paper-authorship and the textual life that is not the writer's own. In particular, Nehamas' author/writer distinction has solidified the prosopopoetic mechanisms by which writerly agents become both the subject and object of their textual discourse. But as we see with Gray's speaker, this loss itself remains unconscious and implicit in his address. Melancholia, then, is the elegiac condition through which writers confront what ever-remains the latent knowledge of their authorial estrangement.

In the context of elegy's role reversal, parabasis would serve as the prime apparatus by which the melancholy subject constructs an internal witness, "who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life" (Laub 87). In recognizing himself through the second person pronoun, "thee", the speaker is able to witness his own loss from the inside, as it were (Laub 82):

The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal "thou," and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself (Laub 85).

Reemphasizing the rhetoric of prosopopeia's address from I to Thou, Laub specifies how the self-abstaining subject strives to reconstitute the possibility of dialogue. Gray's speaker then activates the potential for self-witness in constructing an elegy, whose prosopopeia voices its own commemoration.

By stanza 24, the elegiac voice of Gray's poem has reached its fullest inversion point. What was previously the speaker's address becomes the prosopopoetic "voice of Nature['s]" cry (line 91), which steals the speaker's power of speech in re-lating, or carrying back, the "artless

¹³ Cf. Anne Williams' essay, "Elegy into Lyric," which summarizes the various readings of Gray's final, self-reflexive stanzas, page 102.

tale” (line 94) of *the speaker’s own* “unhonored” death (line 93). Elegy narrates a posthumous life spoken from beyond the grave – a grave that the speaker does not fully inhabit in his role as the poem’s scriptor. Interestingly, the speaker’s prosopopoetic transfer from subject to object position is narrated by the indirect reportage a “hoary-headed swain” (line 97) – none other than the Miltonic icon of elegiac poetry somehow wizened by the poem’s ambiguous temporality. Stanza 25 then marks the moment when the nominal speaker *literally* loses his voice in deference to the other. Here the voice of Nature’s cry makes good on the promise that “Some kindred spirit *shall* inquire thy fate” (line 96, my emphasis). Whether we read “shall” as an imperative, or as the future tense’s prophetic connotation, both readings ironically inscribe the poem’s speaker within an economy of mourning for which he is now the addressed object, and no longer identified as the speaking subject. Here, the speaker’s specularity, which frames him as both the agent who penned the text and a voice within the poem, implicitly models prosopopeia’s exchange between writer and his authorial double.

The irony of the speaker’s role reversal is that his identity is effaced by the swain’s uninformed commemoration, just as the obscure destinies (line 30) of the country forefathers’ were marred by the speaker’s own impossible witness:

Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love (lines 106-108)

Despite numerous possibilities, the speaker’s affliction remains unclear and uncertain for the swain. Did he suffer from loneliness, anxiety, unrequited love, all three, or something else all together? Parallel to the speaker’s impossible and unknowable conjecture that “Full many a gem of purest ray serene, / The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear” (lines 53-54), the swain analogously “missed” (line 109) the moment of the speaker’s death during the silent pause between stanzas 27 and 28. In both situations, elegy, and the figure of prosopopeia more generally, suffer from an inadequacy that *necessarily* obscures the other’s death as it strains to

“re-late” (line 94), or carry back, the seemingly “artless tale” (line 94) of an impossible witness. Consonant then with the writer’s alienation, melancholia defines the swain’s (and the speaker’s) inability to fully explicate an unconscious loss.

Witnessing self-loss via parabasis, the speaker yet again confronts language’s insufficiency. Here, Laub describe trauma’s constitutive privation as the way in which “the act of bearing witness at the same time makes and breaks a promise: the promise of the testimony as a realization of the truth” (Laub 91). While elegy’s prosopopoetic address promises access to the site of an unconscious loss, this mode of witness comes to recognize the *generative impossibility*, which allows the unknown and unknowable to speak itself through a fictive hypothetical. Yet, a return to the originary site of loss is never achieve. The traumatic latency of elegy’s address always transforms the recollection in the telling. Accordingly, the writer’s paper-authorship does not return the call of his would-be authority. Thus the writer learns the hard lesson “that there is no way back from his fictional self to his actual self” (de Man 219). But does this conclusion then necessitate our agreement with Freud’s assessment that melancholia’s lack proves debilitating? Must we follow Freud in foreclosing the possibility that authorial self-alienation may serve as the writer’s *productive* mode of self-relation?

Leaving this question unanswered for the moment, the final two verses preceding “The Epitaph” trace the speaker’s inseparability from his textual existence: “Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay, / Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn” (lines 115-116). The parenthetical assertion erupts as a voice from beyond the grave, which is, in fact, now the voice of the deceased speaker who initially “wrote” the elegy in a country churchyard. His command is not exclusively directed towards the “kindred spirit” (line 96), who heard the swain’s account, but also reaches out towards the reader of Gray’s poem. The poem’s admonition, “Approach and read”, highlights how Gray’s social critique, which previously championed the illiteracy of an “unlettered Muse” (line 81), defers before the imperative to tell and be heard. The focus is on a

witness who can properly receive the forthcoming epitaph “*Graved* on the stone beneath yon aged thorn” (line 116, my emphasis). Punning on the double sense that epitaph’s are “graved” or written into stone just as the deceased is “graved” beneath the stone,¹⁴ prosopopeia generates an undecidable oscillation between writing as silence or cessation, and the epitaph’s speechless invocation as such a mode of writing.

But if the difference between speech and silence is indistinguishable, how then does “The Epitaph” to Gray’s *Elegy* pose its mode of closure? In what way can the engraved resting-place fulfill the “solemn stillness” (line 6) of a written account that fails this evaluation? In responding to the epitaph’s imperative to tell the death of its author, an internal witness steps outside its repose “upon the lap of Earth” (line 107) in appealing to the reader, who can read and comprehend the connection between speaker and hearer. Of course, the epitaph’s second stanza would sidestep the quandary of communicability in once again appealing to the recompensory witness of a friend. Here, Laub describes the now familiar desire for “an empathic listener... an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness” (Laub 68). Yet, it is equally necessary that elegy arise out of prosopopeia’s formative privation and the inadequacy of thought, speech and memory. Accordingly, the epitaph’s final stanza rings false:

No farther seeks his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
The bosom of his Father and his God (lines 125-128).

The epitaph admonishes the reader, “No farther seek,” as if foreclosing the possibility of further address. Thematically, the movement towards closure is reinforced by the invocation of divine redemption. Death is read as a process of transcendence whereby the speaker’s “Melancholy” (line 120) and misery are inversely reciprocated in the form of a gained companionship with

¹⁴ Cf. Mercutio’s dying speech: “Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man” (Romeo and

humankind and divinity. Yet, for the epitaph to conclude that both the speaker's merits as well as his frailties *alike* repose in "the bosom of his Father and his God", not only suggests reconciliation, but also implicitly identifies an uncanny *equivalence* between frailty and merit. Bracketing the speaker's moral introspection with parenthesis then epitomizes the epitaph's effort to close its address as a repose into silence and stillness.

Yet, lurking below the poem's supposedly placid movement towards tranquility is a series of darker possibilities. The swain's recollection provides a picture of the melancholy marked speaker "Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn, / Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love" (lines 107-108). The possibility of the speaker's untold suicide is implicitly suggested by his "Melancholy" mood (line 120), manic disposition, woefully crazed emotional state, and his forlorn hopelessness, against which the epitaph suspiciously warns the reader not to delve any further (Lonsdale 24). But like the speaker's initial narrative, and the swain's after him, the poem's epitaph cannot declare the speaker's unknowable fate. Only at elegy's limit does there arise the phantasmal voice from beyond the grave, whose prosopopoetic address marks the unknowable fate via an impossible witness.¹⁵

Likewise, Dori Laub describes trauma's limit as a silent frame, which enables the speaker to communicate his melancholia's unconscious lack. Loss is surrounded by a *boundary of silence*, to use Laub's term, which conditions the experience of voice's (in)communicability (Laub 62). Caruth's also argues that trauma testifies to what it means not to see (Caruth 105). The resulting view is that the address of Gray's *Elegy* repeatedly confronts its blindness and limitation. Not only does the swain "miss" (line 109) the moment of the speaker's demise, but the poet's melancholia cannot explicitly name the possibility of its own suicidal condition. Like the writer's melancholia, suicide is itself a latent possibility in the text and one whose

Juliet, III,i, 94-95).

actualization cannot be confirmed. Here again, the imperative to tell and be heard confronts the social limits of communicability. In particular, the epitaph's Christian framework, implicated in a doctrinal prohibition against suicide, could not act as a sympathetic listener for any *explicit* account of the speaker's suicide.¹⁶ In this rupture between elegy and religion, Gray's text serves a modernist precursor, tolling the parting day of sociality's theological coherence, which reaches its ending point in the proclamation of Nietzsche's madman: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" (*Gay Science*, §125).¹⁷

Nietzsche and his anti-theology aside, Laub construes the silences structuring loss' communication as the enabling function of Gray's *Elegy*: "It is not merely her [the survivor's] speech, but the very boundaries of silence which surround it, which attest... to this assertion of resistance" (Laub 62). Throughout, prosopopeia's impossible witness propels the address of Gray's speaker. Responding to the imperative to tell and be heard, trauma speaks its loss through a subtle exchange between what is known and what remains unknown. In mediating between these poles, melancholia encounters its "repeated confrontation[s] with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life" (Caruth 62). The imperative to tell and be heard never finds full expression in language. Whereas a desire to compensate for one's lack motivates, on the one hand, elegy's prosopopoetic address, the ability to speak from the latency of what remains an unconscious loss provides a mode for resisting trauma's unspeakable silence. It is exactly in this way that writers voice their authorial alienation without mastering or overcoming the loss. Thus the normative functioning of the writer's authorship is held under erasure without nullifying its function as the writer's foundational mode of self-relation.

¹⁵ Certainly, the possibility of the speaker's suicide conveys a very different message than what Barthes prescribes as the timely "Death of the Author." Nevertheless, I am interested in the commonality between both occurrences as figures for melancholia's unconscious loss.

¹⁶ Cf. the religious impropriety of Ophelia's suicide in act V, scene i of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

¹⁷ Nietzsche's believes that the western mind has murdered the viability of organized religion. Yet, he envisions this death as an alienation, which originates in culture's own fractured self-consciousness.

V. Beyond elegy's unconscious loss

Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" has then occasioned my sustained inquiry into an elegiac model of authorial alienation constructed out of the poem's prosopopoetic address. Here, we can reflect back on the two-fold question that prompted my exploration: both how do writers engage their grieving for an alienated authorship and to what extent does this activity reposition and rearticulate authorship itself? Clearly, Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" emphasizes mourning's role as a recuperative process, which allows loss to be worked through via the memorial recollection. In contrast, the prosopopoetic address of Gray's *Elegy* enters into what Freud called the privative disorder of mourning's normative restoration. Modeled after the unknown and unknowable fate of Gray's speaker, authorship inscribes the historical writer within a psychic economy of unconscious loss, doomed to stutter over the alienation it cannot name.

Yet, from my reading of Gray, Freud's prescription against melancholia's disorder loses its force. If nothing else, the poem constantly names and renames the site of its unconscious loss. Here, prosopopeia provides the mechanism for an impossible witness, whose voice is *constituted* by its foundational lack. Laub, Caruth, and de Man have then clarified how melancholia's dialogical imperative to tell and be heard presents its testimony in and through a variety of temporal, psychic, linguistic, and social disjunctures. Contra-Freud, melancholia's prosopopeia then *enables* a crucial "passage through, and an exploration of, differences, rather than an exploration of identity" (Laub 91). The melancholy writer then finds himself empowered by the lack that now allows him to speak his unconscious loss without erasing the privative force propelling his address. To excerpt Laub at length:

[Testimony] cannot bring back the dead, undo the horror or establish the safety, the authenticity and the harmony of what was home. But neither does it succumb to death, nostalgia, memorializing, ongoing repetitious embattlements with the past... It is a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is – that are different and will always remain so. The

testimony is inherently a process of facing loss – of going through the pain of the act of witnessing, and of the ending of the act of witnessing – which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss. It reenacts the passage through difference in such a way, however, that it allows perhaps a certain repossession of it (Laub 91).

Melancholia faces loss in simultaneously speaking to and conferring a face (and a voice) upon this absence. Accordingly, melancholia's grief-stricken "plaint" remains "housed within language, refus[ing] to escape out of time into apocalyptic conceptions of human temporality" (de Man 223). In de Manian terms, Laub reveals how the writer's melancholic *demystification* abolishes the "nostalgia and desire to coincide" (de Man 207) *without* achieving a resolution to its constitutive lack. Thus the experience of loss redefines its confinement within the limitations of the writer's disillusionment, no longer finding it necessary to overcome the insufficiency. In other words, while the writer's authorial alienation does not yield positive self-knowledge, neither does the loss become debilitating or incapacitating. As in "The Epitaph" to Gray's poem, melancholia's flawed movement toward closure paradoxically posits the possibility of resolution in failing this objective. Without collapsing or ignoring the other's existence within the self, melancholia stymies mourning's effort to overcome its bereavement. Thus, while melancholia fails to work through its loss, so to does the melancholic relinquish his desire to move on and erase the otherness lodged both within and without. The yearning for a pre-traumatic wholeness departs and with it the impetus driving melancholia's angst.

Thus, by placing authorship's normative function under erasure, we have traced how prosopopeia can begin to rehabilitate its writerly difference. Rather than undergoing a recuperation or recovers of loss, with its implicit expectation of a return to sameness and identity, Michel Foucault likewise undertakes a reconsideration of authorship that does not "restore the theme of an originating [authorial] subject, but seize[s] its functions" and allows for their rearticulation (Foucault 137). Laub and de Man have then helped to re-envision a correction to the Freudian legacy, which held that mourning is to melancholia as the norm is to its disorder.

Against this grain, prosopopeia's dialogic address liberates melancholia from its debilitating desire for presence. Faces its loss, melancholia then allows the subject to enter into the tale of his alienation as an author's parabasis would disrupt the space of his fiction. In doing so the writer gains a demystifying insight into the loss that constitutes his address. But without offering the possibility of a return, melancholia productively reinhabits its alienated attachment to the lost love-object. With this analysis, we have begun to reimagine a reading of Barthes' "The Death of the Author" that does not abandon authorship's positionality, but yet remains cognizant of the writer's insufficiency. Such a project now authorizes a repositioning of melancholia's difference as the therapeutic norm.¹⁸

¹⁸ It will remain the task of another study to pressure mourning's genealogy as an *encryption and repression* of loss felt beyond (or in spite of) the memorial recollections of its self-conscious acknowledgement.

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