

MUSING SADLY ON THE DEAD: EROTIC EPISTEMOLOGY IN THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH ELEGY

by

JORDAN L. GREEN

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2017

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Jordan L. Green

Title: Musing Sadly on the Dead: Erotic Epistemology in the Nineteenth-Century English Elegy

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

Forest Pyle	Chair
Heidi Kaufman	Core Member
Veronica Alfano	Core Member
Lowell Bowditch	Institutional Representative

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
----------------	-----------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2017.

© 2017 Jordan L. Green
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (United States) License



DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Jordan L. Green

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

June 2017

Title: Musing Sadly on the Dead: Erotic Epistemology in the Nineteenth-Century English Elegy

This project is about what I am calling an “erotic epistemology” in nineteenth-century English elegiac poetry, a condition or event in a poetic text in which the discourses of love and knowledge are, to use a term Shelley liked to describe the experience of love, “intermixed.” The persistence of this inter-discourse suggests some fundamental connection between the desire for love and the desire for knowledge. Curiously, these performances of erotic longing insist urgently in the rhetorical, formal, and somatic registers of elegiac poetry in the nineteenth century.

The confrontation with death that elegy stages is ideal for thinking about the relationship between erotic desire and poetic knowledge. As the limit case of a mind confronting an ultimately unknowable condition, the furthest expression of an impossible desire—the desire for the dead—elegies are love poems as well as death poems. This dissertation argues that Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Adonais* for John Keats (1821), Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* for Arthur Hallam (1850), Algernon Charles Swinburne’s *Ave Atque Vale* for Charles Baudelaire (1867), and Thomas Tod Stoddart’s *The Death-Wake* (1831), perform the poetics of mourning as an erotic discourse, and allow an intimate understanding of a dead other that is an experience of pleasure.

Much scholarship on the concept of eros considers it nearly synonymous with

sexual desire and bodily pleasure. This project establishes a mode of reading elegy through its figures and forms that conceptualizes eros in these poems beyond sexuality, and without the burdens of biography and history. By stepping outside the critical confines of generic convention, literary influence, and eros-as-sexual want, this dissertation reevaluates the interpretive possibilities of erotic desire and language in a genre that is not commonly read as an amorous mode of speech. For these elegists, knowledge itself is an object of amorous desire, and epistemological want is a motive force of poetic mourning. These poems arrive at the pleasure of this knowledge through verse forms and figures of speech that perform an intimate textual relationship between the living and the dead, and when these linguistic events occur, the elegies reveal themselves as love poems.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Jordan L. Green

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
State University of New York at Buffalo
University of Delaware, Newark

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2017, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, English, 2012, State University of New York at Buffalo
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2001, University of Delaware

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Nineteenth-century British Literature
Poetry and Poetics
Critical Theory

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, University of Oregon, 2005-2007, 2013-2017
Teaching Assistant, SUNY Buffalo, 2007-2012

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Department of English Sherwood Travel Award, University of Oregon, 2016
Department of English Ernst Dissertation Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2015
Honors Degree, Magna cum Laude, University of Delaware, 2001
University Dean's Scholar, University of Delaware, 1998-2001
Phi Beta Kappa, University of Delaware, 2000
Honors Program Essay Scholarship Winner, University of Delaware, 1997

PUBLICATIONS:

“A Fierce Sublime: Violence, Violation, and the Limits of Ethics in Robinson
Jeffers’s ‘Hurt Hawks.’” *The Rocky Mountain Review* Vol. 63.1 (2009):
13-25. Print.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the Department of English for warmly and graciously welcoming me back to this program after many years away, and for the Department's support in the form of the Ernst Dissertation Fellowship in 2015 and the Sherwood Travel Award in 2016. I give my sincerest thanks to my committee members—Professors Forest Pyle, Heidi Kaufman, Veronica Alfano, and Lowell Bowditch—who have all been fully supportive interlocutors for this project. I could not have asked to work with better mentors and scholars, and I am grateful for their encouragement and intellectual generosity.

For my parents, my teachers, and my friends.

And, for M.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. “ANOTHER SPLENDOUR ON HIS MOUTH ALIT”: SHELLEYAN METONYMY AND PLATONIC EROTICISM IN <i>ADONAIS</i>	23
III. “AS THOUGH A HAND WERE IN MY HAND TO HOLD”: EROTIC FIGURATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN SWINBURNE’S <i>AVE ATQUE VALE</i>	66
IV. NECROPHILIC EROS IN THOMAS TOD STODDART’S <i>THE DEATH-WAKE; OR, LUNACY: A NECROMAUNT IN THREE CHIMERAS</i>	117
V. CODA: “A HAND THAT CAN BE CLASP’D NO MORE”: NOTES ON RETURNING TO TENNYSON’S <i>IN MEMORIAM</i>	145
REFERENCES CITED	156

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I begin this dissertation with the following proposition: elegies are love poems. As they speak of or to an absent other who is a figure or object of intense desire and pleasure, represented as in possession of some privileged knowledge available only to the poetic speaker, and the attainment of which is ever just beyond their grasp, mourning poems think like love poems. My study of elegy stems from this observation that the language of poetic mourning in the nineteenth century has powerful echoes in the language of love. This project explores the elegiac relationship between the speaker and the lost object in canonical and non-canonical elegiac texts that range across the middle of the nineteenth century, from *Adonais* in 1821, *The Death-Wake* in 1831, *In Memoriam* in 1850, and through *Ave Atque Vale* in 1867. These poems perform what I am calling a “textually erotic” relationship, or a textual intimacy, in which pleasure is a somatic and intellectual experience that inheres in the language of epistemological want and in certain rhetorical figures and formal structures of desire. In the poetry of mourning, I will argue, language is the elegiac subject’s erotic potential.

Elegy speaks in the absence of an other who can respond. A central aim of this project is to think about other possibilities for this “other,” interpretive opportunities that are raised in the language and form of these elegies. The lost object in elegy does not need to be a person, or even an object at all, but can be an experience or event, a sensation, an affect, or a concept that gives the elegiac speaker knowledge and pleasure of some kind.¹ What I mean is that elegiac love, like Platonic love, is ultimately for

¹ This is a variation of what John Rosenberg writes in *Elegy for an Age*, in which he defines elegy as any poem about a personal loss. I expand on Rosenberg later in the introduction.

something other than an other (a human other)—it is a love of knowledge, of wisdom, of the Good, mediated by the pleasure of the poetic text. I raise this possibility to introduce a way of thinking about eros that does not circumscribe it within the sexual body, and an understanding of knowledge and knowing that does not limit them to cognition, intuition, and mental experience, but pursues them as erotic events that course through the multiple speaking and silent bodies in the elegies, and through the bodies of the elegiac texts themselves, and even as they cross over to the position of the reading body.

The following chapters seek to discover what erotic knowledge sounds and looks like, what it tastes like and how it feels; and further, how these figures and objects that exist only in language allow the living speaker to touch the dead. I propose that, for Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Thomas Tod Stoddart, poetic mourning is grounded in a desire to know and love the dead. In these poems, figuration and form are the means by which the mourning poet seeks to gain an intimate knowledge of the lost object, and it is this desire for intimate knowledge of the other that makes these elegies erotic. Put differently, the linguistic encounter between the living speaker and the dead love-object in these poems reveals that knowledge itself (in various forms which I detail below) can be an object, and knowing an experience, of pleasure, something that can be pursued “like a lover.”²

The argument I pursue throughout this project seeks to orient discussions of elegy and eroticism around their textuality—around figuration, versification, and form—as the means of writing desire for the lost love-object. The textual dimension of elegiac eros happens rhetorically through particular figures of speech, and formally through meter,

² This simile, “like a lover,” is from Swinburne’s *Ave Atque Vale*; I return to it in Chapter 2.

grammar, and even punctuation, which are the mechanisms of poetic pleasure. Yet the difficulty of determining what pleasure is and means in elegy is already apparent, and I aim to show how these elegies thematize the nature and particular qualities of pleasure as a continual problem of language that seeks the dead. Following this elusive pleasure through the body and bodies of the elegiac text is another main goal of this project.

This dissertation also seeks to address the delightfully playful and cheeky question posed by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*: “[W]hat if knowledge itself were *delicious*?” (23).³ Barthes, of course, ever the punster, always has in mind the multiplicity of language, and here, “delicious” has a double meaning: the first is metaphorical and signifies knowledge as an immaterial, conceptual object of desire; the second, and more interesting, implies that knowledge is a somatic pleasure—in this instance, delicious knowledge delights the sense of taste. I introduce Barthes as a model to show how *Adonais*, *Ave Atque Vale*, *The Death-Wake*, and *In Memoriam* each raise the possibility that knowledge and knowing can be experienced as a delectation.

Elegiac Tremblings

A study of eros in nineteenth-century British poetry—perhaps in any field of Western humanistic thought—should probably begin with Plato, and I take my concept of eros from the *Symposium*. The fundamental question of this dialogue is over the nature of E/eros, or love. The guests at the banquet for Agathon—Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Socrates, Alcibiades—each take turns trying to explain what eros is. My interest, though, lies in the character who is not there: Diotima (as spoken by

³ Barthes asks this question in the immediate context of the political implications of pleasure as being right or left, clerisy or radicalism; I aim to place it into conversation with the erotic and epistemological conditions of the elegy.

Socrates). She poses to Socrates a variation of the fundamental question of this dissertation: how are we to understand what love and lovers are, what they seek and desire?⁴ “Why do we call some people lovers and not others?”, she asks (205b). Her answer is characteristically elliptical: “In essence, every type of desire for good things or happiness is what constitutes, in all cases, ‘powerful and treacherous love’. But this can be approached by many routes, and those who do so by other means, such as making money or athletics or philosophy, aren’t described as ‘loving’ or ‘lovers’. It’s only those whose enthusiasm is directed at one specific type who are described by terminology that belongs to the whole class, that of love, loving and lovers” (205d).⁵ In the following chapters, I put pressure on the “type[s]” and “terminology” of love and lovers in the elegies to think about how the elegiac relation can be written as an erotic relation between the living and the dead.

Another aspect of Platonic thought that resonates in the elegies and informs my readings is the double register of touch and touching. When thinking about the language of Platonic eros, it caught my attention that, despite the insistence that transcendence of the body is ultimately necessary for attaining spiritual immortality and possessing “the Good,” the rhetoric of touch, though problematic and unstable, seems crucial for elaborating the conditions of eros. Two brief quotations and a close reading should demonstrate how touch can be an epistemological act, a mode of understanding: “[A]ll

⁴ I should note here that the definition of eros, which is the fundamental question of the *Symposium*, changes reference and meaning throughout the dialogue. Sometimes eros and love are used interchangeably, sometimes in contrast—alighting on a stable definition will continue to be a problem for the dialogue and this dissertation.

⁵ The comparison Diotima makes is to writing/poiesis itself: “When anything comes into being which did not exist before,” she says, “the cause of this is always composition” (206a, 43).

who rightly touch philosophy, study nothing else than to *die*, and to be *dead*,” Plato says.⁶ In positing philosophy as something touchable, and touching as a mode of studying (of knowledge), the body that touches and is touched by philosophy is the necessary intermediary that translates sense perception into knowledge. In my readings, I examine particular figures of speech that function as acts of touch, that allow the elegiac speaker to touch the dead with language. Agathon speaks a variation of this idea that imagines touching as an act of Love: Eros is “so skilled a poet that he makes others into poets. Everyone turns into a poet [...] when he is touched by Love. We may take this as evidence that Love is a good composer” he says (196e).⁷ “Love” is both a god and a concept in the *Symposium*, and the creator of poets. In the first quotation, touching enables philosophical understanding; in the second, touching makes poets. In both examples, though Plato is (or at least thinks he is) using “touch” figuratively to mean “think” or “study” or “inspire,” the term also invokes a physical touching.

Earlier in the *Symposium*, for instance, when Socrates arrives to the banquet being held in honor of Agathon’s winning a poetry competition, the rhetoric of touch turns interestingly and explicitly toward the physical body: “Come hither,” Agathon says to Socrates, “and sit down by me; so that by the mere touch of one so wise as you are, [*d*] I may enjoy the fruit of thy meditations.” Socrates replies, archly, but not dismissively: “It would be well, Agathon, if wisdom were of such a nature as that when we touched each other, it would overflow of its own accord, from him who possesses much to him who

⁶ I have not been able to find the original source of this quote in Plato’s work. See Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures*. London and New York: Macmillan, 144. Print. George Levine uses this quotation as an epigram to his book, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2002. 1.

⁷ Later, Diotima says: “[B]ecause Love inspires people to poetry, and poetry is identical to wisdom, Love is wise” (74, n. 82).

possesses little [...] [*e*] If wisdom had this property, I should esteem myself most fortunate in reclining near to you. I should thus soon be filled, I think, with the most beautiful and various wisdom” (7). While Socrates may say this wistfully, in the hope that it might be true, and regret that it is not, the possibility that arises here also arises, in various ways, in *Adonais*, *Ave Atque Vale*, and *The Death-Wake*. These poems seek, through multiple rhetorical and formal strategies, and with varying degrees of success, ways of touching the dead so that they, like Agathon, might come to intimate knowledge of their desire.⁸

The particular problem of elegiac knowledge, however, is that the object of desire is dead and unavailable to the poets. How, then, can the living speakers attain the deathly knowledge they seek? The following chapters will show that in the context of elegy, knowledge is available only through figures and figuration, which allows the speaker to inscribe the love object in the materiality of language, which I take up shortly. I will argue that in the absence of an other who can respond, the dead poet’s *corpus* becomes the material substitute for the dead poet himself, and the site of a metonymic relationship between the speaker and the dead. The elegiac text, in other words, is a way of touching the dead with language. I present an example here from *Adonais*, which I develop in Chapter One, to briefly illustrate how the poem itself helps us to read the process of Platonic eros in the nineteenth-century elegy as a textual condition, by which I mean a relationship between elegist and elegized enacted in and by the figurative language of the

⁸ In Gill’s translation, this reads: “‘Come and lie down beside me,’ Agathon says to him, ‘so that, by contact with you, I can share the piece of wisdom that came to you in the porch’” (175d, 7). Socrates replies, archly, but not dismissively: “‘How splendid it would be, Agathon, if wisdom was the sort of thing that could flow from the fuller to the emptier of us when we touch each other [...] If wisdom is really like that, I regard it as a great privilege to share your couch. I expect to be filled up from your rich supply of fine wisdom’” (175e, 7). Shelley’s translation of this scene has subtle stylistic and word-choice differences that may have implications for this close reading, which I will develop in future work.

text. In stanza nine, Shelley is in the middle of conventionally invoking a long procession of mourners to visit Adonais's grave and share his own grief:

O, weep for Adonais!—The quick Dreams,
The passion-winged Ministers of thought,
Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams
Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught
The love which was its music, wander not,— (ll. 73-77)

These “quick Dreams,” Adonais’s “flocks,” are representations of Keats’s own poetic inventions, figures arisen from his poetic corpus.⁹ When Shelley calls on them here to mourn their creator, they are the figure of speech of metonymy, which reveals relationships with connected or closely associated words, ideas, and objects.¹⁰ When I return to this passage in Chapter One, I explore how this figure of speech functions to reveal or posit the body of the dead poet in the body of the text, a process that makes reading the dead poet’s corpus an act of touching of his body with/in language. The “quick Dreams” that are metonymic representations of Adonais’s poems, are also “passion-winged Ministers of thought,” representations of Keatsian love and knowledge.¹¹ By linguistically linking the textual “bodies” (figures) in Keats’s poetry to

⁹ The *Norton Critical Edition* identifies the “quick Dreams” as “living Dreams,” “personifications” of “various aspects of Keats’s mental life as his *flocks*, according to the tradition of pastoral elegy” (l. 73, n. 2, 413).

¹⁰ Roman Jakobson has identified metonymy as a linguistic process that works by contiguity, and is the thought-structure of narrative prose. Later, I expand on the figure of metonymy in elegy and explain how it works differently than metaphor, which Jakobson claims is the thought-structure of poetry.

¹¹ In my reading of *Adonais* in Chapter One, I attempt to explain what “Keatsian love and knowledge” mean for Shelley, and how this might shape his figures.

the now absent body of Keats himself, amorous and epistemological desire “happen” in a single, eroticized figure of speech.¹²

A related difficulty of specifying the kind or nature of this knowledge of the dead lies in the fact that there is no single or stable object of deathly knowledge that can be articulated precisely.¹³ Death closes off the possibility of a concrete knowledge of the lost object in itself, and in the absence of this possibility, the only kind of knowledge available to the poetic speaker is an understanding of his *relationship* with the lost love-object. This relational knowledge is not a determinate understanding of subject and object as discrete entities; rather, it is an awareness akin to what Roland Barthes calls the “transport”—the avenue or structure of linguistic interaction—between the desiring subject and the object of desire.¹⁴ My poets seek this relational knowledge through figures of speech that signify the nature of the relation between themselves as living, speaking subjects and their dead love-objects. A figure of speech is not itself a discrete subject or a discrete object, but a linguistic construction of the relationship between a discrete subject and a discrete object; a more conventional definition of a figure of speech is: “a ‘trope’ or ‘turn’ in language from the proper or literal meaning, and is therefore entirely intralinguistic.”¹⁵ The figures I discuss are not explicitly Platonic in the sense that Socrates himself employs them to explain Eros in *Symposium*; rather, they are

¹² As it desires the dead as an object of knowledge, and takes pleasure in the pursuit of that knowledge, the elegiac text becomes a figure of the epistemology of dying and death.

¹³ See Goodwin and Bronfen, *Death and Representation*, and Burke, “Thanatopsis for Critics.”

¹⁴ Kostenbaum, Wayne: “In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, he succinctly described his hermeneutic method: ‘I listen to the message’s transport, not the message.’ Banish the message. Preserve the exaltation that surrounds it. Investigate the perfume that the message leaves behind” (52).

¹⁵ Credit is due to Forest Pyle for this articulation.

structurally Platonic in how they operate in the text to draw together the εραστες (*erastes*) and the ερομενος (*eromenos*), the lover/amorous subject and the beloved object, in a relation grounded on the desire for knowledge.

The figural and epistemological possibilities of elegiac eroticism I examine in this project reveal a correspondence to a modern theory of language, love, and knowledge we find in Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1978).¹⁶ In the discourse of love, Barthes writes seductively, "Language is a skin; I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire" (73). The amorous elegiac speakers in these poems, I aim to show, press their language over, and into, and through, the material and metonymic body of the love object, like the Barthesian lover runs fingers over a beloved's skin. These "tremblings" of language manifest in particular moments of figural and formal touch between the living speaker and the dead love-object.

Why the Eros of Mourning?¹⁷

The elegy is ideal for rethinking eros because, as a love poem as well as a death poem, its language dwells at and seeks to traverse the boundary between life and death. These conditions—love and death—are the extremes of human experience; they occupy the farthest reaches of desire, knowledge, and fear, and inhabit the most intimate spaces of the mind. The confrontation with death that elegy stages is a prime opportunity through which to think about the relationship between poetic pleasure and knowledge because it presents the limit case of a desiring consciousness confronting an ultimately

¹⁶ This is the year of the English translation. It was originally published in French in 1977.

¹⁷ *Eros in Mourning* is the title of Henry Staten's 2001 book.

unknowable condition. Elegiac speech is the furthest expression of an excessive desire—the desire for intimacy with the dead—and as such it illuminates the point where the poet's longing reaches its limit in language and pathos.¹⁸

My reinterpretation of Eros will show it to be a complex mode of epistemological desire in which the elegist's pursuit of a poetic and philosophical knowledge of death gives intellectual and bodily—but not necessarily sexual—pleasure. It may seem odd to claim that eroticism is not about sexual pleasure, and at the same time that the elegy does represent a kind of amorous relation between the poets that is structurally and rhetorically analogous to a lover's discourse. How can Shelley and Keats, or Swinburne and Baudelaire, be considered to have an erotic relationship if sexual desire is not at issue between them, and no direct reciprocity is possible? The question asks that we recall the Platonic origins of Eros, as an experience of pleasure and knowledge. This is not an anachronistic application of Platonic thought to the text, but rather an attempt to show how these texts have already inscribed the epistemological pleasure of Platonic eros.

We will also gain a more flexible and yet more precise, sense of elegiac figuration in that metonymy need not be relegated to narrative, and in that the relational action of a figure of speech signifies more insistently in elegy because the two objects or ideas that a figure can put in relation dwell on opposite sides of the boundary of death. Put differently, when a living speaker tries to speak across the boundary of death, to reach for the lost-object, he finds it intangible, indistinguishable; when poets cannot grasp their

¹⁸ Harrison notes that Swinburne's work "entails a real existential concern as he used poetic depictions of carnal desire to 'express . . . his sense of life's inevitably tragic development for all spirited men and women: tragic because satisfying our passionate impulses is ultimately impossible'" (62). He also draws a smart connection to Swinburne's Romantic predecessors: "Like Byron and Keats, then, Swinburne subscribes to a Romantic tradition that 'generated a mythology of 'Soul-making'—of enrichment and redemption through desire and through suffering—that went far beyond orthodox conceptions of sexual morality and immorality' ('Swinburne's Losses' 690) (62).

desire in concrete terms due to death's opacity to the senses, the linguistic relation they create becomes their significance.

Elegy has long been a contested genre, and determining its particular nature and characteristics has been the difficult starting point for most major critical approaches to this literary mode. Karen Weisman, in her introduction to the recent *Oxford Handbook of The Elegy* (2010), writes, "Elegy inhabits a world of contradiction. The narrative of its historical development is torturous at best, and the unraveling of its salient preoccupations betrays a persistent entanglement with its generic and formalist relatives. In its adjectival form it is all-pervasive in literary criticism, and yet few scholars would profess certainty in knowing precisely what *elegiac* denotes" (1).¹⁹ As it has historically included an array of forms, meters, moods, speakers, and desires, elegy is among the most diffuse literary practices. Originally referring to a Greek stanzaic form—a couplet of hexameter and pentameter lines (though even this seems not to be agreed on)—its meaning has undergone significant changes over the course of its history.²⁰ The Early Modern elegy (which begins with Spenser's "Astrophel" (1595) for Sir Philip Sydney, for example, has roots in classical love poetry and amatory complaint.²¹ It is only by the

¹⁹ She continues, in language that anticipates some of my own: "Most scholars of post-classical elegy trace its foundations to antiquity, yet in the world of classical studies, there is still no consensus on the origin of elegy [...] When taken in the more contemporary sense as the framing of loss, elegy can be pulled between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the present life of sorrow and the vanished past of putative greater joy. Between the extremes of life and death, joy and sorrow, the receding past and the swiftly moving present, falls the elegy as we know it today. This is a burden uncertainly borne by many elegiac poems and art forms. More than any other literary kind, elegy pushes against the limits of our expressive resources precisely at the very moment in which we confront our mortality, which is as much to say that it throws into relief the inefficacy of language precisely when we need it most" (1).

²⁰ See Gregory Nagy, "Ancient Greek Elegy" in *The Oxford Handbook of The Elegy* (2010).

²¹ "Classical" love elegy is the main the term Gordon Braden uses in his essay in *The Oxford Handbook*, "Classical Love Elegy in the Renaissance (and After)" (153). It is also referred to as the "Latin" love elegy (George Luck), or the "Roman" love elegy, and sometimes these terms are used interchangeably.

mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Pfau argues, that elegy comes to be understood in its modern sense, as the poetry of mourning.²² Though it converges in the late eighteenth century around the expression and consolation of grief, in the early nineteenth century it undergoes significant formal and thematic expansions that Stuart Curran considers to represent “Romantic elegiac hybridity” (238).²³ And, in the Victorian era, John Rosenberg claims, the category of elegy expands even further, to become “a mode of expression that transcends all restrictions of genre” (4).²⁴

Thomas Pfau offers a compelling counter-history of elegy derived from Schiller and Hegel. He claims that “the elegiac [is] *the* defining characteristic of aesthetic production in Modernity” (548), which we are to understand as the historical self-consciousness of an era—in this case, the pre-Romantic and Romantic era—that thinks of itself and its art in terms of historical discontinuity.²⁵ What happens to the poetry of loss, and scholarship on the poetry of loss, when it can be expanded across all genres and forms, as Rosenberg implies, or absorbed into history itself, as Pfau suggests? The result of this literary-philosophical turn to “Modernity” in the late eighteenth century, with its

²² Thomas Pfau, “Mourning Modernity: Classical Antiquity, Romantic Theory, and Elegiac Form,” *The Oxford Handbook of The Elegy*, 546.

²³ See Stuart Curran, “Romantic Elegiac Hybridity,” in *The Oxford Handbook*.

²⁴ It remains, nonetheless, one of the most conventionally- determined genres; that is, elegy is (rather) consistently identified as a genre through an extensive set of conventions. According to Peter Sacks, these include: a pastoral setting, vegetation myths and deities, an invocation to the Muse, a procession of mourners, the questioning and cursing of death, praise for the dead, repetition and refrain, traditional images of resurrection, the eclogic division between mourning voices, poetic contests and rewards, and the movement from grief to consolation through the possibility of immortality, all of which are done with an unusual degree of self-consciousness over the act of elegy itself (2).

²⁵ My argument pushes against what he considers the theoretical limitations of “formal readings” that attend to such things as prosody, tone, and literary self-consciousness. I consider attending to the internal logic and movements of elegy is precisely how we can understand the erotic epistemology of nineteenth-century elegiac poetry.

punctuated sense of history, has been that “elegy” has come to mean nearly any poem, adhering to genre convention or not, that expresses a deeply felt personal loss.²⁶ And further, if any poem that expresses a profound loss can be called “elegiac,” then much of post-Enlightenment poetry would in some way fall under this heading, and “elegy” becomes less a literary mode of mourning than a historical condition that can, incidentally, be expressed in poetry.²⁷ Ironically, the genre that confronts the final boundary of mortal experience threatens to become a genre without bounds. A parallel irony arises from my claim that elegiac poems express a desire for knowledge in response to an event that marks the foreclosure of knowledge.

One further difficulty of classifying elegy is that the poetry of mourning can take a multitude of formal shapes. The three canonical elegies I look at, for instance, are composed in three distinct stanzaic forms: Spenserian stanza, *In Memoriam* stanza, and, for lack of a more precise term, the elaborately rhymed and metered, eleven-line *Ave*

²⁶ This view of elegy belongs originally to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who insisted that, “although elegy may treat of any subject, it must remain ‘always and exclusively’ personal”; and his own claim for elegy is that it must “center on personal loss, although that loss may be of places or beliefs as well as persons, and the person may be imaginary” (Rosenberg 4).

²⁷ The range of poems in the long nineteenth-century that are not in the canonical elegiac tradition but are clearly “elegiac” is quite broad. A small selection includes: Charlotte Smith’s “Elegiac Sonnets” (1785); Wordsworth’s “Elegiac Stanzas” (1807); “posthumous voice” death lyrics of Christina Rossetti (1830-94), and toward the end of the century, Oscar Wilde’s sonnets on the graves of Shelley and Keats (1881). From these diverse examples, we can begin to see the categorization problems Weisman refers to, yet the difficulty of alighting on a stable definition is precisely what makes it such an exciting problem for scholarship. This term comes from Claire Raymond, whose book *The Posthumous Voice in Women’s Writing from Mary Shelley to Sylvia Plath* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006). Beyond the self-identified elegies *Adonais*, *In Memoriam*, “Thyrsis,” and *Ave Atque Vale*, examples of such formal stanzaic poems in the nineteenth century include: Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, Wordsworth’s “Elegiac Stanzas,” Keats’s ballad “La Belle Dame sans Merci” and various sonnets, Shelley’s “To Wordsworth” and the *terza rima* “The Triumph of Life,” and the sonnet sequences “The House of Life,” “Monna Innominata,” and “Modern Love,” among many others. Examples of elegiac poems in non-stanzaic forms would include: Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode,” Shelley’s “To Constantia” and “The Retrospect,” the blank-verse “Alastor,” and “Epipsychidion,” numerous works by Emily Bronte and Hopkins, and Swinburne’s “Anactoria,” again among many others. And other types of elegiac lyrics would include Wordsworth’s “Lucy” poems and lyrical ballads like “Michael” and “Resolution and Independence,” as well as many parts of *The Prelude*. This is just a brief listing of poems that may be considered elegiac under Rosenberg’s expansive rubric, demonstrating the perhaps overly inclusive conditions “elegy” has come to involve.

Atque Vale stanza. The outlier of this project, Stoddart's *The Death-Wake*, is of a wholly different formal order. The poem bends and twists grief into a narrative composed in wild, sinuous, yet impressively taught, heroic couplets. The heroic couplet is an unusual choice not only for an elegy but for a gothic "Necromaunt"—a portmanteau of "necrophilic" and "romaunt" (romance)—and I explore the verse form and its implications in greater depth in Chapter Three.

Scholarship on the elegy has tended to remain tied to biographical, conventional, and intertextual interpretations, while critical approaches to the concept of eros generally consider erotic experience to be synonymous with sexual desire and bodily pleasure.²⁸ My arguments will be grounded in figurative language and the formal-metrical environments of these elegies. I contend that nineteenth-century poetic performances of erotic desire are inherently epistemological; that is, their expressions of desire consistently involve a longing to know and take pleasure in the lost-object. By stepping outside the critical confines of generic convention, literary influence, and eros-as-sexual want, I aim to reevaluate the status of erotic desire and language in a genre that is no longer viewed as an amorous mode of speech.²⁹ Reading elegy as an erotic discourse sets

²⁸ The most influential of these are Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973); Jerome McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (1972); and Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (1985). There are, of course, notable exceptions to this, which I address below.

²⁹ The history of elegy is difficult to trace for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the term originally refers to an ancient Greek metrical structure (a rhymed couplet of iambic hexameter and pentameter) and not to the genre classification that we associate it with today. Yet there are early roots of elegiac eros in what is referred to as the "classical" (or "Latin" or "Roman") love elegy, and even earlier roots in the ancient Greek elegy. For more, see Gregory Nagy on "Ancient Greek Elegy" and Gordon Braden on "Classical Love Elegy" in *The Oxford Handbook of The Elegy* (2010). Later in this introduction, I discuss this history in greater depth to complicate the notion that elegy in Modernity is not generally understood as an amorous mode of speech.

up the mourning relation as one between lovers, in a linguistic structure that places the elegiac speaker in the subject position of a lover.

As a mode of understanding, eros is interpretive, and Geraldine Friedman, draws on Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics as a model for how an object of desire—in my context, the lost object, the dead poet—can become, as she writes, “an interlocutor on the level of a human subject.” Shelley, Swinburne, Stoddart, and Tennyson each, in multiple and various ways, represent their dead poet as or in a text or textual body; in other words, as a “work of art [that] ‘says something’ and as such is ‘like a person.’” Representing the “hermeneutical problem as ‘lovers talking to each other’ [...] suggests privileged access between two selves” and “implies that all human experience, including aesthetic experience, has an erotic potential” (Friedman 226).³⁰ The definition of eros here as “privileged access between two selves” is what I interpret as intimacy. I elaborate this further in Chapter One, in the section on Shelley's poetic theory, to discuss the affinities between Shelleyan and Platonic eros, as well as the obstacles to reciprocation when the lost object is dead, in order to present an alternate conception—a textual conception—of elegiac mutuality.³¹ The theory of eros and/as epistemology I develop in regard to *Adonais* will serve to ground my readings of the other poems.

Chapter One initiates the project by investigating the nuances of a textually erotic relationship to explain how this relationship is determined by poetic figuration and poetic form. To show how *Adonais* is an erotic text, I approach the poem from outside the

³⁰ Geraldine Friedman, in an incisive essay that influenced my thinking on this issue, discusses the erotic potential of the interpretive act in Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” as resonant with how Gadamer writes the “figure of interpretation as erotic conversation” (226).

³¹ Put differently, I mean to shift the ground and terms of the erotic-elegiac relation from the dead poet to the dead poet's corpus.

confines of biographical criticism and generic convention, to focus on its subtle figurations of erotic desire, on its representation of bodies—living and dead—as sites of pleasure and knowledge, on Urania’s oddly sexual rhetoric, and finally, on the poem’s virtuosic repurposing of the Spenserian stanza as a formalization of his love for the figure of Keats.³² The stanzas I examine each perform what I am calling an “elegiac eroticism.” This term, elegiac eroticism, is a mourning love for the dead poet that is grounded not in a personal relationship, nor in a generically conventional or competitive relationship. Instead, it arises from Shelley’s representation of Keats as a body of knowledge and pleasure through the figures of his poetic corpus, the only “part” or related object still available to him. Put differently, elegiac eroticism is at work in those moments when the poem represents Keats as an object of knowledge that Shelley pursues as if he were an object of amorous desire.

Further, I claim that for a poet like Shelley, to situate an idea or person within the most intimate recess of himself—the imagination—with such force and urgency demonstrates the depth of his feeling. The imagination for Shelley is the prime agent of Poetry in human experience, so to elegize Keats in this way is not, as critics such as Leavis and McGann have claimed, a solipsistic act of literary Platonism or a self-referential and self-interested aestheticism, but rather an intimate act, an act of love.³³

³² On Shelley’s use of the Spenserian stanza, see Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (1991). I refer to this text later in this chapter, in my examination of the poem’s stanzaic form as a materialization of Shelleyan eros.

³³ It is the “Power” he alludes to in “Mont Blanc.”

“Love-object,” then, is an appropriate term for Keats, and will be later for Baudelaire, Julio and Agathe, and Hallam.³⁴

The next focus of this chapter is the goddess and Muse, Urania. She plays a number of roles beyond Muse, and is called by a number of names, such as “might Mother,” “melancholy Mother,” and “Most musical of mourners.” Urania is also one of the poem’s clearest references to Platonic eros, as in the *Symposium* she represents both aspects of the love goddess—Venus Urania and Venus Aphrodite, or Uranian Venus and Pandemian Venus. But it is in her own speech that Shelley writes her as an erotic figure whose longing for Adonais vibrates with the passion of a lover. As an imperfect Platonic lover, however, Urania comes to reflect Shelley’s ambivalence not only toward Keats, but toward his own Platonism. Barthes offers a nuanced model for elaborating the language of Shelleyan eros in *A Lover’s Discourse*.³⁵ When Barthes seeks the experience of a lover who is “speaking within himself, amorously, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak” (3), he is writing the erotic condition of the elegist. My readings of

³⁴ Kelvin Everest, however, in contrast to McGann, and Epstein, argues that “Adonais differs from other English elegies in celebrating its subject throughout as a more important poet than the author, which is what Shelley really judged Keats to be. The poem is a courteously elaborated compliment to its subject as a poet who, it is anticipated, is about to take his place among the major English poets of both past and present, whose tradition he has embodied and sustained. In *Adonais* conception, form, style, imagery, and allusion are all to be understood as in graceful honour of the dead” (237). Everest makes this claim based on letters written by Shelley in direct reference to Keats’s work as well as on the critical reception of his poetry in publications like *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, *British Critic*, and *Quarterly Review*, which Shelley saw also as an affront to his own work. Everest states, “Shelley’s judgement of *Hyperion* in the first paragraph of the Preface to *Adonais* is typical of all his recorded views of that poem: ‘I consider the fragment of *Hyperion* as second to nothing that was ever produced by a writer of the same years’” (259, n. 1). And, “In a letter to Marianne Hunt of 29 October 1820,” Everest tells us, “Shelley reiterated his wish to help Keats in his illness by looking after him in Italy, and wrote: ‘I am aware indeed in part [tha]t I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass [me] and this is an additional motive & will be an added pleasure’” (260, n. 2).

³⁵ In Chapters Two and Three, I argue that this formulation of the lover also shapes those elegies.

these moments will illustrate how *Adonais* is an acute site of Platonic eros.³⁶ I end the chapter by thinking about how the poem's intervention into the discourse of love and mourning shapes the current of elegiac eroticism that I propose flows through the other elegies I take up in later chapters.

Chapter Two reads Swinburne's *Ave Atque Vale* as an exploration of the erotic potential of the elegiac encounter. This chapter is interested in what happens to Swinburne's language when it encounters the dead, and will examine key moments in the elegy when figures of speech (like prosopopoeia, metonymy, and simile), and figures of bodily affect (like synaesthesia), confront the obscure, immaterial bodies and objects of death. What scholars from Eliot through Rosenberg have identified as the fundamental "diffuseness" of Swinburne's poetry, I will articulate as a textual performance of the multi-sensory condition of synaesthesia. In general, synaesthesia is firstly a condition of the bodily senses, which happens when one sense perception is intermixed with another, such that, for instance, sights have a smell, or sounds have a taste. In this intermixed sensory state, the faculty and boundary of each individual sense dissolve into each other and lose specificity and particularity. What is special about synaesthesia in *Ave Atque Vale* is the epistemological and affective urgency we find in the multi-sensory descriptions of death and the insensate dead. In this chapter, I show how this multi-sensory experience occurs on the level of speech, how in the elegy, synaesthesia is a textual condition that happens within its figures of speech.

³⁶ It is unsurprising that his desire for perfect intimacy with another has its clearest and most impassioned expression in his greatest love poem, "Epipsychidion," which interestingly is also considered by scholars to be one of his most Platonic poems. In this text, Shelley's ideal of love is that his and his beloved's "breath shall intermix," and "The fountains of our deepest life, shall be / Confused in passion's golden purity"; "We shall become the same," he cries out, "we shall be one / Spirit within two frames, oh! Wherefore two? [...] One hope within two wills, one will beneath / Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death, / One Heaven, on Hell, one immortality, / And one annihilation" (ll. 570-87).

My reading of *Ave Atque Vale* responds to two common critical views on the nature of eroticism and the nature of classicism in Swinburne's poetry. The first position holds that Swinburne is an "erotic" poet, a reputation he acquired at the beginning of his career, and that is now something of a critical commonplace that predominantly refers to the adventurous representations of sexual pleasure in his work. This assertion tends to be grounded on the impression that erotic experience is synonymous with sexual desire and bodily pleasure.³⁷ Yet, the term itself is not often investigated for other interpretive possibilities that may allow us to better understand the subtle complexities of Swinburnean eros. A crucial goal of this chapter is to interrogate this association and demonstrate the poetic and epistemological virtues of thinking eros beyond the sexual body.³⁸ My aim is to discover whether there is scholarly value in shifting our understanding of the concept of eros from something circumscribed within the sexual body to a more fully embodied condition of knowledge. The second position this chapter investigates is the extent and manifestation of his affinity for Greek thought and art. Scholarship generally seeks out Swinburne's Hellenism as it inhabits references and allusions to the classical past, and as it manifests in his mastery of attic forms and meters, such as Sapphics and Hendecasyllabics.

This chapter also considers the epistemological possibilities of Swinburnean eros, possibilities that have generally been overlooked in scholarship focused primarily on

³⁷ This narrow view of eroticism is not exclusive to Swinburne criticism: it reverberates throughout Victorian literary studies, although due to the ingrained-ness of this long-standing impression, is more problematic for him than for his Victorian contemporaries. The chapter will detail these critical responses.

³⁸ Brennan explains this connection thusly: "Desire, as Swinburne presents it, is closely connected with the work of thinking. How is it possible to pursue the dead in thought if one does not believe in a life or reality beyond the present? This problem brings Swinburne to the potential, and perhaps the limit, of thought itself—what Deleuze calls a thought without an image. How Baudelaire symbolizes this limit says much about how Swinburne conceives the poet's immanent connection with the present" (263-4).

representations of sexuality. A key point will be to show how erotic experience in Swinburne has linguistic, formal, and epistemological—which is to say, poetic—potential beyond sexual pleasure. By reading a poem that is not considered among his “erotic” texts, this chapter seeks a textual understanding of erotic experience, one that considers Swinburnean eros a product of his figures. In the end, I hope to show that *Ave Atque Vale* inscribes a textually erotic relationship between Swinburne and Baudelaire that represents the dead poet as an object of knowledge and pleasure. My argument comes to rest with the claim that erotic experience in Swinburne’s poetry is fundamentally epistemological, that what inheres even in the explicitly sexual poems is a striving for some kind of knowledge beyond the carnal, and below the sensuous surface of the body.

In the third chapter, I look beyond the canonical elegies to pursue the limit case of poetic mourning, a work in which mourning speech turns into necrophilia. This text that ventures to the extremity of mourning is all but unknown and requires contextualization, which I detail in the chapter. Thomas Tod Stoddart (1810-1880) is the author of *The Death Wake: or, Lunacy a Necromaunt in Three Chimeras* (1831), an example of what I call “necrophilic elegy.” What characterizes necrophilic mourning, and distinguishes this necrophilic elegy from the conventional elegies, is that the dead love-object—unlike Keats and Baudelaire—is not a poet, and so cannot be imagined as a metonymic figure *representing* a poetic corpus. In *The Death-Wake*, the corpse remains a corpse, does not turn the necrophile away from it; it remains, for him, a site and object of pleasure and knowledge. This is not to say that rhetorical figuration is not at work or play in these poems, of course; it is to say that in a necrophilic elegy, the body of the dead love

object—in its beauty and in its decay—remains the primary site of the lover’s desire.³⁹ In contrast, in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, the corpse is the material fact on which the poem is grounded, and the mourning poet seeks to recuperate his loss by transforming it into a figure of speech. Doing so allows him to avoid the abjection of the decomposing body itself and thereby continue to represent the dead beloved as an idealized image. But in a necrophilic elegy, the lover’s relationship to the body of the dead beloved continues on from where the conventional elegist’s stops.

Furthermore, reading *The Death-Wake* is an intellectually and viscerally disorienting experience. The singularly strange, multi-part title integrates a bodily action with a poetic genre in the portmanteau “necromaunt”—a combination of necrophilia and romance (romaunt)—and its division into “chimeras” rather than “books” or “parts” or “sections,” hints at the awesome weirdness of this text. This tale of a monk driven toward madness and necrophilia by the death of his beloved nun, resists generic classification and formal interpretation on multiple levels: 1) It is a narrative poem shot through with moments of lyric apostrophe and excess; 2) It is an elegy, though told not by the primary mourner himself; it is spoken by a third-person narrator; 3) The status of the narrator is consistently unstable in his relation to the lovers he elegizes, in relation to the time of his narration, as well as in relation to the time of the narrated events; constant temporal shifts are unannounced and unexplained, marked only by subtle shifts in grammatical tense; 4) The narrator’s inconsistent self-representation often blurs the identity of the speaking voice, obscuring who is a subject and agent, and who is the silent love object.

Speakers like Stoddart’s narrator and monk, I will show, step over the edge of mourning and into what Barthes calls the “dissolve” of pleasure: “the site of a loss [...]

³⁹ “Figurative language is the substance of poetry itself, the heart of the poetic” (Downing 73).

the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (7). This “dissolve” is the liminal space of elegy, where language, body, and death meet and touch. This kind of necrophilic eroticism, though still Platonic in its interdependence of knowledge and somatic pleasure, occurs at the boundary of abjection, a precipice on which pleasure and disgust are precariously balanced.

CHAPTER II

“ANOTHER SPLENDOR ON HIS MOUTH ALIT”: SHELLEYAN METONYMY AND PLATONIC EROTICISM IN *ADONAIS*

My argument in this chapter begins with this proposition: *Adonais* is a love poem. By this I mean that the elegy speaks in a language that represents Keats as a figure of poetic pleasure and knowledge—as, in other words, an erotic love object. To make this claim of *In Memoriam*, for instance, is not likely to be contentious, considering the intimacy of Tennyson’s friendship with Arthur Hallam; in fact, John Rosenberg has recently called Tennyson’s masterwork “one of the great love poems in English” (44). But Shelley and Keats were not particularly close in life, and so my proposal cannot be supported by biographical or historical interpretations. This chapter argues that the elegiac relationship in *Adonais* is a textually erotic relationship between the speaker and the lost-object that is performed rhetorically through particular figures of speech, and formally through the poem’s stanzaic structure. In *Adonais*, I contend, figuration and form are the means by which the mourning poet seeks to gain an intimate, albeit posthumous, knowledge of the lost-object. It is this desire for intimate knowledge of the other that dwells at the heart of Shelleyan Eros. As Shelley writes in “On Love” (1818), Love is

the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities, which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret, with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the

accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own
[...] (504)

This passage, pregnant with the language of epistemological want—in the desire to “meet with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own”—expresses Shelley’s understanding of the correspondence of love and knowledge, a pleasure immanent in the “nerves” that give exquisite delight as they “vibrate with the vibrations” of his own voice.⁴⁰ It articulates the chiastic, or intermixed, relation he experiences between the intellectual conditions of love and the affective conditions of knowing.⁴¹ Furthermore, and most importantly, this passage presents a Platonic view of love in which understanding another gives epistemological and somatic—which is to say, erotic—pleasure.

The difficulties of concisely communicating his conception of Love as/and knowledge in the essay parallel certain ontological and linguistic problems Shelley faces in the elegy (and which I continually face in my reading). One such obstacle to attaining this intimate knowledge of the other is particular to the elegiac genre itself: the fact that the other is dead and therefore cannot respond in language or reciprocate in action. If Shelleyan love, like Platonic love, is inter-relational, as the above passage from “On Love” indicates, it is predicated on the possibility of mutual reciprocation, and so the question arises: How can a poet establish such a connection with a dead other? In this

⁴⁰ See Diotima on spiritual procreation and giving birth in beauty.

⁴¹ The chiastic relation is an intermixing, a term I use with particular intention, as it is crucial in “Epipsychidion” as Shelley’s term for the similar love-relation that I find in *Adonais*: “Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound, / And our veins beat together; and our lips / With other eloquence than words, eclipse / The soul that burns between them, and the wells / Which boil under our being’s inmost cells, / The fountains of our deepest life, shall be / Confused in passion’s golden purity, / As mountain-springs under the morning Sun” (ll. 565-72).

chapter, I will argue that in the absence of an other who can respond, the dead poet's corpus becomes the figurative substitute, the site of a metonymic replacement, for the dead poet himself.

I also engage the predominant critical position, held by scholars such as Jerrold Hogle, William Ulmer, and Stuart Peterfreund, that holds metaphor to be the fundamental mode of Shelley's poetics of love, by investigating how another figure of speech—metonymy, particularly the metonymy of corpse and corpus—is in some ways better suited to perform Shelley's erotic desire for Keats. I suggest this because, while metaphor grasps for an unacknowledged similarity—an identification—between disparate things, and transforms them into each other, metonymy reaches for some integral aspect or element of the desired object when the object itself is absent. Metonymy, then, reveals a more immediate, rather than a distant, connection between the desirous subject and the desired object. I want to mention also that I am attempting here to rethink Roman Jakobson's theory of the metaphoric and metonymic poles of language, in which he privileges metaphor as the dominant figure of poetic speech, while positing metonymy as the dominant figure of narrative prose. My interpretation of *Adonais* posits metonymy as the figure of speech through which Shelley reaches for and tries to touch the dead Keats in language.

Another difficulty of specifying the kind or nature of this understanding of the dead lies in the fact that there is no single or stable object of knowledge that can be articulated precisely.⁴² Death closes off the possibility of a concrete knowledge of the lost object in

⁴² In the *Symposium*, we learn from Socrates that “Love is always love *of* something (34, 199e-200e), that is, Love always has an object, and this object is something that it desires but does not possess; therefore, he explains to Agathon, “desire is directed as something you need and that if you don't need something you

itself, and in the absence of this possibility, the only kind of knowledge available to the poetic speaker is an understanding of his *relationship* with the lost love-object.⁴³ This relational knowledge is not a determinate understanding of subject and object as discrete entities; rather, it is an awareness akin to what Roland Barthes calls the “transport”—the avenue or structure of linguistic interaction—between the desiring subject and the object of desire. I will show in the poem how the impassable boundary of death imposes imaginative and representational limits on Shelley’s ability to give concrete language to the object of his desire, yet insists at the same time that (the possibility of) an intimate understanding of and connection with the dead love-object is not available outside of language.⁴⁴

As with the difficulties the poem encounters when seeking to identify the specifics of the knowledge it desires, *Adonais* also struggles with the idealizing impulses of Shelley’s Platonism. When discussing the Platonism of the elegy, and Shelley’s Platonic inclinations in general, scholars have predominantly interpreted it as concerned primarily with the immortality of the soul, and while this interpretation holds true, as Eros is ultimately aimed at “possessing the good forever,” there is another current of Platonic thought moving through the text that elucidates the epistemological and somatic nuances of its desire for the dead—the concept of Eros that Plato expounds in the

don’t desire it” (34, 200a-b). Shelley encounters this difficulty throughout his work, actually, as his constant revisions and restatements of terms and definitions exemplify.

⁴³ The imperative for mutuality is cut off in this instance, as the consciousness that would be capable of understanding and representing death and the conditions of death would vanish when the subject dies.

⁴⁴ At the same time, though, as it seeks an intimate relation with (knowledge of) the dead Keats, the elegy struggles with the idealizing impulses of Shelley’s Platonism, and Shelley negotiates these limits by writing a mourning text that I believe resonates also with the decidedly non-Platonic, structural conception of love outlined in Roland Barthes’s *A Lover’s Discourse*.

Symposium. In “On Love,” Shelley already has imagined this possibility such a possibility in mind: to imagine, he writes,

that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another’s, if we feel, we would that another’s nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart’s best blood. This is Love. (503)

In this passage, the central idea is the notion of the “airy children of [the] brain” that are “born anew within another’s.” It is also important to note Shelley’s hope that “lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart’s best blood,” as this is a problem of elegy itself: the discontent of speaking to a dead love-object whose lips would be “of motionless ice” while the speaker’s own lips “quiver and burn with the heart’s best blood.” We will see this logic at work in stanzas twelve and twenty-six.

The tension between Platonic idealism and mortal skepticism in Shelley’s work has been investigated extensively in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, and especially so in *Adonais*. Mid-twentieth-century examinations of this tension, namely those by Notopoulos (1949) and Baker (1948), have generally favored an idealistic interpretation of the poem, based primarily on readings of its visionary final stanzas.⁴⁵ However, since Wasserman (1959 & 1972), this philosophical tension has become a problem not to be resolved but thematized as one of Shelley’s fundamental poetic drives

⁴⁵ Notopoulos also notes this elsewhere in the poem, writing of stanza forty-two: “He is made one with Nature [...] Which wields the world with never-wearied love, / Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.” He claims that “the Platonic Beauty in these lines is also synonymous with Love” (296). The previous lines walk through his logic, of the Eternal which is Nature and Power, which in comparison to Hymn to Intellectual Beauty “shows that the Eternal, Nature, and Power are variant facets of Intellectual Beauty,” which “is here presented in its immanent and transcendent character; it sustains the world from beneath and kindles it from above with eternal love; thus it is shown that the Platonic Beauty in these lines is also synonymous with Love” (Notopoulos 296).

and anxieties. By focusing on the figural eroticism in *Adonais*, I do not aim to discount the achievements of this scholarship that is concerned with the poem's Platonic idealism and desire for poetic immortality: ultimately, Platonic Eros, too, seeks the knowledge and experience of ideal Beauty and the Good as the means of attaining to the "One." My aim is to identify in *Adonais* those figures of speech that signify the nature of the relation, the mode of relationality, between himself as living, speaking subject and Keats as dead love-object. A figure of speech, we must remember, is not itself a discrete subject or a discrete object, but a linguistic construction of the relationship between a discrete subject and a discrete object. The figures I discuss are not directly or explicitly Platonic in the sense that Socrates himself employs them to explain Eros in *Symposium*; rather, they are structurally Platonic in how they draw together the *εραστες* (*erastes*) and the *ερομενος* (*eromenos*), the lover/amorous subject and the beloved object, in a relationship grounded on the desire for knowledge. Through figuration and form, I will argue, Shelley seeks to renegotiate the nature of his relationship with the dead Keats in terms of a textual eroticism that resonates with the conditions of Platonic eroticism. To briefly clarify the points I have been trying to make: we are used to thinking of eros as more or less synonymous with sexual desire and bodily pleasure, but I am interested in returning to Shelley's own definitions—in his prose and poetry—of this form of non-sexual love, which we also find in Diotima's conversation with Socrates in *Symposium*.

There are a number of these erotic figurations in the poem that deserve attention, but in this chapter I limit myself to only four. My focus will be on stanzas nine, twelve, twenty-six, and forty-seven, each of which perform, in various but related ways, what I am calling an "elegiac eroticism." To reiterate, this term, elegiac eroticism, is a mourning

love for the dead poet that is grounded not in a personal relationship, nor in a generically conventional and competitive relationship. Instead, it is grounded in Shelley's epistemological yearning to know Keats through his poetic corpus, which is the only thing still available to him. Elegiac eroticism is at work in those moments when the poem represents Keats as an object of knowledge that Shelley pursues as if he were an object of amorous desire.

I first approach *Adonais* at the level of genre and convention. Scholars from Notopoulos, Wasserman, and Wilson, through Scrivener and Sacks, have claimed *Adonais* as one of the most deeply conventional elegies in the English tradition.⁴⁶ The first stanza's "skeptical employment of conventions" and "long interrogation of conventional gestures and figures of mourning," Sacks tells us, "marks this poem as a true heir of 'Lycidas' and 'Astrophel'" (146-47).⁴⁷ Yet at the same time as the elegy's opening salvos recall the genre's history and demonstrate its classical and pastoral inheritances, they also challenge that tradition and mark it as the "most archaic and most revolutionary of poems" (145). Sacks also notes, in a critique of a limited view of the Platonic in the elegy that anticipates my own, that Notopoulos regards *Adonais* as "the purest example of Shelley's Platonism."⁴⁸ But he does not take up the question of the

⁴⁶ The poem's second epigraph and the opening stanza, Sacks explains situate it firmly within the Western elegiac tradition. Sacks explains that "the epigraph foregrounds Shelley's debt to the Alexandrian elegy at large. The debt is immediately apparent in the opening line, which reads almost as a translation of Bion's 'Lament for Adonis'" (146). For more, see Scrivener "Adonais: Defending the Imagination" (Shelley's Poetry and Prose: *Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Reiman and Fraistat. New York: Norton, 2002. Print. 753-60).

⁴⁷ "Perhaps no-one since Milton and Spenser," he adds, "had so closely reengaged the origins of the genre" (347, n. 11).

⁴⁸ Sacks suggests that "Shelley's choice of the epigraph indicates his desire to believe in a poetry somehow compatible with Platonic thought. The fact that Shelley misattributed the lines to the harsh judge of poetry underscores the problem, and it is interesting to see how thoroughly and with what personal urgency 'Adonais' reveals the contradictory nature of Shelley's aspiration" (146).

problematic relation between Shelley's ideology and his dependence on poetic figures" (347, n. 10).⁴⁹ Though scholars tend to identify the elegy's Platonism in its idealistic abstractions from the mortal, corporeal world to the immortal, universal, spirit realm of Ideal Forms and the "One," and find its classical influences in references, allusions, and imagery of the mythic past, it is Shelley's particular "dependence on poetic figures" that orients my intervention into the critical history of *Adonais*.

When Shelley invokes the procession of mourners to grieve with him over Adonais's death, he does so in a way that is both highly conventional and idiosyncratic.⁵⁰ In keeping with convention, he calls on the various mythic deities and personified forces of nature to share in his sorrow; but the language he uses to represent them is shot through with what I consider erotic potential beyond convention and competition, and this marks the point of my intervention into the critical history of the poem. Issues of elegiac convention and Platonism have been examined extensively and productively in twentieth-century scholarship on *Adonais*, but there is still much to say about the poem's other registers. I depart from the conventional approaches to the elegy to focus in greater depth on the erotic conditions of its speech and form. In other words, I pursue certain

⁴⁹ Among those scholars who observe the elegy's Platonism predominantly in reference, allusion, and image, are: Milton Wilson, Carlos Baker, Notopoulos, Ronald Becht, and Donald Reiman. Wilson, Becht states, sees in the poem the discursive structure of a philosophical argument: "The victory of Shelley's Platonism," Becht quotes Wilson, "has given *Adonais* a unity and certainty of purpose" that his other Platonic poems, like "*Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion* lack" (195). And Carlos Baker, he explains, links "the poem's Platonism to its patterns of symbolic imagery and to its complex use of Urania," and contends, "The narrative of the first two-thirds and the implied narrative of the last third... seem to be of a piece." Further, Bloom "sees the poem as falling into two main thematic movements," while Reiman "offers a descriptive account of structure to show how 'Shelley has interwoven Classical and Judeo-Christian myths, conventions of the pastoral elegy and scientific imagery, into his most nearly perfect work of art'" (195).

⁵⁰ Sacks notes that, in contrast to Bion, "Shelley turns immediately to question the efficacy of weeping. By so doing, he begins a long interrogation of conventional gestures and figures of mourning. This oddly skeptical employment of conventions marks this poem as the true heir of "Lycidas" and "Astrophel," yet, "Shelley's struggle with his legacy and with his very medium itself is particularly vexed. We can perhaps see this in the unusual prematurity with which he initiates the self-questioning or self-qualifying mode" (147).

figures and figures of speech not as they are determined by Shelley's self-awareness of the elegiac tradition but as they represent the possibility of a posthumous, textual intimacy with the dead Keats.

I transition from the register of genre convention to the register of rhetoric with a reading of stanza nine, where we encounter the "quick Dreams" I briefly introduced earlier. This is the moment when the poem's eroticism is activated by a particular figure of speech—in this instance, the figure of metonymy. Instead of pursuing the poem's Platonic idealizations through classical reference, allusion, or image, I trace the poem's erotic consciousness through other beings, and bodies, and voices. Figures such as the "Splendour" of stanza twelve and the muse Urania of stanzas twenty-three through twenty-nine, act and speak in ways that vibrate with amorous longing for the dead poet.

Shelley's Theory of Poetic Language and Love

In his major prose, Shelley presents multiple entwined theories of the relationship between poetry and love, language and desire. His ideas are often abstract and not often stable, but an initial understanding of this interaction is essential for investigating the complex linguistic landscape of the poem. In the "Defence," Shelley identifies metaphor as the fundamental structure of poetic thought: the language of poets, he writes, "is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things" (512). To be "vitally metaphorical" is to continually reimagine the relation between seemingly incongruous things or thoughts by revealing a previously unacknowledged similarity between them. Poetic speech, he says, offers "pictures of integral thoughts" rather than perpetuating fixed "signs for portions or classes of thoughts," and thereby fends off the moral catastrophe that would be a language "dead to all the nobler purposes of human

intercourse” (512).⁵¹ The “noblest purpose” of human experience, for Shelley, is Love, the imaginative reinvention of the self in relation to others and the universe: “The great secret of morals,” he writes, “is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification [which is the process of metaphor] of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively” (517).⁵² In this essay, Shelley is working toward a theory of poetic language in which metaphorical figuration is the imaginative expression or performance of love.

Shelley scholars generally accept his claim for the metaphoricity of love, and similarly interpret the loving “identification” of the self with the “beautiful thoughts” of another as an act of metaphor. According to Jerrold Hogle, Shelleyan love is “the action of metaphor inhabiting our deepest emotional drives” (188).⁵³ William Ulmer states, “Arising as a pursuit of integral likeness, Shelleyan eros is metaphorically constituted and structured” (6). More recently, Stuart Peterfreund links Shelley’s epistemological desire

⁵¹ These “signs for portions or classes of thoughts” are identified by the Norton editors as “abstract concepts” (512 n. 2). One aim of this chapter is to challenge the criticism of abstraction and abstract thought in Shelley’s work, which I see instead as an effort to create an intimate relation by internalizing the other into his poetic imagination.

⁵² Shelley holds an idiosyncratic ontology of perception, writing in “On Life” (1819), that “Nothing exists but as it is perceived,” and concerning the relation among all things, he claims, “By the word *things* is to be understood any object of thought, that is, any thought upon which any other thought is employed, with an apprehension of distinction. The relations of these remain unchanged; and such is the material of our knowledge” (508). Separation and difference are bounded constructs his aims to dissolve so as to reveal that the concept of the individual subject is an ontological error: “[T]he existence of distinct individual minds similar to that which is employed in now questioning its own nature, is likewise found to be a delusion. The words, *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between assemblages of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote different modifications of the one mind.” He then anticipates the charge of solipsism in response to this view by adding, “Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it” (508).

⁵³ See Hogle, Jerrold. “Shelley’s Poetics: The Power as Metaphor,” *KSJ* 31 (1982): 188 n. 32. William Ulmer also notes this statement by Hogle in his own discussion of love and metaphor.

with the amorous desire for the O/other: “The end of Shelleyan knowledge is love; its means, metaphoric,” he writes (48). I aim in this chapter to reorient the “action,” “structure,” and “means” of Shelleyan love around metonymy and the various mouths in the poem in order to show how these figures of speech and body embody his erotic desire for Keats.⁵⁴

In *Adonais*, I contend, Shelley metonymically reimagines Keats’s own poetic inventions, like the “quick Dreams” (l. 73) and the “Splendour” (l. 100), metonymically as if they were his lovers. By representing them also as figures of knowledge, as “passion-winged Ministers of thought” (l. 74), Shelley links the amorous with the epistemological in a way that echoes his 1818 essay, “On Love.” In this short piece, Shelley struggles to reconcile the imperfect power of metaphorical speech with his desire for language adequate to the erotic union of individual selves. The essay is also deeply informed by Plato’s conception of love in the *Symposium* (which Shelley himself translated, also in 1818), and therefore is particularly helpful for understanding love in *Adonais*.

Love and death are intimately tied together in Shelley’s work as the two most unknowable yet philosophical aspects of mortal life. In “A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love,” he claims that sexual intercourse is “the link and type of the highest emotions of our nature” and he “commonly represented the range of human relationships ‘by categories which are patently derived from erotic attraction and sexual union’” (Ulmer 3). At times, Ulmer states, Shelley writes death as love’s ideal realization: “Only because death lurks in love, do so many later Shelleyan

⁵⁴ In his discussion of Urania, Sacks does engage with the metonymization of her desire for Adonais, but not in quite the same way as. I address this later, in my reading of stanza 26.

poems join *Alastor* in tacitly or expressly urging lovers to ‘Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!’ (*Adonais*, ll. 464-65)” (34). Peterfreund identifies this complex relation as an explicitly epistemological problem, writing that in *Adonais*, Shelley’s speaker “makes explicit his understanding that the price of such knowledge is death” (45).⁵⁵

However, when critics discuss eros in Shelley’s work, they most often interpret it as an experience of the sexual body. Ulmer’s incisive *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (1990), which has been an invaluable starting point and interlocutor for this project, focuses on examples that “range from nocturnal emission, to the sexual consummation of Titanic marriage, to incestuous rape,” in readings of “Alastor,” “The Revolt of Islam,” *Prometheus Unbound*, and “Epipsychidion” (ix). And though he does acknowledge that “Shelleyan love can hardly be reduced to eros” (3), even this qualification still implicitly links eros to sexual desire, and implies that love and eros are distinct conditions in a hierarchy. Considering eros synonymous to sexual experience, however, does not account for the epistemological want inherent in Shelley’s desire. By approaching Shelleyan love as a desire for pleasure in and as knowledge, which I see as resonant with Platonic love, I aim to reconsider the nature of Shelleyan eros in a text that

⁵⁵ For Shelley, claims William Ulmer, sexual intercourse is “the link and type of the highest emotions of our nature” and he “commonly represented the range of human relationships ‘by categories which are patently derived from erotic attraction and sexual union” (3). Shelley, as we shall see, aligns love with death, at times claiming it as love’s ideal realization. Ulmer writes, “Only because death lurks in love do so many later Shelleyan poems join *Alastor* in tacitly or expressly urging lovers to ‘Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!’ (*Adonais*, ll. 464-65) (34). Further, and quite helpfully, Stuart Peterfreund brings the problem of knowledge into this intricate and often perplexing relation, writing that here in “Adonais,” Shelley’s speaker “makes explicit his understanding that the price of such knowledge is death” (*Shelley among Others: The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language*, 2002, 87). However, in regard to “Adonais,” I wish somewhat to modify Ulmer’s claim that “Shelley’s metaphorical idealism will finally accept death as the negative form (specular image) of erotic transcendence,” a “climactic gesture [which] remains a last resort. It is an option selected when visionary maidens prove irrecoverable and revolutions doomed. Shelleyan eros begins by embracing earthly mediations” (10). In elegy, death is already the poem’s metaphorical condition, the starting point for the eros of poetic speech, making this “last resort” the elegist’s only resort.

has been called “the clearest and purest statement” of Platonism in his work (Notopoulos 291).⁵⁶

Shelley begins his elegy with a conventional wail of mourning—“I weep for Adonais—he is dead!” (l. 1)—followed by an invocation of conventional mythic deities and personified natural forces to share in his grief. He calls out to the “sad Hour,” a personification of the “Horae,” goddesses of the seasons, to “rouse thy obscure compeers, / And teach them thine own sorrow” (ll. 5-6).⁵⁷ He also repeatedly cries out for Urania—whom he refers to variously as “mighty Mother” (l. 10), “melancholy Mother” (l. 20), and “most musical of mourners” (l. 28 & l. 37)—to “weep for Adonais” (l. 19), “weep again,” (l. 28) “lament anew” (l. 29), and “weep anew” (ll. 10-37). The Horae are joined by numerous personified affects like “Desires and Adorations,” “Winged Persuasions,” and twilight Phantasies” (ll. 109-112). All the mourners in this procession are commonly understood as aspects of the poem’s self-conscious conventionality. Shelley calls upon them to delegate his own mourning work to others, Sacks argues, for two reasons: “they are all inadequate mourners, allowing Shelley to criticize them and to distance himself from various forms of unsuccessful grieving; and yet they keep his poem in motion, giving it the processional character of traditional elegies, allowing it to achieve the self-purifying and self-surpassing ceremonies so important to the work of mourning” (148).

“Airy Children of the Brain”: Figuration as (Spiritual) Procreation

⁵⁶ Everest notes, “Platonic readings have not been dominant in recent years, as Shelley’s critics have generally found his scepticism more restless and rhetorical; but studies of *Adonais* are still sometimes shadowed by the assumption of a commitment to some mode or other of transcendence and idealism in Shelley’s thought” (261). The close readings to follow take up the rather unproblematic association of Shelley’s Platonism with “transcendence and idealism.” my reading aims not at a clear divide between idealism and scepticism in *Adonais* but at the subtler understanding that Shelley’s himself is ambivalent in his Platonic commitments.

⁵⁷ See *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 411, n. 3.

It is with the description of the “quick Dreams” of stanza nine that my argument turns from conventional scholarship on *Adonais*, and toward a figural and formal interpretation that steps around Sacks’s claim for their “inadequacy.” By reading mourners like the “quick Dreams” (l. 73), the “Splendour” (l. 100) and Urania (stanzas 23-29) as figures of speech first, and conventional symbols second, their ineffectualness as grievors does not overshadow their status as textual embodiments of Shelley’s desire for Keats. Stanza nine presents the first real opportunity in the elegy to read the procession of mourners rhetorically, that is, as embodied figures of speech that exceed their conventional function. Shelley imagines that Adonais’s “quick Dreams, / The passion-winged Ministers of thought, / Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams / Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught / The love which was its music” (ll. 73-77), come to grieve his death. These “quick Dreams” are metonyms for the inventions of the dead poet’s imagination—as Shelley puts it in a later stanza, “All he had loved, and moulded into thought, / From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound, / Lamented Adonais” (ll. 118-20)—and by representing them here as figures of love and knowledge now in his own poetic imaginary, Shelley begins to create a textually intimate relation to Keats.⁵⁸ The provocatively anticipatory statement from “On Love” (written three years before *Adonais*, in 1818) noted earlier, about the “airy children of the brain,” shows that Shelley already had such a possibility in mind. The “quick Dreams” are the

⁵⁸ Kelvin Everest writes, similarly: “Shelley’s central purpose is to establish Keats as a fixed star in the constellation of the great poets, and its brilliantly original approach is to *weave the products of Keats’s poetic imagination into the texture of his elegy*. In *Adonais* the presence of Keats in the English poetic tradition is consequently neither a matter of mere assertion nor simply a demonstration of his claims to be the inheritor — or indeed more literally the literary offspring — of Spenser and Milton. *Keats’s comparable stature is everywhere implicit in the poem’s echoing of his living poetic voice*, alongside those of his peers” (244, italics mine, J.G.). And, in a statement that succinctly sums up the core of my argument, he says, “The mode of this echoing may be illustrated by some examples of Keats’s presence as a poet *in the texture of the rhetoric of Adonais*” (244). My hope is that the examples I explore will demonstrate how Shelley textualizes Keats, how he represents him within the poem as a *textual object of erotic desire*.

“airy children” of Keats’s imagination, now “born anew” within Shelley’s.⁵⁹ The direction of this movement in the elegy, however, is reversed, as here it is not Shelley’s “airy children” that are “born anew” within Keats’s mind, but Keats’s reborn in Shelley’s. These metonymic figures for Keats’s own “integral thoughts” (*DoP* 512) perform the work of love commonly ascribed by Shelley scholars (and Shelley himself) to metaphor.⁶⁰

At the same time as Shelley’s reanimating of these figures is an act of love-speech, they reflect also his apprehensiveness over attaining immortality through poetic language. By giving new life to Keats’s “airy children,” metonymy allows Shelley to fill the aesthetic and affective void of his corpse with the now newly “living” corpus of his poetry. As Michael Scrivener writes (though of a later stanza), “The poet lives on through the survival of poetry, and as the world remembers the poetry, so it breathes life into the dead, and keeps alive the hope of utopian transformation”; “The primary meaning of immortality in the poem is the entirely naturalistic process by which dead poets live by being read creatively by successive generations” (280).⁶¹ Here, Shelley does more than “remember” Keats’s poetry, and his rebirthing the “airy children” of Keats’s mind is much more than a creative reading: it is a procreative reading through which Shelley holds out the possibility that not only can poetry keep alive the ideas and ideals of the

⁵⁹ In this rhetoric of reproduction, we see that the language of Platonic immortality is already immanent in the text, for, as Diotima explains to Socrates, “Reproduction is the closest mortals can come to being permanently alive and immortal” (44). The airy children of the poet’s brain live on past his corporeal death.

⁶⁰ Ulmer writes, “By nominating metaphor as the imagination’s presiding harmonizing mechanism, Shelley inscribes metaphor with the larger contradictions of his antithetical vision. He slights metaphor’s presupposition of absence and difference; he tries to make metaphor do too much. The problem refers ultimately to the discrepant roles accorded to antitypes in Shelley’s appropriation of *The Symposium*” (8). See my earlier discussion, in the introduction to this chapter, for elaboration on the common critical assertions of Shelleyan metaphor as the central figure of love.

⁶¹ For an expansion on this problem of poetic immortality, see Ulmer, “*Adonais* and the Death of Poetry.”

dead, but might actually create life anew from those ideas.⁶² This conception of poetry recalls its classical Greek origins in *poesis* (ποίησις), the act of making. For a poet to breathe life into his own aesthetic inventions is unexceptional—this is how poetry works; but to breathe new life into another poet’s inventions, especially a dead poet with whom he was not particularly close in life, is quite something else.⁶³ For Shelley, for whom the Imagination is the prime agent of love and knowledge—in other words, of Poetry—to situate his lost object metonymically within that vital, sacred space, is a deeply intimate act, an act of love. Sacks, as I have noted above, attends mainly to the failure of the “quick Dreams” and all the Splendours as mourners, whom he claims Shelley invokes in order to dismiss as ineffectual and thereby contrast with the passion and force of his own mourning.⁶⁴ This genre-based and teleological interpretation associates the elegy with the Freudian “work of mourning,” which necessitates the conscious detachment and displacement of libidinal desire away from the lost object so that the mourner can escape the melancholia that would prevent his consolation.⁶⁵

⁶² See Plato 209c on figurative children.

⁶³ Michael Scrivener writes similarly about “breathing new life into the dead” (280).

⁶⁴ Sacks explains: “One of the major tasks of the work of mourning and of the elegy is to repair the mourner’s damaged narcissism—but without allowing that repair to have permanent recourse either to the melancholy form of secondary narcissism or to the fantasies of the primitive narcissism associated with the mirror stage. ‘Adonais’ and *In Memoriam* are the most obvious examples of elegies that cannot be fully understood without observing how they perform this complex reparation” (10). “The work of mourning, too, is largely designed to defend the individual against death [...] Once again, a forced renunciation prevents a regressive attachment to a prior love-object, a potential fixation on the part of the griever, whose desire in such cases for literal identification with the dead is another force very much like that of the death wish” (16-17).

⁶⁵ According to Freud, Sacks writes, “‘Melancholy is in some way related to an unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in where there is nothing unconscious about the loss.’ In order for this resistance to be broken, the mind must be repeatedly confronted with the fact until the recognition has been achieved. Only once the loss is recognized can the griever continue the work of mourning by withdrawing his attachment from the dead” (24).

I do not disagree with Sacks on this purpose of the elegy, but in my reading it does not matter so much that all of the procession that Shelley invokes turn out to be ineffectual as *mourners*: they are more rhetorically and epistemologically provocative for the dynamic locutions that shape them into amorous figures, into “lovers.”⁶⁶ While Sacks is concerned with how *Adonais* enacts the psychoanalytic work of mourning Keats through the conventions of the genre, this chapter is focused on how the poem expresses his erotic love for Keats through particular figures of speech. Shelley, of course, is sensitive to the problematic bind of seeking intimacy, or love—by which I mean, again, a sympathetic knowledge of another’s “inmost soul”—through poetic speech. As he writes in “On Love,” of his failure to attain such intimacy with others, “I have everywhere sought sympathy, and have found only repulse and disappointment” (503).⁶⁷ And, in a supremely sorrowful statement that throws further into question the possibility that poetic language can spark and sustain this kind of intimate relation, he laments, “These words are inefficient and metaphorical—Most words so—No help” (504, n. 3).⁶⁸ When we recall, from the “Defence,” how fundamental metaphor is to Poetry, we can better

⁶⁶ I am using “lovers” in the sense of both the Platonic and Barthesian traditions.

⁶⁷ The full passage reads: “I know not the internal constitution of other men, or even of thine whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when misled by that appearance I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburthen MY inmost soul to them I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought and have found only repulse and disappointment” (503).

⁶⁸ Shelley comes to this realization as he continues to articulate his ideal sense of love: “This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists. We are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness [...] We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed: a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow or evil dare not overleap” (504).

understand one of the linguistic and epistemological paradoxes inherent to his work, but one which, rather than being aporetic and paralyzing, reinvigorates his passions and drives him to seek other modes of love speech.⁶⁹ If Shelley worries that his words are “inefficient and metaphorical,” I suggest a shift of linguistic focus may reveal that metonymic language, such as in this stanza, promises (or at least holds out the promise) to redeem his words as acts of love.

Figures of Flowers and Flowery Corpses

Before moving on to stanza 12 and a crucial instance of metonymic figuration as textual embodiment, I want to look at a few earlier examples of conventional elegiac symbols, like flowers, to demonstrate how Shelley understands the representational obstacle, the metaphorical resistance, that is Adonais’s corpse. By its mere presence, the corpse provokes a figural and epistemological conflict in the mourning poet as it signifies at the same time the presence and absence, the past beauty and the inevitable decay, of the lost love-object. Though the corpse reminds Shelley of Keats’s poetical beauty, he cannot but also surrender himself, in very Keatsian fashion, to the knowledge of its certain corruption, and so he turns to the imagery of flowers—a core convention of the genre—to thematize this linguistic and cognitive conflict.

In the second stanza, Shelley writes that one of the mourners, a heavenly “Echo,” “with soft enamoured breath, / Rekindled all the fading melodies, / With which, like flowers that mock the corse beneath, / He had adorned and hid the coming bulk of death”

⁶⁹ Ulmer thematizes this paradox as a central facet of Shelley’s poetics, writing (of “On Love”): “Shelley’s association of love and language ends by implicating philosophy in rhetoric and by demanding that a poem’s moral or political analysis of love be gauged against the performance of its language as a mode of love. ‘On Love’ locates desire in the self’s thirst for an antitypical complement, a beautiful other pursued for its promise of wholeness. By adding this erotic model to its confession of metaphorical inefficiency, ‘On Love’ grounds Shelley’s poetics in contradiction. Shelley’s career was largely an exploration of the artistic possibilities of this contradiction” (4).

(ll. 15-18). Like this Echo, who here revives Adonais's "fading melodies," and like Adonais himself, who "adorned and hid the coming bulk" of his own death with P/oesy, Shelley, too, shrouds the ugly material "bulk" of Keats's corpse with the music of these lines.⁷⁰ Yet despite these efforts to recover Keats's poetic voice, Shelley cannot quite sustain the fantasy that aesthetic beauty—represented by flowers—can compensate for the silencing void of death that "feeds on [Adonais's] mute voice, and laughs at our despair" (l. 27). Shelley remains sadly aware of the "corse beneath" the flowers, and admits that poetry can only "hide" the ugly "bulk of death," but hiding something does not undo or reverse it. In other descriptions of Adonais as a figure of poetic beauty, the metaphor of flowers betrays Shelley's doubt because the flowers he images are always either dying or already dead: Adonais is a "pale flower," a "bloom whose petals nipt before they blew," a "broken lily" (ll. 48-54); later, he is a "sleeping flower" (l. 86).⁷¹ Again and again, these metaphors submit to the paradox of the beautiful corpse: these conventional elegiac markers of aesthetic beauty and poetic accomplishment must, like the poet's once-living body and voice, always die and decay. (l. 21).

There is still more to unpack concerning the problem of elegiac flowers. Shelley inverts the metaphor later in the poem when he speaks of Adonais's "leprous corpse" that

⁷⁰ By "music" I refer to the sonic and somatic pleasure of the metrical and rhythmic regularity of the Spenserian stanza, is one of the primary and most consistent ways that Shelley evokes the aesthetic/poetic pleasure of this elegant material shape to / gives an elegant material shape to that obscures the "bulk of death" that resists concrete representation. I return to the significance of the formal and rhythmic consistency of the Spenserian stanzas in my later discussion of Stanza 47. There, I draw a formal parallel to Sacks's discussion of the consolatory effects of linguistic repetition. I look also to Denise Gigante's incisive reading of Tennyson's "In Memoriam" stanza as a parallel formalization of the elegist's desire for the dead.

⁷¹ Sacks offers an illuminating explanation of the status of flowers in elegy, writing that they are a method of elegiac self-protection, which, "apart from their figurative meanings and their function of obeisance, also add to the temporal or spatial respite within the rites, or within the poem itself; and the flowers, like the poetic language to which they are so often compared, serve not only as offering or as gesture for respite but also as demarcations separating the living from the dead" (19).

“Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath” (ll. 172-73). Here, it is not Adonais (his dead body) who is the flower; rather, his corpse is contrasted with flowers, a contrast made sharper by the severity of the adjective “leprous.”⁷² By juxtaposing the gentle beauty of living flowers with the abject ugliness of the decaying body that lies beneath them, yet which in its decay will give those flowers life, Shelley reveals his awareness of this contradiction. While his understanding of the metaphorical connection between flowers and death at first promises to redeem Adonais’s death by recognizing that it will feed the future beauty of nature—which is another kind of immortality—because it also insists that Shelley realize that Adonais’s beauty is now no more, it becomes at the same time a threat to his poetic knowledge, and thereby to his consolation.

The aesthetic and epistemological limitation of metaphor that these examples reveal is that when speaking of death and the corpse that is death’s materiality, the identity this figure seeks between apparently dissimilar things is only possible if each of those things is in itself stable and decidable. Death, though, is representable only abstractly, through shapeless nouns like a “bulk” (l. 18) or a “shadow” (l. 66), things which, like Death itself, are without their own substance or sensuous form.⁷³ The corpse, too, as the troublesome flower imagery demonstrates, is also representable only in imprecise terms. The corpse and Death both function like metaphor itself, which, again, though Shelley privileges it as the central figure of Poetry and love in the “Defence,” he recognizes here in the elegy as inadequate to them.

⁷² Interestingly, in stanza 49, Shelley entwines these conflicting images with the play on words “fragrant corses” (l. 436).

⁷³ Like death itself, a shadow is a thing without its own substance, and is given sensuous form only by the coincidence of light falling on some material object.

What kind of knowledge, then, can figurative language offer the elegist? If metaphor, which is neither the thing itself nor its referent, yet is also both of these, is not sufficient to signify or create the erotic relation he seeks with Keats, and does not afford him the solacing knowledge that the poetic imagination is immortal, to what other figures of speech can Shelley turn, and what other paradigms of knowledge can he draw on, to adequately speak his desire for the dead? To elaborate the problem of figuration in love and knowledge in *Adonais*, and to situate it within the longer currents of Romantic poetics, I want to revisit Earl Wasserman's essay on Romantic epistemology, "The English Romantics: The Grounds of Knowledge" (1964). Wasserman argues that Romantic poetic knowledge is relational rather than empirical or associational, which were the predominant philosophies of knowledge in the eighteenth century. He contrasts eighteenth-century poets' analogical understanding of their experiences in the world with the relational understanding of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley.⁷⁴ He rejects analogy as an adequate epistemic mode for the Romantic poets because it is too "loose" to elucidate the "transaction between the perceiving mind and the perceived world," nor does it insist that the "transaction" itself, the interrelation of subject and object, self and other, poet and nature, is their fundamental poetic and epistemological concern. He argues that analogy maintains the perceiving subject and the perceived object as discontinuous entities brought into "loose association" only by the poet's moral or

⁷⁴ "When the [eighteenth-century] poet is not merely organizing sense data into some picturesque, sublime, or beautiful distribution," Wasserman explains, he usually devotes himself to humanizing the external scene by associating it with some emotion, moral theme, historical episode, moving narrative, or autobiographical experience. The scene becomes significant only by stimulating the poet to link it with man by some loose association. Even when he directly considers the relation of the objective and subjective worlds he usually postulates nothing more intimate than analogy" (20).

affective sensibility.⁷⁵ Analogical knowledge merely “pretends to a relation between subject and object and yet keeps them categorically apart” (21). This is not the intimate knowledge of the other, nor of the self in relation to the other, that the Romantic poet seeks.

The achievement of the Romantic poets, Wasserman claims, is that they “chose to confront more centrally and to a degree unprecedented in English literature [a] nagging problem in their literary culture: How do subject and object meet in a meaningful relationship? By what means do we have a *significant* awareness of the world?” (22).⁷⁶ His questions anticipate questions fundamental to my reading of *Adonais* and to this project on the whole: How can an elegist have an erotic relationship with a dead poet, and through that relationship grasp some knowledge of that which is forbidden to the living—knowledge of death itself? And, what is the status or significance of the dead body in this relationship? If, as I have claimed above, death resists metaphorical representation by exposing the paradoxical beauty of flowers, and the corpse confines metonymy to preserving the figures of the love-object’s poetic corpus in the elegiac text, what else in language is available to the elegist to speak his desire for the dead.

Mouths, Commas, Metonymies

Up to this point, I have been thinking through the figuratively amorous relationship with Keats that Shelley writes by metonymically animating the dead poet’s textual creations in his elegy. My aim has been to show how the figure of metonymy is a

⁷⁵ “[T]he eighteenth-century poet is forever interrupting his scene-painting to find its moral or emotional analogue,” Wasserman writes (20).

⁷⁶ In focusing on the *relation* between subject and object, self and other, poet and language, rather than seeking to fix by association the nature and value of the external world with regard to the subject, he somewhat relieves criticism of the burden of attempting to determine, with a measure of certainty and stability, the nature of things that are too big to know fully, a burden made even greater when the object of the poet’s epistemological desire is death itself.

poetic act of love that allows Shelley to re-birth Keats's "airy children" in his (Shelley's) own poetic imaginary. Now, I shift my focus from Adonais's mourning children to the material site and object of their mourning—his dead body—to explore the erotic possibilities, and problems, the corpse raises for the speaker. Stanza twelve offers an ideal moment to shift attention from the figured mourners to the figured corpse because it portrays an instance of intimate touch that seems momentarily to reignite the spark of life in Adonais's body, a flashing possibility that briefly shakes the knowledge that he is indeed dead.⁷⁷ The stanza reads:

Another Splendour on his mouth alit,
That mouth, whence it was wont to draw the breath
Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit,
And pass into the panting heart beneath
With lightning and with music: the damp death
Quenched its caress upon his icy lips;
And, as a dying meteor stains a wreath
Of moonlight vapour, which the cold night clips,
It flushed through his pale limbs, and past to its eclipse. (ll.

100-108)

This "Splendour," like the "quick Dreams" of stanza nine, is a personification of Keats's poetic invention, one of the "airy children" of the dead poet's brain, to recall that

⁷⁷ This is not the first instance of physical contact between one of the mourners and Adonais's corpse. Earlier, "one with trembling hands clasps his cold head" (l. 82), and another "Washed his light limbs as if embalming them" (l. 92), but these kinds of touch are more reverent than desirous; they are less erotic than other kinds of touch. Touching someone on the mouth, though, is a more intimate act, suggestive even of a carnal relationship, and the sexual(ized) rhetoric of bodily touch and somatic arousal foregrounds the mouth as a/the site of *poesis* and pleasure.

excellent phrase from “On Love,” which is now reborn in Shelley’s poetic imaginary; it, too, functions metonymically as a figure of love.⁷⁸ As he says in a later stanza, “All he had loved, and moulded into thought, / From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound, / Lamented Adonais” (ll. 118-20). Through the metonymy of corpse and corpus (the mouth and the Splendour, respectively), Shelley is able to represent the erotic body that once animated this voice as a force of poetic creation. Here, the poet looks to the mouth as the primary erotic organ.

A simple act of punctuation, the comma after the first foot in line 101—“That mouth,”—imposes a rhythmic pause, a caesura, in the line that insists we linger on and savor the image of Adonais’s mouth: to adapt Matthew Kaiser’s elegant and provocative phrasing, we essentially hold Adonais’s mouth in ours while speaking or reading the line.⁷⁹ The mouth is the organ that “[drew] the breath / Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit, / And pass into the panting heart beneath, / With lightning and with music” (ll. 101-04). This breath that flows through the imagination (the “guarded wit”) and the somatically excited body (the “panting heart”) shows the mouth to be vital to poetry, the bodily source of “lightning”—which is a common, though inconsistent, Shelleyan metaphor for knowledge—and “music.” Shelley thereby sets up the erotic priority of the mouth—through which we breath, and eat, and speak, and kiss—as the bodily organ or site of poetry.

I want briefly to pursue the significance of the lightning imagery before continuing on with the mouth of stanza twelve. Lightning is a favored Shelleyan

⁷⁸ Becht notes that these Splendours were “kindled into life by his [Keats’s] creative love” (202).

⁷⁹ Credit for this idea is due to Matthew Kaiser, whose brilliant essay “Pater’s Mouth” (2011), addresses the status and significance of this bodily organ in Paterian—and more broadly, Victorian—aesthetic thought.

metaphor for the poetic imagination, yet its nature and referentiality are ambiguous and shift often in his work. In the “Defence,” this metaphor appears twice, in resonance with its use here in the elegy: “Poetry,” he writes, “is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it” (520); and of Dante, whom Shelley holds up as an ideal Poet alongside Homer and Milton, he declares, “His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has yet found no conductor” (528). In these passages, Shelley identifies lightning with Poetry, (as) an endless force of imagination with boundless procreative potential.

In stanza twenty, Shelley inverts the symbolism of lightning and raises doubt over the immortality of the poetic imagination. He says, “Nought we know dies: Shall that alone which knows / Be as a sword consumed before the sheath / By sightless lightning?—th’ intense atom glows / A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose” (ll. 177-80). The obscurity of this “sightless lightning” conflicts with the significance Shelley grants it in stanza twelve and in the “Defence.”⁸⁰ Here it is not the poet’s mind (“that alone which knows”) that is like lightning; rather, lightning is that which threatens to “consume” and “quench” the spark (the “intense atom”) of the poetic imagination; though, that Shelley poses this as an open question leaves indeterminate what he ultimately thinks of this metaphor.⁸¹ Sacks reads the ambivalence of the fire and lightning

⁸⁰ The *Norton* editors note that “sightless” implies “[b]oth invisible and blind, amoral” (417, n. 5).

⁸¹ Becht claims that the imagery of “that alone which knows / Be as a sword consumed before the sheath / By sightless lightning?” (ll. 177-78) is “identical with that which Shelley uses in *A Defence of Poetry* to signify a contrary situation—i.e., the power of poetry to survive restriction: ‘Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.’ In *Adonais*, it is poetry—or, at least, the creative spirit of the poet—that is consumed” (203-4).

metaphors in stanzas eighteen through twenty as expressive of Shelley's agonized yearning for poetic immortality:

[he] focuses contrastingly on what he would like to see immortalized: not man's genetic power, but rather his intellectual faculty, 'that which knows.' And yet, this higher faculty is represented by imagery that reflects originally physical referents [...] The cognitive being is thus represented by a sword, or by an atom whose glow is surely related in kind to the 'unimprisoned flames' of Nature and to the forces that spend themselves 'in love's delight.' Nevertheless, it is with such residually erotic and material images of elevation, penetration, and glowing radiance that Shelley will have to reach for consolation, trying to cut or burn through all material textures (present once again, here, in the form of the sheath).
(153)

I want to pursue further the idea that the "intellectual faculty is represented by imagery that reflects originally physical referents." Shelley's emphasis in stanza twelve on the physicality of the mouth, on its carnal and epistemological potential, hints that he may not so assuredly want or need to "burn through all material textures" of life to console his loss of Keats. I see this as an opening to think about the materiality of poetic speech, which I explain below is embodied, figured, in and by the mouth, and allows Shelley to touch his lost object in language.

Beyond the now retrospectively indeterminate status of Shelleyan lightning, the stanza also contains a string of indefinite pronouns—"it" (ll. 101-102), "its" and "his" (ll. 105), "it" and "its" (l. 108)—that, in combination with the torturous syntax and oddly-placed colon in the middle of line 104, is a grammatical performance of the uncertain

distinction between the living and the dead. Most likely, the “it” in line 101 refers to Adonais’s mouth, upon which the Splendour lands in a kind of kiss; in line 102, as well, “it” likely refers to Adonais’s mouth, that once “gained strength to pierce the guarded wit, / And pass into the panting heart beneath.” The fact that Adonais’s mouth is now a dead mouth, a mouth that cannot itself speak or kiss, further complicates its privileged figural status.

The Mouth of Many Figures

Behind these grammatical and referential ambiguities, the rhetoric of this stanza heightens the erotic potential of the mouth by reminding us that not only is it the bodily organ of speech, it is also a first point of physical contact between lovers—the site of the kiss.⁸² The passage raises the possibility, however fleeting and strange, that a kiss or a touch on the mouth may have the power to revive the dead. Yet the second half of the stanza reveals a problem inherent to elegy: Shelley knows, as do we, that Adonais is dead, yet “the damp death / Quenched its caress upon his icy lips; / And as a dying meteor stains a wreath / Of moonlight vapour [...] / It flushed through his pale limbs, and past to its eclipse” (ll. 104-108). This imagery suggestively mimics the rush of blood that reddens the skin when lovers touch. This fleeting trace of a physiological response to an intimate touching of Adonais’s mouth, death’s “caress upon his icy lips”—literally a kiss of death—leads the mourners (and us) to think, if only for a lightning-like moment, that the dead poet might somehow be reinfused with life. It seems as if, for just a moment, the corporeal conditions we associate with death—cold, dark, rigid, pale—are overturned,

⁸² This contact, this touch, avoids becoming necrophilic by remaining in the realm of the poetic imagination. It is the Splendour that alights on Adonais’s mouth, and “damp death” that “caresses his icy lips,” and this keeps Shelley himself at a somewhat safe remove from this taboo because these touches are performed by imagined presences, personifications from Keats’s imaginary. In Chapter Three, I look at an elegiac poem that takes an explicitly necrophilic turn.

and death tinges Adonais's corpse with the shade and fluid rush of life. But it is "damp death" that flushes through his body and instead of reviving his "panting heart" it triggers only a cruel reminder of death's final "eclipse" of this possibility and vanishes this hope. Yet this fugitive moment disrupts the assumed certainty of difference between the living body and the dead body.

Shelley's achievement in stanza 12 is simultaneously to represent the mouth as a metonymy for poesis and a synecdoche for the erotic (even if dead) body.⁸³ The mouth is the passage that links the external world (in the form of air) with the internal "world" of the body through the act of breathing: drawing breath brings air into the body, and is then exhaled back out of the body as the inspired "breath" of poetic speech. The mouth, then, is the point of transformation of what is everywhere around us in the world (as air) and permeated into all living things (as breath), yet is in essence still intangible and shapeless, into Poetry. The mouth gives material form to what is formless by making language out of breath. As the point of intersection between external world and individual body, and a point of contact between a desirous subject and an object of desire—through speech or a kiss—the mouth is the site where the body *makes* words.⁸⁴ This intersectionality implicates the mouth in the relation between knowledge and pleasure that is at the heart of Shelley's elegiac eroticism.

⁸³ In other words, the mouth is a metonymy for poesis (Keats's poetic voice), and a synecdoche for Keats's erotic body; this synecdoche also folds back into (as a figure for) the poetic voice because the body is what brings poetry into the world through breath and lingual movement. And we should recall that the Splendour is still also a metonymy.

⁸⁴ We should recall that the Greek term *poesis* originally translates as "making." For more on this, and to see how this idea is integral to Platonic thought, see Christopher Gill's translation of *Symposium*, p. 42, 205c and p78, n. 109).

To clarify: I am identifying this Splendour, like the “quick Dreams,” as another metonymic figure of Keats’s poetry that Shelley brings to life in the elegy; however, the greater significance of the Splendour is that, in touching Adonais on the mouth, it focuses our attention on the erotic potential of the corpse. Through this intimate touch the mouth becomes an ideal synecdoche for the erotic body. In the following section on Urania, I continue to put pressure on these figures and bodies.

“That word, that kiss...”

The Urania stanzas are among the densest, most rhetorically and affectively challenging in the elegy. Scholars from Carlos Baker (1948) and Notopoulos (1949) to Peter Sacks (1985) and, more recently, Kelvin Everest (2007), have focused on Urania to demonstrate the poem’s self-awareness of the classical mythological and pastoral elegiac traditions into which it enters by drawing on the genre’s deep well of convention from Bion’s “Lament for Adonis” (year unknown) and Moschus’s “Elegy for Bion” (circa 100 BCE) through Milton’s “Lycidas” (1637). In addition to her conventional role as poetic muse, critics also tend to read Urania with specific attention to her role in Platonic philosophy: “Urania in *Adonais*,” Everest explains, “has sometimes been understood to embrace a wider philosophical connotation which carries her significance well beyond the broadly literary.”⁸⁵ A number of studies have sought to demonstrate a pervasive and central Platonism in the poem’s intellectual framework, structure and style, which can be construed as in accord with her Platonic associations” (239).

⁸⁵ However, Everest notes, “Platonic readings have not been dominant in recent years, as Shelley’s critics have generally found his scepticism more restless and rhetorical; but studies of *Adonais* are still sometimes shadowed by the assumption of a commitment to some mode or other of transcendence and idealism in Shelley’s thought [...]” (261 n. 8).

In the Platonic readings Everest alludes to, Urania's significance stems from her dual status in classical mythology as "Aphrodite Urania" and "Aphrodite Pandemia," two aspects of the love goddess that Socrates discusses in *Symposium*. In Shelley's translation, the former is "the Love who inspires us with affection, and exempts us from all wantonness and libertinism," while the latter type of love is "common to the vulgar, and presides over transient and fortuitous connexions, and is worshipped by the least excellent of mankind" (181b-c). My interest in Urania arises from Shelley's nuanced portrayal of her as a figure of love who represents both the ideal and common aspects of Eros.⁸⁶ I aim in this section to demonstrate how this doubleness links her conventional role with her Platonic role: she is a conventional elegiac Muse, and she is a discontented Platonic lover whose desire for Adonais is both corporeal and epistemological—in other words, erotic.

Stanza twenty-six is perhaps the poem's most erotically-charged expression of desire for Keats. When Urania appears, she gives one of the poem's most impassioned submissions to the erotic condition of mourning. She cries,

Stay yet awhile! speak to me once again;
Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live;
And in my heartless breast and burning brain
That word, that kiss shall all thoughts else survive,

⁸⁶ Everest acknowledges that "Shelley's Urania in *Adonais* might seem to pose an unwanted contrast with the lower Cyprian Aphrodite of the source myth in Bion's handling, where the goddess is distinctly earthy and sexual, and so not ideally fitted to Shelley's adaptation to Keats's situation; hence the change in Urania's identity in *Adonais* from lover to mother" (241). Though I disagree over his final assertion that Shelley transforms her from lover to mother, I should note, however, that multiple times in the elegy, Shelley does refer to her as a mother. For instance, in stanza three, she is the "melancholy Mother" (l. 20), and at times refers to Adonais as her son. Relatedly, Earl Wasserman has asked: "Why did Shelley choose to make this Venus the mother of Adonais instead of his lover, as in the legend?" I contend that her speech in stanza twenty-six supports the possibility that she also yearns for Adonais as a lover, an erotic love-object.

With food of saddest memory kept alive,
Now thou art dead, as if it were a part
Of thee, my Adonais! I would give
All that I am to be as thou now art!

But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart! (ll. 226-34)

As in stanza twelve, the possibility of a kiss carries amorous and epistemological implications, but this stanza insists, more strongly and overtly, that love and knowledge are directly linked in Shelleyan mourning through poetic speech and the body. Urania yearns for a “kiss” and a “word”—acts performed by the mouth—to solace her grief, that they might “all thoughts else survive.” This stanza insists that love and knowledge are directly linked in Shelleyan mourning through poetic speech and the body. She hopes to compensate for or displace the “saddest memory” of Adonais’s death with the material substance of words that might touch her body. Her speech reflects Shelley’s elegiac eroticism by correlating language and the body in the production of poetic pleasure and knowledge. Furthermore, to recall my claim about the erotic status of the mouth in stanza twelve, in this passage, Urania herself figures Adonais’s mouth as a synecdoche for the desirous body and as a metonymy for the site of language. The text posits, once again, the poet’s mouth as (something like) the ur-organ of Shelleyan eros.

Urania’s grief provokes in her a double-edged epistemological crisis. Though she stands directly over his corpse, she at first refuses to accept the empirical fact of his death. In having Urania speak directly to Adonais, Shelley relies on the figures of apostrophe and prosopopoeia to posit the temporal fiction that the dead poet might somehow return to life and “speak to [her] once again,” and “Kiss [her], so long as but a

kiss may live.” In this moment, Urania speaks like a lover, desperate for one last kiss-word from her beloved poet, but she quickly comes to the sorrowful recognition that her own immortality—which is the very thing she wants for Adonais—is, ironically, what prevents them from embracing once more.⁸⁷ Strangely, this irony is almost appealing in that, by denying to both the immortal Urania and the mortal Shelley a posthumous intimacy with Adonais, he and his muse are linked more closely together in their loss. More often, in his poetry and prose, Shelley idealizes immortality as the surpassing of human intellectual and affective limitations, but here, Urania’s immortality conflicts with the very desire she seeks to attain. Michael Scrivener writes, “The poem is skeptical concerning the nature of a post mortal existence, but there is no skepticism over the imagination, whose values Shelley asserts unequivocally. Although individual poets might be lured toward death by the anguish of utopian creativity, poetry itself, represented by Urania, is ‘chained to Time’ (st. 26), and cannot escape into a post mortal One” (280).

Urania’s sad knowledge of this limitation of her immortality, which Hegel would identify as “unhappy consciousness” and Schiller would call “tragic consciousness,” seems antithetical to positivist-idealist interpretations of Shelley’s Platonic desire for Keats’s (and by extension his own) poetic immortality.⁸⁸ If love should, or at least is imagined to, transcend the perceptual constraints of individual consciousness and the temporal constraints of mortal life—in other words, if poetic love, like Platonic love, holds out the promise of immortality—it is a sad irony indeed that immortality might

⁸⁷ Interestingly, the term Urania uses to categorize the word-kiss she desires is “food,” the sustenance for life that is taken into the body by the mouth. Sacks also uses the compound “kiss-word” (155).

⁸⁸ The “positivist-idealist interpretations” I allude to here are those by Notopoulos and Baker, though this is not without caveat and complication.

actually be a curse. That the intimate, immortalizing touch of love-speech should be disallowed to Urania because she is a goddess, raises the question of for whom, if anyone, immortal love is allowed. If the satisfaction of erotic desire is not even permitted to the immortal muse of Poetry, is immortality truly idealized in the elegy?⁸⁹ Addressing this question asks for a rethinking of what immortality means for Shelley.

Though *Adonais* has long been considered Shelley's most overtly Platonic poem, Urania's unhappy recognition in stanza twenty-six challenges the assumption of an idealized, Platonic notion of poetic immortality. Scholars since Wasserman generally agree that Urania's appearance marks a crucial turn in the poem's dialectic of skepticism and idealism, but the direction of this turn is still under debate. Ronald Becht's idealist reading of Urania, for instance, asserts that she "has come to slake wounds of despair, and she will do this by furnishing a consolatory wisdom that transcends the speaker's restricted understanding of what has occurred. Her arrival," he argues, "signals a reversal in the direction that the poem has taken thus far" (205).⁹⁰ Though I agree with Becht and

⁸⁹ William Ulmer, in "Adonais and the Death of Poetry" (1993), writes, "Adonais has always resisted determinedly skeptical readings. Faced with that resistance, critics wedded to skepticism typically appropriate Adonais for secular humanism by claiming that in the text's manifestly Platonic locutions Shelley is only 'speaking metaphorically' (Cameron, Shelley: The Golden Years 438). In *Adonais*, according to such readings, "immortality" signifies not literally but tropically, as a false surmise, a mere figure for something else: therefore the poem is not idealist. Recent theoretical perspectives have discredited such interpretations by showing that traditional, humanistic conceptions of value and language are variations of the same logocentrism that underlies more overtly idealist doctrines—so that the phenomenon of a poet naturalizing the supernatural or 'speaking metaphorically' of the One, however significant, does not thrust the poem beyond idealism. Nor does it (in the case of skeptical readings of Shelley) sunder the text's allegiances to truth: while *Adonais* acknowledges the unavailability of final truth, the poem agonizes over that uncertainty instead of embracing it as a touchstone of enlightenment."

⁹⁰ Her transcending perspective, he continues, "penetrates beyond this world to an apprehension of reality that removes the terror from death. Viewed from a temporal perspective, the destruction of a young poet by 'herded wolves' and 'obscene ravens' can lead only to despair. Viewed from the perspective of the Muse's higher wisdom, Adonais' new existence outside the world of time becomes enviable" (205). And further: "The spectacle of tragic mortality begins to lose force: "Death / Shamed by the presence of that living Might / Blushed to annihilation" (11.217-19). Adonais, of course, does not return to life; he is still a victim of the "night of time" that rules the world. But Urania, the protector and "mighty Mother" of poets, operates from a privileged vantage point that gives death new meaning" (205).

others that Urania's arrival marks a turning point in the poem's epistemological and affective response to Adonais's death, he comes to this conclusion by reading Urania as "exist[ing] within the temporal world" (205) because she is "chained to Time" (l. 234), which implies that she herself is subject to time's passing.

In my more skeptical reading, to be "chained to Time" implies being outside temporality, that capital-T "Time" itself—which is neither mortal nor immortal, temporal nor atemporal, but rather the very ground of these things—is what keeps her outside the circumference of mortal life. Even though, as the elegy demonstrates, she can be invoked to move through the human world to inspire and mourn for poets, because she is shackled to the infinity of Time she "cannot thence depart" into the ideal realm of death with the mortal Adonais (l. 234); perhaps the only way for her to do so would be to give up her goddess nature—to "give / All that I am"—to "be as thou now art!" (ll. 232-33). Becht seems to construe being "chained to Time" as a lower-case condition, in which Urania overcomes the discontinuity of being immortal within the mortal time-stream without upsetting the very condition—death—over which she is invoked to prevail. Immortality, it appears, precludes the very satisfaction of unceasing Love that both muse and poet desire from it.

Love in the Void (Circumference)

As the poem nears its end, we see that Shelley's perspective on the virtue of mourning has shifted from early insistence—"O, weep for Adonais" (l. 2), "O, weep for Adonais" (l. 19), "Most musical of mourners, weep again! / Lament anew, Urania" (ll. 28-29), "Most musical of mourners, weep anew!" (l. 37), "O, weep for Adonais!" (l. 73)—to insistent refusal—"Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep— / He hath

awakened from the dream of life” (ll. 343-44), “Mourn not for Adonais” (l. 362). This turn from despair to hope marks a systemic shift in the text’s erotic epistemology, in which Shelley arrives, after much agonizing, at a new knowledge of Adonais’s posthumous condition and the relation between them. In stanza forty-seven, he seems finally to possess an understanding of poetic immortality that melds his Platonism with his relational epistemology:

Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth
Fond wretch! and know thyself and him aright,
Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;
As from a centre, dart thy spirit’s light
Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
Sate the void circumference: then shrink
Even to a point within our day and night;
And keep thy heart light lest it make thee sink

When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink. (ll. 415-23)

To “know thyself and him aright” is to comprehend, or at least apprehend, what Poets do: they expand their imagination (“dart thy spirit’s light”) throughout the world and satisfy humanity’s search for knowledge of their place in the world and their relation to others (“Sate the void circumference”); this is, as I have suggested earlier about stanza nine, an act of poetic love. Immediately following this epistemological imperative—aimed outward to the other mourners and the world (the indefinite plural “Fond wretch”), and inward to himself—Shelley theorizes the formal and figural (metaphorical) shape of his desire for Adonais as a circumference. This image, and correlates like “circles,” are

privileged Shelleyan metaphors for the unity, the identity—the perfect intimacy—between self and other, individual subject and external world/universe, that he strives for in so much of his work.⁹¹ The circumference is the figurative shape of Shelleyan love, a shape that encloses and seals the “bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists” (“On Love” 504).

The metaphor of the “circumference” as the entirety of the universe, and the “void” as a signifier for the lack of knowledge left in the universe by the poet’s death, is another crucial concept in Shelley’s poetics. In the “Defence” he writes, “Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge [...] the root and blossom of all other systems of thought” (531).⁹² Yet the insistence here, in *Adonais*, for the epistemological primacy of Poetry—the “centre and circumference of knowledge”—is shrouded in obscure syntax and abstract spatial imagery that puts this ideal into question in the very instant it is uttered. A “centre” is a single point, without area; a circumference is an outer perimeter, a circle that would enclose this central point; the area between the centre and the perimeter is empty space, a “void.” As a conceptual metaphor, this image holds together, but Shelley’s linguistic self-consciousness—the convolutions of the stanza’s syntax and the obscurity of the imagery—exposes the strangeness of the figure. Nonetheless, the density and opacity of this apostrophic address

⁹¹ For instance, in “On Love,” he writes: “We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all we condemn or despise, the prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed: a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow or evil dare not overleap” (504).

⁹² Later in the essay, he explains: “Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food.”

do not negate Shelley's hard-earned knowledge of the possibility of, and also the obstacles to, poetic immortality.

This stanza presents his theory of poetic knowledge as an ontological necessity; in other words, knowledge of the relation (to recall the definition of Shelleyan epistemology I have been encouraging) between elegist and lost object is a function of the erotic imagination that allows subject and object to, as Wasserman puts it, “meet in a meaningful relationship” and gain a “*significant* awareness of the world” (22). In the end, the only thing that can “sate the void circumference” in the mourner's soul is something which Shelley refuses to let go, even at the risk of his own agency: Love, the sympathetic “going out of our own nature” (*Defence* 517), the “powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves” (“On Love” 503).⁹³ Eros flows like a current throughout the poem, much like, as Shelley writes in “Mont Blanc,” “The everlasting universe of things / Flows throughout the mind, and rolls its rapid waves, / Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom— / Now lending splendour, where from secret springs / The source of human thought its tribute brings / Of waters,—with a sound but half its own” (ll. 1-6). Aroused by the imagination and conveyed in poetic speech, the erotic figures in the text offer the consoling knowledge that, although now beyond the reach of rational thought—“the owl-winged faculty of calculation”—and beyond the reach of the body, dead poets are not annihilated—they live on in their

⁹³ I want to note again the language of emptiness: “insufficient void” is like the “void circumference.”

corpus.⁹⁴ In this self-transcendent moment, even when staring directly into the void abyss of death, Shelleyan love can fend off oblivion.

To close this discussion of *Adonais*, I want to step back from a rhetorical analysis to look at the fundamental structural component of the elegy, the Spenserian stanza. This stanzaic structure is the textual shape of the elegy's eroticism and is the only thing that remains consistent throughout the poem. While many scholars have addressed Spenser's influence on the Romantic poets in general, and on the Spenserian echoes and allusions in *Adonais* in particular, only Greg Kucich, to my knowledge, has investigated the epistemological implications of the stanza form itself.⁹⁵ Ronald Becht, for instance, examines the overall shape of the poem and discovers a completed structure of thought, a "unified sequence of 'mental events,'" a kind of narrative that "carr[ies] the poet-speaker from an initial condition of 'dejection' [...] to a final state of visionary power" (194).⁹⁶ He interrogates earlier interpretations by Milton Wilson, Carlos Baker, Harold Bloom, Donald Reiman, and Earl Wasserman, all of whom, despite the differences in their evaluations, share a common shortcoming: "in none of them," Becht states, "do we find a

⁹⁴ In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff utters this phrase—"The dead are not annihilated"—at the height of his rage and the depth of his despair. The lyric excesses of Brontë's prose mirrors this affective and epistemological condition of elegiac poetry.

⁹⁵ See Kucich, *Romantic Spenserianism*.

⁹⁶ Becht's approach begins from the New Critical premise that "among the characteristics common to all works of art are unity and structural integrity," and endeavors to "explain the structure of *Adonais* in terms of the unified sequence of 'mental events' that carry the poet-speaker from an initial condition of 'dejection' [...] to a final state of visionary power" (194). "To approach the poem in this manner," he writes, "is to argue that it is 'about' the speaker and his state of mind, that it is, in short, the representation of a completed activity," the mental activity of the grieving poet's response to his loss. "By locating the poem's shaping principle in the specifically mimetic quality of its self-contained mental drama," Becht aims "to demonstrate and emphasize structural features that have received little or no comment" in previous scholarship (194).

definition of form that is based on a systematic analysis of the peculiar nature of the poet-speaker's mental drama" (195).⁹⁷

Though Becht smartly surveys, and rightly finds lacking, these earlier studies of the elegy's formal characteristics, he approaches "form" as the overall arrangement of the text's logic and its affective progression from despair to prophetic triumph over death.⁹⁸ But there is more to the poem's form than this: in viewing form as Shelley's means of organizing his shifting ideas and emotions, Becht overlooks the effects of the Spenserian stanza itself. His discussion of the macro-scale movement of ideas and affects throughout the whole poem, to suggest a sort of narrative progression of Shelley's shifting thoughts and desires and fears, does not account for these self-contained structures that enwrap the discrete, micro-scale movements of its epistemological discourse. Even scholars who directly address Spenser's influence on *Adonais* do not account for the particulars of the stanzaic form.⁹⁹ Everest, for instance, identifies numerous references and allusions to Spenser's poetry, and notes that "*Adonais* is coloured by a graceful patterning of

⁹⁷ Milton Wilson, Becht states, sees in the poem the discursive structure of a philosophical argument: "'The victory of Shelley's Platonism,'" Becht quotes Wilson, "'has given *Adonais* a unity and certainty of purpose" that his other Platonic poems, like "*Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion* lack'" (195). Carlos Baker, he explains, links "the poem's Platonism to its patterns of symbolic imagery and to its complex use of Urania," and contends, "The narrative of the first two-thirds and the implied narrative of the last third... seem to be of a piece." In addition, Bloom "sees the poem as falling into two main thematic movements," while Reiman "offers a descriptive account of structure to show how 'Shelley has interwoven Classical and Judeo-Christian myths, conventions of the pastoral elegy and scientific imagery, into his most nearly perfect work of art'" (195). He states further that critics have mostly "ignored the crucial function of the lyric speaker's crisis in determining its unity and formal design. They have preferred, instead, to approach structure through an examination of Shelley's themes or of his handling of pastoral conventions and mythic material" (195). Peter Sacks, too, holds an implicitly teleological view of the poem, as a Freudian work of mourning that follows the speaker from despair to consolation.

⁹⁸ Later, he will write that the elegy's "formal structure"—by which he means its organization of "mental events" into a teleological trajectory from despair and uncertainty to spiritual ascendance and triumph—"defines the speaker's condition and combines with his thoughts and feelings to give shape and unity to his personal drama. It is, in other words, the internal principle of construction through which the poet has organized his material into a self-contained representation of a particular human experience" (210).

⁹⁹ Kucich remains the exception to this overlooking.

allusions which acknowledge Spenser's influence on Keats" (243). But beyond remarking that the poem is composed in Spenserian stanzas, he stops short of analyzing the specific significance of this.¹⁰⁰ In what follows, I examine the Spenserian stanza as a formalization or materialization of Shelley's erotic desire for Keats.

Stanza forty-seven presents Shelley's theory of love and knowledge through the figure of the circumference, which I have explained above is an ideal shape through which to understand the formal, performative nature of Shelleyan eroticism. The figure and shape of the circumference is analogous to the enclosed, self-contained structure of the individual Spenserian stanza, which I propose to call a "little circumference."¹⁰¹ The iambic pentameter and *ababbcb* rhyme pattern of the first eight lines create a near chiasmus of aural and visual effects, a sense of unity and balance just a bit askew. Of course, Shelley often plays with spondaic and trochaic opening substitutions to animate the pentameter, and the enjambments across the *ab*, *bbc*, *cb*, and *cc* lines effect a forward momentum that further energizes the stanza. Moreover, the extra foot in the Alexandrine accentuates the specular symmetry of the first eight lines by bringing their unity into greater relief by contrast.¹⁰² This contrast between the hexameter Alexandrine and the eight pentameter lines is partially offset, though, by the interlocking rhymes that link the first line's *a* rhyme with the closing couplet's paired *c* rhyme, thereby maintaining the

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Epstein, too, though he makes passing reference to the "web of allusions and echoes" of Spenser which "reveals that Shelley is self-consciously aware of the chain of poets before him who have memorialized, transformed, and fed upon their lost rivals" (108), says nothing specific about the stanzaic form.

¹⁰¹ Credit is due to Veronica Alfano for this term.

¹⁰² As Veronica Alfano has explained in conversation, the Alexandrine is extended because the hexameter line wants to be two trimeter lines so as to be divided into a 3 or 4 syllable unit (which most English meters want to be, which they all sort of naturally do) while a pentameter line cannot be so divided, which has made it distinctly identified with poetic speech instead of song.

Alexandrine as part of the whole. Additionally, the enjambment of the closing *cc* couplet makes the last line feel even longer, by extending the eighth line's pentameter into the hexameter Alexandrine, creating the effect of a twenty-two syllable semantic unit.

This sense of enclosure within each stanzaic circumference is reinforced further by the fact that there are no enjambments between stanzas.¹⁰³ The rhyme and rhythm that lure the poet to the brink of this stanza's final line, and then are momentarily suspended across the wordless, soundless void before the next stanza, create a discrete circumference of poetic language within which Shelley gives sensuous form to his desire. As each stanza closes around itself, encircling figure and image and sound, it is a bounded unit; from this perspective, each can be thought of as itself a "centre" from which the mourning lover can "dart [his] spirit's light / Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might / Sate the void circumference." In this spirit light, each stanza then also becomes analogous to a "point within our day and night," a point of concentration of mind that will "keep [the] heart light lest it make thee sink" into melancholia and despair. Although, historically, the "point within our day and night" is commonly thought to refer to Rome, "the sepulchre of our joy" in the following stanza (l. 424), I read this "point" figurally, and more expansively, as a "centre and circumference of knowledge" ("Defence" 531) that represents the bounds—the day and night, start and end, the

¹⁰³ With exceptions, stanzaic enjambments are common in Shelley's poems. "Ode to the West Wind," for instance, is comprised of five interlocked and highly enjambed terza-rima sonnets; and "The Triumph of Life" is also comprised of highly enjambed terza-rima stanzas. Future work will expand on the significance of enjambment in Romantic and Victorian poetry, and investigate the association or similarity I find between enjambment and the corpse.

totality—of mortal life.¹⁰⁴ There is a danger inherent in this hope though, as being lured to the brink of mortal life is to risk death for the promise of immortality.

Finally, the repetition of this uniform stanzaic structure creates, as Sacks rightly argues, “a sense of continuity, of an unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the extreme discontinuity of death” (23). The unbroken stanzaic pattern of *Adonais*, which yet has between its stanzaic circumferences the dissolving “edges” of Barthesian pleasure, suggests that Shelleyan eros moves through the elegy in form as well as figure. The fifty-five Spenserian stanzas, each in themselves, and together, perform the expansive circularity and unity of Shelley’s ideal vision of love. This is not to say, however, that poetic form somehow fully resolves the problem of mourning and knowledge for Shelley in the end, because although he elevates his vision from the skeptical to the ideal by pushing *Adonais* heaven-ward into “the abode where the Eternal are” (l. 495), Shelley himself is “borne darkly, fearfully, afar” (l. 492).

In closing, I hope to have shown how *Adonais*’s figural and epistemological gymnastics are the ground of the poem’s Platonic eroticism. If we read the poem as an amorous expression of Shelley’s desire for Keats as epistemological object, we see that Shelley’s Platonism and eroticism are more complicated than critics usually acknowledge. Most often, it is the Platonic concepts of Ideal Forms and the immortality of the soul that critics find to most strongly inform *Adonais*.¹⁰⁵ But this philosophical

¹⁰⁴ The *Norton Critical Edition* identifies this “point within our day and night” as Rome: “When the imagination *shrinks* to a single *point* (a *centre*) after having reached out to scan the universe in stanza 47, the poet suggests Rome as the proper point within time (*our day and night*) to explore” (424).

¹⁰⁵ A line such as “The One remains, the many change and pass” (l. 460), is one of the most common references in scholarship on the poem’s Platonism. Notopoulos, for instance, whose book, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Platonic Mind*, is the foundational critical text on this subject, writes, “The poem is an inextricable fusion of Plato’s metaphysical view of the ideal and temporal world as stated in the *Republic*. It is restated in terms of immortality versus mortality in the *Phaedo*, and in terms of Intellectual Beauty, immanent and transcendent, versus the transient shadows in the *Symposium* and the

perspective tends to miss another way that his Platonism is inscribed in the poem: in the figures of speech and stanzaic form of the text. Shelley's mourners grieve Keats as an object of knowledge and pleasure, and while the poem's conclusion imagines Keats's soul as "a star" that "Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are" (ll. 494-95), Shelley himself is "borne darkly, fearfully, afar" (l. 492), suggesting that his idealism is tempered by his recognition—his knowledge—of Poetry's limitations, which he has attained by inventing the erotic relation between himself and Keats through poetic speech. The textual pleasures that we encounter here are elements of the poem's multi-valenced eroticism.¹⁰⁶ While its desire as an amorous expression may strive to meet the ideals of Platonic eros, in its figures and form, *Adonais* veers toward the disruptions of self, language, and knowledge that we encounter in Barthes's *Lover's Discourse*. To conclude, I return to where this chapter started: for Shelley to elegize Keats in this way, to mourn him, to pursue him, as an object of knowledge and poetic pleasure, is perhaps the most intimate act a poet or poem can perform. What Shelley has written is a deeply erotic text, a love poem to Keats, who himself becomes, through the elegy's situating of the mouth as erotic organ, a figure of speech for the ultimate love object: Poesy itself.¹⁰⁷

Phaedrus [...] These Platonic themes are sometimes developed separately, but in the last stanzas of the pome they are blended into a perfect amalgam of Platonism" (291).

¹⁰⁶ This definition of pleasure as indeterminacy is just one aspect of this concept. As with "knowledge," the term "pleasure" will shift and bend as the argument progresses. I will also address the difference between pleasure and desire, despite their conceptual closeness in Barthes and in psychoanalysis.

¹⁰⁷ Credit is due to Tres Pyle for this suggestion.

CHAPTER III

“AS THOUGH A HAND WERE IN MY HAND TO HOLD”: EROTIC FIGURATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN SWINBURNE’S *AVE ATQUE VALE*

This chapter thinks about what it means to call Algernon Charles Swinburne an “erotic” poet, and investigates how Swinburnean eros operates in the context of elegy. It examines key moments in the elegy when figures of speech like prosopopoeia, metonymy, and simile, and figures of somatic sensation like synaesthesia, encounter the obscure, enigmatic bodies and objects of death, and asks what happens to elegiac speech seeks to touch the dead. There are specific moments in the poem when language and body meet and touch, when the speaking body and the textual body meet at the boundary of death in a relation of knowledge; these moments are the focal points of this chapter. This entangling of sense perceptions and the figures of sense perception (the metonymic simile of a “shut scroll” as “though a hand were in my hand to hold”) that the elegy enacts, the loss of discrete reference that language undergoes when it speaks across the boundary of life and death, the “diffuse” or imprecise articulations of deathly bodies—these are the elegiac linguistic counterpart to the “diffuse” sensory condition of synaesthesia. When language can be experienced in and on multiple sensory registers—heard with the ear, seen (read) with the eye, “tasted” by the mouth (as in touched on the tongue when spoken, making taste a sense of touch, and tasting a touching, too)—it becomes a sensory object.¹⁰⁸ As it moves through the body that speaks or reads it, poetry

¹⁰⁸ From this perspective, all tasting is a touching, but not all touching is a tasting; touching also happens in other sense organs like the ear (ear drum) and eye (retina). I am unsure, though, whether language has a smell—that is, while smell is particulate and therefore similarly “touches” the nose (smelling as a touching of the body)—that is, whether there is an analogous “smell strata” of language that can be activated by poetry, like the “sonic strata” Jakobson discusses.

is a somatic event perceivable by multiple senses at once. Put differently, this multi-sensory potential of poetic speech is the linguistic analogue of bodily synaesthesia.¹⁰⁹

Poetic speech is not material in the way a flower is, though, which does not need to be spoken to touch the body: a flower touches the eye that sees it and the nose that smells it. Yet I propose that because a flower can effect (touch) the body in multiple ways, through multiple senses, and sometimes at the same time, it may be considered a kind of synaesthetic object. A sensory object is a basic one that just hits one sense at a time and doesn't activate others; a synaesthetic object, though, can effect more than one sense perception, and sometimes at the same time. Swinburne's synaesthetic objects like the pale bitter burning flowers that affect eye, tongue, and skin (touch) and later the "pale Titan-woman."

The intermixings and meldings of sensory perceptions in *Ave Atque Vale* are interesting for their sensitivity to the nuance of experience, but are more significant for their rarity.¹¹⁰ For a poet as deeply synaesthetic as Swinburne to employ this figure so sparingly in the elegy suggests something fundamental about the sensory potential of elegiac speech. Later in this chapter, I look at moments of multi-sensory shutdown, which I refer to as a de-synaestheticizing of the bodies in the poem. I read the faceless bodies, disembodied faces, and nonworking body parts in the poem—the "effaced unquiet eyes" and "unmelodious mouth" of stanza VIII, the "pale mouths, etc.," of stanza IX, as anti-prosopon, what, from de Man, we call disfigurations and defaced bodies. Though they may frustrate in their lack of concrete detail and referential potential, they yield a

¹⁰⁹ I am using the term "synaesthesia" figurally, as a figure of speech for sensory experiences.

¹¹⁰ The exquisite "chill the wintry smell" is one of the few synaesthesia-adjacent moments in the elegy.

negative knowledge, the performance of touching yields, their touching is a multi-sensory linguistic performance of language crossing textual boundaries, the boundaries of the bodies in the text, the body of the text, and the body that speaks or reads the text. The connection I am attempting to highlight is a way to understand how the obscure, nondiscrete bodies and body parts of death in the poem are the result of the problem of synaesthesia in language.

Julia Kristeva offers a compelling textual model of the multi-sensorial nature of love as a linguistic synaesthesia: “The language of love,” she writes, “is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; *it is a flight of metaphors—it is literature*” (1). Love, figured in and as metaphor, is

a crucible of contradictions and misunderstandings—at the same time infinity of meaning and occultation of meaning— [...] It is revealed as such in the wandering of metaphorical connotation. Indeed, in the rapture of love, the limits of one’s own identity vanish, at the same time that the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love’s discourse [...] The ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test. (2)

Kristeva captures the resistance of eros to the language poets would use to create or represent it in a text. She clarifies that, by nature, the discourse of amorous experience is “blurred,” and she categorizes the synaesthetic rapture of love as a negative epistemological event. By pointing out the inextricability of poetic speech (“metaphorical connotation”) and subjectivity (“the limits of one’s own identity”) she figures the “rapture of love” as a synaesthetic condition of knowledge and language.¹¹¹ When she

¹¹¹ In an essay that has been tremendously helpful for me, Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor looks to Kristeva’s conception of the metaphoricity of love in her discussion of “Anactoria.” In this poem, she writes,

describes love as “a crucible of contradictions and misunderstandings,” simultaneously the “infinity of meaning and occultation of meaning” activated by “the wandering of metaphorical connotation”—she is also describing the linguistic equivalent of multi-sensory experience. Synaesthesia is a way to embody or perform in speech a multi-sensory experience of the body, because it relies on the language of one sense to express the activation of another.

In order to more clearly understand Swinburne’s reputation as an erotic poet, it is necessary to delve into the reception history of his work. Upon the publication in 1865 of *Atalanta in Calydon*, and in 1866 of *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, Swinburne’s poetry was celebrated for its formal virtuosity and aesthetic ambition, and reproved for its sexual provocations (156).¹¹² *Atalanta*, John Ruskin wrote in an 1866 letter, is “the grandest thing ever yet done by a youth,” and “though he is a Demoniac youth” his “foam at the mouth is fine” (156).¹¹³ *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, which includes such infamous

“Swinburne's flight of metaphors is a creative language of love, in which the play of language is love because its transfer of meaning is a trope of love's desired transference of subject and object. ‘To love,’ says Julia Kristeva, ‘comes in here in the place of to be and as: copula and comparison, existence and image, truth and deception. A drifting together of the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary’” (919, 162).

¹¹² *Atalanta*, John Ruskin writes, is “the grandest thing ever yet done by a youth—though he is a Demoniac youth—whether ever he will be clothed and his right mind—heaven only knows. His foam at the mouth is fine, meantime” (156). Ruskin, John. “To Charles Eliot Norton.” 28 Jan. 1866. *Letters of John Ruskin to Charles Eliot Norton*. Ed. Charles Eliot Norton. Vol. 1. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905. 156-57. In another letter, Ruskin is slightly circumspect toward *Poems and Ballads, First Series*: “For the matter of it—I consent to much—I regret much—I blame or reject nothing. I should as soon think of finding fault with you as with a thundercloud or a nightshade blossom. All I can say of you or them—is that God made you, and that you are very wonderful and beautiful. To me it may be dreadful or deadly—it may be in a deeper sense, or in certain relations, helpful and medicinal. There is assuredly something wrong with you—awful in proportion to the great powers it affects, and renders [it] at present useless.” See Ruskin to Swinburne, 9 September 1866. Cited in *PL*, 139. In Rikky Rooksby, *A. C. Swinburne: A Poet’s Life*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997, 141. Henceforth abbreviated as *PL*. 5.]

¹¹³ In a letter to Thomas Dixon in 1866, William Rossetti writes, “Swinburne’s superiority over his contemporary poets, with the sole possible exception of Tennyson . . . lie[s] in his mastery of all the literary or artistic resources of poetry.” [William Michael Rossetti to Thomas Dixon, 2 September 1866, in *Selected Letters of William Michael Rossetti*, ed. Roger W. Peattie (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 1990), 150.

works as “Laus Veneris,” “Dolores,” “The Leper,” and “Anactoria,” received a rather less generous welcome.¹¹⁴ The negative critical response to the adventurous sexuality of *Poems and Ballads* long-overshadowed the other the aesthetic and intellectual virtues of his poetry.¹¹⁵ Another still-influential criticism of Swinburne comes from T.S. Eliot, over a lack of intellectual depth and the supposed imprecision of speech. Eliot’s view that arises from what he considers Swinburne’s privileging of the sensuousness of poetic speech over the poetry of making sense. Eliot refers to this as “diffuseness,” a problem of poetic speech not properly grasping its object. When a lack of concrete description and reference obscures the relation between words and objects, Swinburne’s poems do not offer “images and ideas and music,” but “one thing with a curious mixture of suggestions of all three” (133). He “uses the most general word,” Eliot continues, “because his

¹¹⁴ John Morley, for instance, excoriated the young poet, calling him the “libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs.” Robert Buchanan, who would later be known for his rebuke of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, claimed that Swinburne’s poems were “unclean for the sake of uncleanness” (source?). Morley’s review of *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, was published on August 4, 1866, in the *Saturday Review*. Buchanan’s review appeared in *Athenaeum* on the same date. Though such critiques were rightly refuted by other of his contemporaries, such as W.M. Rossetti and Ruskin, they influenced scholarly responses to Swinburne for the next century.

¹¹⁵ Swinburne’s verse “eclipses or sacrifices thought,” one nineteenth-century reviewer stated (Hyder 14). To this, Swinburne responded: “Except to such ears as should always be kept closed against poetry, there is no music in verse which has not in it sufficient fullness and ripeness of meaning, sufficient adequacy of emotion or of thought, to abide the analysis of any other than the blind scrutiny of prepossession or the squint-eyed inspection of malignity” (Hyder 14). “To Swinburne,” Hyder tells us, “poetry was not music capable of separation from thought” (14). This imprecision is in sharp contrast to the Victorian emphasis on particularly and specificity. See Carol Christ, *The Finer Optic*, for more. As Jerome McGann notes, “[S]o shocking was the advent of this epochal book that it would come to obscure the range of Swinburne’s work—a range so extensive that one can sometimes scarcely imagine how it came to be thought narrow or precious” (207). See McGann, Jerome. “Swinburne’s Radical Artifice; or, The Comedian as A.C.” *Modernism/Modernity* 11.2. April 2004: 205-218. More recently, Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner has commented: “To a large degree [...] *Poems and Ballads, First Series* has set the terms for interpreting, evaluating, and assessing the significance of all his poetry. Those terms—aestheticism, sexuality and sensuality, technical virtuosity—invest a great deal of significance in the otherworldliness and abstractness of the volume’s descriptive passages. Resulting accounts enlist Swinburne in the ranks of an anti-Enlightenment Romanticism whose truth claims are intelligible largely as a rejection of those asserted by Enlightenment rationalism, and whose preference for imagination and reverie rather than reason and observation entails a deliberately vague descriptive practice” (13).

emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused; it is emotion reinforced, not by intensification but by expansion” (134).¹¹⁶ Moreover, his demand that poetic speech “present[s] the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified,” is particularly problematic for elegy because the identification or substitution of word and object is not possible—the love object is dead and immaterial or otherwise hidden from the sight of the living. What Eliot decries as the “hallucination of meaning,” when “the object has ceased to exist,” I read as a performance of and as meaning itself.¹¹⁷ His view does not consider other possible modes of poetic performance, other ways that poems speak and make meaning, and Swinburne calls on many more resources of poetry than Eliot accounts for in this essay. For instance, Swinburne relies on aural signifiers to produce meaning in the absence of concrete sensory objects. In elegy, where there is no concrete object to enclose in words, the somatic effects of the sounds of speech and rhythm—what can be called the materiality of speech—can communicate desire and voice the “human feelings” that Eliot cannot hear (136).

While Eliot thinks of poetic diffuseness—non-particularized perception, language, and affect—as a failure of meaning, recent scholarship by John Rosenberg and Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner considers this kind of generalized non-specificity a poetic

¹¹⁶ Criticism such as Eliot’s was responsible for Swinburne’s general neglect in the first half of the twentieth century; not until the 1960s did his work begin to recapture scholarly interest; according to Clyde Kenneth Hyder, the resurgence in interest was in large part due to the publication of Cecil Y. Lang’s *The Swinburne Letters, 1959-62* (3). Catherine Maxwell and Stefano Evangelista similarly credit Lang with recuperating Swinburne’s reputation, and praise Hyder as well: “While he commanded a select minority of admirers and supporters, Swinburne’s own reception was muted until the 1960s when his fortunes began to revive owing to the good offices of scholars such as Cecil Y. Lang, editor of the monumental six-volume *Swinburne Letters* (Swinburne 1959-62),” as well as collections by Clyde K. Hyder in the late 1960s and early 1970s (3).

¹¹⁷ Interestingly, I find that what he says of authors whose work he esteems more highly is applicable to my way of reading Swinburne: “But the language which is more important to us is that which is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects, as, for instance, the prose of Mr. James Joyce or the earlier Conrad” (136).

virtue.¹¹⁸ Extending this line of thought, when I look to stanzas 1-4 in the next section of this chapter, I read under the hypothesis that the “diffuse” or “deliberately vague” conditions of *Ave Atque Vale* are not limited to reference, image, and affect; they also happen in certain multi-sensory experiences and figures of speech.¹¹⁹ I suggest that the “curious mixture of suggestions” of sound, speech, and thought, and the “expansion” of emotion, describes the synaesthetic mode of relation that is the fundamental condition of Swinburnean eros.

The second position this chapter addresses is the poem’s relation to the elegiac tradition. Most studies of the elegy attribute the experimental and dynamic (if impersonal) nature of its language, imagery, and form to Swinburne’s reimagining of the classical and pastoral conventions of the genre to better fit Baudelaire.¹²⁰ While Swinburne’s elegy is aware of the classical conventions, they are not the dominant influence on its voice and form. This chapter proposes an approach to the elegy’s classicism that is not dependent on the conventions of the genre, and which in fact reveals the constraints of genre criticism. The elegy’s classicism, I will show, exceeds references

¹¹⁸ John Rosenberg writes that while “Traditionally, the English poet has prided himself on particularity [...] Our very conception of poetry has been shaped by the practices of the metaphysical poets and by Keats’s dictum that the poet must have ‘distinctness for his luxury.’ We are at a loss in reading a poet who, like Swinburne, is diffuse not by default but by design” (163). Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner observes a similar non-specific quality throughout Swinburne’s work, and refers to it as “a deliberately vague descriptive practice” (13).

¹¹⁹ Swinburne’s tendency toward somatic and affective impression over concrete imagery and representation stems from his interest to represent “the effect of the thing instead of the thing itself.” The consistency in the elegy of non-specific images, bodies, objects, affects, and figures of speech belies the difficulty of describing death and the dead from across the boundary of life, and the resulting linguistic and somatic difficulty of distinguishing the various sense perceptions in poetic speech and form.

¹²⁰ Brennan writes that criticism by Bloom and Sacks on the competitive nature of *Ave Atque Vale* “is astute in its account of Swinburne’s relation to the elegy genre. Though the poem centers on Baudelaire, Swinburne’s depersonalized mode is certainly a reaction to the more personal connections Tennyson, Arnold, and Shelley seek to establish with their precursors” (254).

and allusions to the classical past, to poets like Sappho and gods like Apollo, and its pastoralism is an anti-pastoral inversion of the conventionally idyllic atmosphere of the elegiac tradition. While scholars have generally focused on the poem's references and allusions to classical poets and mythic figures as evidence of Swinburne's attentiveness to elegiac convention, such recallings of antiquity confine the text's classicism to associations that do not account for its nuanced figurations of love and knowledge in the face of death. I believe it is more exciting and theoretically provocative to think the poem's classicism rhetorically and structurally, in order to show the epistemological undercurrent of its figures of speech and versification.

The third issue this chapter interrogates concerns the nature of Swinburne's classicism. His Hellenic affinities are most commonly interpreted through conventional references and allusions to the classical past, as well as through his mastery of classical forms and meters such as Sapphics and Hendecasyllabics. Instead, I propose an approach to the elegy's classicism that is not dependent on the conventions of the genre, and which in fact reveals the constraints of generic criticism. The poem's classicism exceeds claims grounded on references and allusions to the classical past—to poets like Sappho and mythic gods like Apollo—and its inversions of the idyllic pastoralism of the elegiac tradition. While scholars have generally focused on the poem's references and allusions to classical poets and mythic figures as evidence of Swinburne's awareness of elegiac convention, this view confines the text's classicism to associations and reinvests the elegy in the literary tradition; it also does not account for the elegy's subtle and sophisticated reimagining of classical tropes like metonymy and prosopopoeia.¹²¹

¹²¹ The dimensions of Swinburne's classicism, too, though having been smartly investigated in major studies by Margot K. Louis (*Swinburne and his Gods*), Yisrael Levin (*Swinburne's Apollo*), and Charlotte

There is, however, a problem of elegiac convention that is worth mentioning here because it arises in a figure of speech that I have so far been arguing is a crucial figure of eros—the corpse/corpus metonymy—yet here it seems to turn itself back into a convention. Peter Sacks elaborates this problem from within the elegiac tradition: “Swinburne regarded Baudelaire as a pioneer and model,” Sacks writes, “and it is with this in mind that we should recognize how fully ‘Ave Atque Vale’ exploits the elegy’s generic association with issues of lineage and inheritance” (206).¹²² Once again, though, the focus on “issues of lineage and inheritance”—which encompasses the competitive anxiety that Bloom and McGann propose—tends to overshadow non-generic elements. While I agree that Swinburne reveres Baudelaire as an aesthetic ideal and model, I view this as more than a nod to the conventions of literary inheritance and influence. In an excellent recent essay, Thomas Brennan similarly critiques these interpretations by Bloom, McGann, and Sacks: “They follow the traditional notion of the elegy as a competitive genre, a view that does not account for Swinburne’s lingering over Baudelaire—as a corpse but also as a *corpus* or body of work—throughout his poem” (251). The poem’s “lingering” over Baudelaire as corpse and corpus, this chapter will argue, reflects Swinburne’s erotic pursuit of the dead poet. Rather than setting himself in

Ribeyrol, have been under-examined in the elegy. It is through a Platonic interpretation of Eros, I will argue, that the elegy’s classical affinities are better understood.

¹²² Sacks expands: “Swinburne considered Baudelaire to be the great pioneer of this aesthetic creed; hence even though Baudelaire as a personality appears nowhere in the poem, Swinburne’s tribute succeeds in feeling not only fitting but deeply sincere. The very qualities that make ‘Ave Atque Vale’ seem impersonal—all of its gorgeous imagery, symbolism, and mythological machinery—confirm Swinburne’s fervent admiration for Baudelaire and his heartfelt desire to assume the mantle of the elder poet” (Sacks 206). Erik Gray, citing this same passage in Sacks, adds: “Swinburne’s poem simultaneously gestures back to a long poetic tradition and looks forward to the more stylized, more detached form of elegy that would emerge, or re-emerge, in the twentieth century” (Gray 282).

an agonistic or competitive posture toward the dead poet, Swinburne pursues what I claim is a textually erotic relationship with the dead Baudelaire.

When scholars attend to erotic experience in his work they tend to do so at the exclusion of other interpretive possibilities that I suggest offer a more nuanced understanding of the complexity and diversity of the figures, forms, and images at play in his poetry. And even when scholars engage erotic experience as a formal problem, eros remains grounded in bodily materiality and carnal pleasure. For instance, in a cleverly counter-intuitive reading of the erotic in Swinburne, John Rosenberg has recently claimed: “Virtually all of Swinburne’s most powerful poetry is an elegy to the evanescence of love” (171); “There are scarcely any lovers in Swinburne’s poetry,” he continues. “There is much passion but little conjunction; emotion is felt but not communicated and not returned. Swinburne has mistakenly acquired the reputation of an erotic poet; he is rather the elegist of love’s impossibility” (177). The impossibility of love is a common theme in Swinburne’s work, and the lack of “conjunction” and reciprocation is clear in poems like “The Leper,” “Anactoria,” and “Laus Veneris.” Yet this view of love’s lack maintains a straightforward, and straight, association of eros with sexual love.

A central question for this chapter, then, is: What has been the effect on Swinburne studies when eros is consistently equated with sexual desire and bodily pleasure, and when only such explicitly sexual examples like these are claimed as evidence of Swinburne’s erotic poetics? Harrison encourages a rethinking of Swinburnean eroticism similar to my own: “Sexuality and sexual rhetoric,” he writes, “not only allowed Swinburne to express social critique and anti-Christian sentiments, but

also helped him to conceptualize his own theological framework” (63). I would amend this to claim that the erotic figuration and imagery in the elegy helped Swinburne to conceptualize his own epistemological framework.

The referential and formal dimensions of Swinburne’s Hellenism, particularly his mastery of classical prosody and his knowledge of Greek poetry and thought are well addressed in the scholarship.¹²³ However, as with those critical views that reduce the eroticism of the elegy to conventional reproductive imagery, the rhetoric and figural logics of classical (Platonic) thought have been under-examined in favor of identifying allusions and references that assume representational transparency and privilege the positivism of Greek thought.¹²⁴ The erotic-linguistic constructions I pursue in *Ave Atque Vale* do not fit the positivist “Olympian vision,” as Charlotte Ribeyrol refers to it, of a classical Greece that would provide “secure ideological foundations” for the elegist.¹²⁵ Instead, these figures reveal themselves as textual inventions in the same moment they

¹²³ Charlotte Ribeyrol, for instance, writes: “Swinburne’s intensive education in classical Greek language and culture is without question”; he was “a learned Hellenist, trained at the best institutions offering a classical education in nineteenth-century Britain, from Eton to Oxford” (52).” Erik Gray smartly (and counterintuitively) interprets the elegy’s classical referentiality as an aspect of its radical (un)conventionality. *Ave Atque Vale* is, he writes, “in no sense ‘private’: Swinburne had no personal knowledge of Baudelaire—indeed, he began his elegy while the latter was still alive, after hearing a false report of his death. Nor does Swinburne’s poem concern itself with topical issues; to the contrary, all of its references are classical and mythological. Its title is taken from Catullus, and there follow allusions to Sappho, the Muses, Dryads, Proserpine, Venus, Niobe, and the House of Atreus. Yet the poem’s constant invocation of classical tropes and its virtuosic formal polish do not stifle it. Rather, Swinburne’s elegy manages to be at once strictly conventional and utterly radical. Swinburne’s radicalism, here as in all of his poems, lies in his willingness to grant precedence to aesthetic value over every other consideration—including traditional morality, and even individuality” (281). While I agree that these conventional references do not at all “stifle” its energy or affect, Gray’s view is still representative of the relatively narrow sense of the elegy’s debt to classical thought. For other investigations of Swinburne’s Hellenism, see Margot K. Louis and Yisrael Levin, among others.

¹²⁴ The assumption of aesthetic-referential transparency of Greek art comes to us from Winckelmann. See David Ferris, *Romantic Urns*, for an incisive re-examination of this ideal of classical art in Romantic poetry.

¹²⁵ Ribeyrol challenges the positivist presumption by examining the darker corners of Swinburne’s classicism, his “liminal and transgressive excursions into marginal Hellenic territories” which were “often obscured by the exclusively Olympian vision of Greece extolled by most Victorians in their quest for secure ideological foundations” (52).

express their desire, and so they sort of undermine themselves; this implies that the erotic relation, the intimate textual relation Swinburne seeks with Baudelaire, is possible only within the language and form of the poetic text.

My argument about the elegy's classicism builds on the work of Sacks, Gray, and Ribeyrol, but shifts focus from its referentiality to its rhetoricity. Swinburne's elegiac classicism entails more than mythic reference and allusion, whether idealizing and Olympian (as per Gray), or "liminal and transgressive" (as per Ribeyrol): for me, the elegy's classicism inheres and operates in the figures of speech that represent the relation between the amorous subject and the dead love object. These relational figures—which, as in *Adonais*, I consider figures of love—perform the conditions of Platonic eros by representing the pursuit of knowledge (in the figure of the lost object) as an experience of somatic and intellectual pleasure. *Ave Atque Vale*, however, presents the desire for knowledge in a very different way. Neither the "pale Titan-woman," the metonymy of corpse and corpus in the "shut scroll," nor the many anti-prosopons, signify positively and encourage rational thought or intellectual order, but rather the loss of these things in the pursuit of the dead.¹²⁶ It is worth noting here another variation of the problem of elegiac knowledge: if Swinburne's erotic figures signify the undoing of reason and rationality, how can this be considered knowledge, and how can this knowledge give

¹²⁶ "Greek Antiquity progressively appeared throughout the nineteenth century as a powerful signifier of rationality, purity, and order," Charlotte Ribeyrol tells us in an illuminating recent essay on Swinburne's Hellenism (52). "What is striking in Swinburne's poems," she states later, "is the instability of the Greek reference which constantly shifts from the archaic to the later, Hellenistic periods or from the mystery gods (Demeter, Persephone, and Dionysus) to the deities of Olympus [and] the God Apollo is repeatedly said to be both 'Destroyer and Healer'" (55). "Swinburne's Hellenism is dual, Janus-like," she writes. "His Hellenic inspiration exceeds the limits of Olympus to offer readers shocking glimpses of Chthonian and Dionysian depths [...] revealing repressed features of ancient Greek culture, in particular colour as opposed to marmoreal whiteness, darkness as opposed to Apollonian light, suffering as opposed to health and innocent joy" (54-55). We see the opposition to Apollonian light in the Sun-Gods ineffectual mourning. But more problematically, I would also add "Platonic as opposed to carnal eroticism," though this is a reversal of the order.

pleasure? As I develop later in this chapter, elegiac figuration offers what we can think of as a negative knowledge, or the negative epistemology of mourning.

Swinburne's Elegiac Anti-Pastoral

From its first line, *Ave Atque Vale* sets itself apart from the elegiac tradition.¹²⁷ Like *Adonais*, *Ave Atque Vale* self-consciously engages key, recognizable conventions of the genre, with imagistic nods to the pastoral tradition, references and allusions to antiquity, and the performance of symbolic acts, such as the strewing of flowers and the posing of questions.¹²⁸ Like *Adonais*, *Ave Atque Vale* strews flowers over the dead and poses questions about poetic immortality and the limits of human knowledge. Unlike *Adonais* (and earlier forebears), *Ave Atque Vale* does not first implore a muse or a god to share Swinburne's grief: he speaks directly to the dead poet, and the flowers he proffers are not sylvan and bucolic.¹²⁹ In addition, though the elegy seeks no sympathy from fellow mourners, and seeks nothing more for the dead poet than silent rest, it also seeks nothing less than the impossible: to make the dead speak again, for the lost object to respond to the address of the living.

My focus in the opening stanzas is the imagery that gestures toward the pastoral tradition of elegy only to turn sharply into a severe anti-pastoral atmosphere. "Shall I

¹²⁷ What is radical about Swinburne's elegy is the continual, insistent turning or inversion of conventions to fit more closely the aesthetic of the lost object. These conventional things do not occur in the common order of elegiac events, nor do they fit the aesthetic expectations of an idyllic pastoral setting, a sympathetic community of mourners, a compassionate muse bereft.

¹²⁸ "Since the first question with which Thyrsis opened his lament for Daphnis, in Theocritus's 'First Idyl,' the convention of questions, sometimes private and gnomic but more often in a sharply interrogative mode, addressed to a particular auditor, has echoed throughout the history of the elegy" (Sacks 21).

¹²⁹ The canonical elegies typically open with an invocation to the muse, not to the dead poet himself; also, this opening invocation is usually an imperative statement, not an interrogative question. Shelley's opening lines, for instance, are posed desperately to the Muse and the heavens; he implores Urania to grant him the inspiration and voice to compose his mourning song, and cries for all of creation "weep" with him and share his grief.

strew on thee rose or rue or laurel, / Brother, on this that was the veil of thee?”, he asks quietly (ll. 1-2). At first glance, this opening scene of Swinburne’s mourning, at the site of Baudelaire’s grave, is idyllic, set in a natural world of “quiet sea-flower,” “meadow-sweet and sorrel,” and “summer-sleepy Dryads / Waked up by snow-soft sudden rains at eve” (ll. 3-6).¹³⁰ Swinburne poses this question with a knowing irony, however, and the notion that Baudelaire would prefer such staid, traditional signifiers lasts a mere six lines. As the specifically named, serene flowers of the pastoral conceit give way to the harsh, unnamed “Half-faded fiery blossoms, pale with heat / And full of bitter summer” (ll. 7-9), we begin to see that when Swinburne “does” the conventions, the result is twisted, distorted, yet perfectly appropriate:¹³¹ the colorless, burning, bitter flowers he offers Baudelaire are *fleurs du mal*, flowers of evil.¹³² More importantly, however, we glimpse a

¹³⁰ As Sacks explains, “the strewing of flowers, or, figuratively, of elegiac poetry, is an extremely conventional act, redolent of vegetation rituals and the origins of the genre” (207). The kinds of flowers Swinburne proposes in the following lines, however, are not conventional; in fact, these “fiery blossoms” are anathema to the traditionally pleasing rose and laurel. They scorn and mock the tradition. I return to the idea and act of mocking later in this chapter.

¹³¹ “Swinburne’s connection with Baudelaire is complicated by a combination of both poets’ conscious representation of a perplexingly paradoxical existence in their poetry along with the problematic effect of cultural influences on perceptions of their poetry,” writes Tony W. Garland (634). “Swinburne,” he continues, “identifies Baudelaire’s focus as ‘sad and strange things—the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure—the perverse happiness and wayward sorrows of exceptional people.’ By stressing Baudelaire’s juxtapositions of extreme emotional reactions, Swinburne reveals an enthusiasm for similar topics and an interest in cycles of pain and pleasure” (634).

¹³² To Sacks, this choice of symbolic flowers indicates “Baudelaire’s and Swinburne’s revision of the pastoral clichés. Here, the world of pastoral is made harsh; luxuriousness and sweetness are crossed with fervor and astringency” (208). Thomas Brennan comments similarly on Swinburne’s aesthetic relationship with Baudelaire through his reading of the French poet’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*. He writes, “the ‘half-faded fiery blossoms, pale with heat’ indicate Baudelaire’s and Swinburne’s revision of the pastoral clichés. Here, the world of pastoral is made harsh; luxuriousness and sweetness are crossed with fervor and astringency. Furthermore, these southern flowers are more truly elegiac than the easily woven garlands of the north, for they are all reliquary, bearing the marks of a withering passion” (208).

vital point of sympathy in their poetics—the synaesthetic condition of poetic experience, and the insynaesthesia of the dead. I return to this later in the chapter.¹³³

The language of the stanza becomes progressively less specific as the stanza progresses, and yet it is more evocative: the first three flowers are named, but not described; the flowers Swinburne offers are unnamed, but sensorially detailed. In the shift from specific names (“rose,” “rue,” “laurel”) to nonspecific sensory phenomena (“half-faded fiery,” “pale with heat,” “bitter summer”) these natural objects lose their identity but gain something more important (to Swinburne): somatic and epistemological potential, which becomes erotic potential in the following stanzas. Though we do not know what these flowers are, we do know how they look, feel, and taste. The poem suggests that sensory and affective knowledge of natural objects and phenomena is more important to the poets than empirical knowledge of floral nomenclature and literary convention.

As the language slips from precise, concrete terms to one-word, vague descriptions, as it de-specifies, the flowers become indistinct; that is, they lose their singular identities and discrete characteristics, the qualities by which we can call them “rose” or “rue” or “laurel.” When the individual forms of discrete sense objects dissolve into nondifferentiation, they meld into a harsh amalgam of intermixed perceptions—fiery and pale, hot and bitter—that is the condition of synaesthesia. How this multi-sensory experience, sparked by the encounter with erotic bodies, figures, or objects in the elegy,

¹³³ Here I am using synaesthesia as the opposite of “discrete”: in synaesthesia the sense impressions become mixed up and/or indistinguishable or indifferntiable from each other. See Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, “Metaphorical Indiscretion,” for more.

translates into the “diffuseness” or “indiscretion” of elegiac speech, will be a continuous thread throughout this chapter.

The landscape (actually, seascape) of the poem, like the flowers, is unlike the elysian pastoral settings of “Astrophel,” “Lycidas,” and *Adonais*. In *Ave Atque Vale*, nature is violent, unforgiving, even murderous. Whatever conventional potential there was in the semi-idyllic first stanza is undone in the second by the “wild sea” that has abused and drowned Sappho, “the supreme head of song” (ll. 12-22).¹³⁴ Yet Baudelaire, the speaker tells us, thrives in this kind of environment. His “ears knew all the wandering watery sighs” of a tempestuous ocean that even Sappho could not survive.¹³⁵ Unlike other poets, Baudelaire pursued more passionately, experienced more intensely, and understood more deeply, the paradoxical conditions—the “fervid languid glories”—of human experience (l. 12). What is remarkable is that even in this undifferentiated, evil seascape, Baudelaire has a privileged understanding of the contrastive multiplicity of sensory perceptions that produce poetic knowledge.

There is a crucial nuance here that raises a problem for elegiac speech: Swinburne’s description of Baudelaire’s sensory acuity subtly reveals the limitations of his sensory knowledge. Although “His ears knew all the wandering, watery sighs / Where the sea sobs round Lesbian promontories,” he actually he knew no farther than these mysterious “sighs.” Death and nature, it seems, obscure things even from the most perceptive poets. Sacks proposes that Baudelaire has “a mourner’s intimate knowledge of

¹³⁴ The lines read: “The wild sea winds her and the green gulfs bear / Hither and thither, and vex and work her wrong, / Blind gods that cannot spare” (ll. 20-22).

¹³⁵ To a degree, this passage feels like the beginning of a blazon, where Swinburne represents the love object as a series of disconnected body parts.

a mournful sea,” bonding him to Sappho and Swinburne.¹³⁶ The indefinite grammar and contorted syntax of lines 14-18, as well as obscure language like “sighs” (the frequency of which increases as the poem progresses), hint otherwise, however.

Baudelaire’s equally sensitive eye also caught things hidden from others: “Thou sawest, in thine old singing season, brother / Secrets and sorrows unbeheld of us: / Fierce loves, and lovely leaf-buds poisonous, / Bare to thy subtler eye, but for none other,” Swinburne says (ll. 23-26)¹³⁷. In his praise that these “[s]ecrets and sorrows” of love and nature were available only to Baudelaire’s “subtler eye,” Swinburne simultaneously demonstrates his own sensory and poetic acuity by recognizing these deep contrasts of experience—beautiful things that are dangerous (“lovely leaf-buds poisonous”) and idealized experiences that are violent (“fierce loves”)—which were the achievement of Baudelaire’s poetic vision. What the dead poet’s hyper-acute eye perceived, however, exceeds Swinburne’s language: “Sin without shape, and pleasure without speech” (l. 29) are obscure, enigmatic images resistant to concrete description. In the “wandering, watery sighs” of the previous stanza, and now in these, the elegy insinuates a persistent concern: the negation of discrete sensory perception and knowledge.

¹³⁶ As Sacks explains, “Baudelaire has a mourner’s intimate knowledge of a mournful sea that grieves for Sappho, herself a passionate griever. The further connection with the presently mourning Swinburne implies not just the bond between all three but a certain relation between poetry itself and grief, between song and separation. Paradoxically, these poets are connected most by their passionate responses to disconnection” (209). Melissa Zeiger argues (mostly) similarly: “Sappho initiates the poet, as her devotee, into a textual world figured in the poem simultaneously as a classical underworld and the place of writing—the place of what Derrida calls ‘graphic relations between the living and the dead’” (34). Their connection is through a shared negative, or at least uncertain, knowledge experience, reflected in the knowing ears that now “know not”: there is a waxing and waning, a push and pull, between knowing and not knowing that mimics the rolling kiss of the waves.

¹³⁷ I have drawn on a similar observation Brennan makes about the sensory shift between these stanzas. He writes, “Having considered what Baudelaire heard, Swinburne then turns to what he saw [but] the focus centers on what is not available in the present; Baudelaire appears to have had access to knowledge not allowed his successors” (259).

As the poem goes on, textual bodies and objects proceed to lose their senses, and the figures of speech that activate the relation between the speaker and the love object also begin to dissolve. When we consider Swinburne's poetics in general, we recognize that such obscure, cryptic imagery is not a shortcoming but a performance in language of experiences that are just beyond the reach of language. Unlike certain of his nineteenth-century predecessors and contemporaries, namely Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, and Rossetti, precision of reference and particularity of image are not Swinburne's primary concerns.¹³⁸ As Rosenberg observes, "Traditionally, the English poet has prided himself on particularity [...] Our very conception of poetry has been shaped by the practices of the metaphysical poets and by Keats's dictum that the poet must have 'distinctness for his luxury.' We are at a loss in reading a poet who, like Swinburne, is diffuse not by default but by design" (163). But diffuseness is not the same as vagueness, he reminds us, and this distinction is essential for understanding the ambiguities of Swinburne's poetics: "The vague poet," Rosenberg writes, "cannot see or speak clearly—in short, is not a poet. Swinburne is often called vague, but no one who has read his best poetry closely could ever accuse him of imprecision or carelessness with words" (164). What Rosenberg calls the "diffuseness" of Swinburne's language, and Wagner-Lawlor terms "metaphorical indiscretion," I identify as the synaesthetic condition of Swinburne's poetry. In the following sections, I examine moments of synaesthetic figuration and figural dissolve—what de Man refers to as "disfiguration"—that signify the sensory closure of the bodies in the text and the body of the text in order to understand how de-synaestheticization of language and the body can still be erotic.

¹³⁸ On Victorian particularity, see Carol Christ, *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (1975).

Having praised the aesthetic and epistemological achievement of Baudelaire, Swinburne then describes him as one who suffered greatly the pains of this knowledge:

O sleepless heart and sombre soul unsleeping,
That were athirst for sleep and no more life
And no more love, for peace and no more strife!
Now the dim gods of death have in their keeping
Spirit and body and all the springs of song,
Is it well now where love can do no wrong,
Where stingless pleasure has no foam or fang
Behind the unopening closure of her lips?
Is it not well where soul from body slips
And flesh from bone divides without a pang
As dew from flower-bell drips? (ll. 34-44)

The repetitive phrasing (the thrice-spoken “and no more”), imperfect anaphoras (“Is it well now” / “Is it not well”), and recurrent negative diction (five “no”’s strewn among the negative adverbs “*sleepless*,” “*unsleeping*,” “*stingless* pleasure,” “*unopening*”), compound on each with the weight of the affective and somatic traumas of poetic experience. Also, the figure of the mouth takes on particular importance here. Though their representations of the poet-lover’s mouth are contrary, both Shelley and Swinburne write the mouth as a primary organ of pleasure and knowledge, a synecdoche for the erotic body.¹³⁹ When we encounter a closed mouth here, it is also a synecdoche, but for

¹³⁹ This representation of life as discord and love as violent reveals a crucial point of difference between Swinburne’s and Shelley’s poetics of elegiac love. In Chapter One, love is—or at least strives to be—a redemptive force of the imagination which promises to fill the existential void left by the death of the beloved other. Additionally, Adonais’s posthumous existence is not one of sleep or rest like Baudelaire’s,

the epistemologically resistant body of the dead. This “unopening closure” offers no affirming knowledge or positive pleasure; instead, it posits the mouth as a void, a site of negation of pleasure and knowledge. Yet even when closed, erotic mouth can be (negatively) generative of poetic knowledge.

The poet-lover’s mouth, an organ of speech that is also an organ of pleasure (as the site of the kiss) and of pain (with its rabid “fang,”), is the signifier of Swinburne’s negative epistemology. Like the shape of an open mouth, metalepsis is a figure of circularity that turns and returns (in)to itself, endlessly, a beginning that endlessly moves toward its end, and an ending that always returns to its beginning, to begin anew. Yet a circle also cuts itself off from what is around it, a figure of, at the same time, infinity and closure. The beginning-ending circularity of metalepsis signifies the potential of poetic figuration to keep the dead returning to life. The “unopening closure” of this mouth, however, signifies death’s foreclosing of poetic speech and of the pains of love.¹⁴⁰ But it is also “pleasure’s mouth,” reminding us that, open or closed, kissing or biting, the mouth is a nexus of pleasure and knowledge, or, in *Ave Atque Vale*, of negative pleasure and negative knowledge.¹⁴¹

but of triumph, of glorious rebirth into the pantheon of poetic genius, the “abode where the Eternal are” (l. 495).

¹⁴⁰ Sacks lucidly explains this ambiguity of elegiac pleasure: “Death brings the desired extinction of desire, in a region where both the spirit and body are gathered together with the springs of song. But despite their ease, these lines seem burdened by contradiction. When the definition of pleasure or beauty has already been so inextricably entwined with bitter passion, the undoing of that bond now seems to unravel the existence of pleasure and beauty themselves. Although ‘pleasure has no foam or fang,’ that consolation is surely offset by the image of her lips’ ‘unopening closure.’ The complex enjoyments of the living seem here to have been drastically replaced by the anaesthesia of the dead” (Sacks 211).

¹⁴¹ Matthew Kaiser states, “Pater places the mouth at the nexus of sense perception.” “The mouth,” he explains, “becomes gateway to the soul, a site of love, where subjectivity expands and unfurls, opens onto an interior vista. Mouths of course do more than taste. They bite, suck, inhale, exhale, and lick, among other things. Pater’s etymologically informed invocation of the word ‘taste’ incorporates a repertoire of

Baudelaire's death seems at first to be a restful vacancy of mind, which Swinburne often terms a "sleep."¹⁴² Swinburne hopes that the dead poet is not disturbed or intruded upon by any sense experience, nor beset by any desire: "O quiet eyes wherein the light saith nought, / Whereto the day is dumb, nor any night / With obscure finger silences your sight, / Nor in your speech the sudden soul speaks thought, / Sleep, and have sleep for light" (ll. 51-55).¹⁴³ This total vanishing of sense perception and consciousness, reinforced again and again by the piling of linguistic negations, posits Baudelaire as a null or negative object. Brennan argues, "The opacity of the corpse to light, as well as to 'day' and 'night' [...] highlights that a knowing subject or mind is to him simply a fiction. Nothing—even Swinburne's own vacancy—is transformed by the reality of Baudelaire's corpse" (262)¹⁴⁴. Even though death's undoing of mind may underscore, as Brennan claims, the fiction of a posthumously "knowing subject" while "continuing to raise his work as a problem" (262), I contend that something vital is indeed transformed by this sad mortal knowledge: Swinburne's own subjectivity, his

intimate motions, little acts of discovery and discernment: hence, the importance to Pater of the kiss, the touching-mouth" (51).

¹⁴² The stilling of desire and the quieting of speech and the closing of the senses in death, are characteristic of Swinburne's poetry. We know from poems such as the "Hymn to Proserpine," "The Garden of Proserpine," and "The Triumph of Time," among others, that Swinburne commonly envisions death as an extinction of mind, self, and desire that he consistently metaphorizes as "sleep." At the end of "Hymn to Proserpine" for example, he writes, "there is no God found stronger than death; and death is a sleep" (l. 73). Antony Harrison writes, "As perhaps the most elegiac among a host of elegiac Victorian poets, Swinburne was obsessed with the finality of death, along with its Keatsian easefulness [...] poem after poem insists that death is oblivion" (179).

¹⁴³ It seems important somehow that the eyes—the organ of vision/seeing, which in stanza III were the "subtler eyes" of the poet—are now the cause of (or have the potential to cause) such existential pain, angst, and agon; the very thing which makes Baudelaire a great poet is the same thing that causes his and Swinburne's own distress; but the poet, this implies, lives in and through this pain—his life is/as trauma, the poetry depends on the pain of living poet.

¹⁴⁴ "What looks like a negation of Baudelaire," he continues, "is really Swinburne's way of continuing to raise his work as a problem. Death is unremitting [and] all of Baudelaire's striving and all the fruits of his striving cannot accrue to him in any way" (262).

agency as an elegiac speaker, is now threatened by his new understanding of death's epistemological (im)possibility. This new knowledge is of mortality's limited epistemological reach and the limits of its linguistic articulation in the face of the dead. To give language to encounters with death and the dead, the poem warns us, is to lose the possibility of discrete, self-contained, affirmative speech.

Brennan's attention to the corpse in the passage above opens up an exciting avenue for my reading: Baudelaire is certainly the poem's central love object, but he is not the only dead body in the poem that signifies (or de-signifies) erotically. I turn now to these other corpses, these other insensate bodies, in order to see how sensory closure, represented in the figure of anti-prosopon and sense organs that do not function, relates to the synaesthetic condition of Swinburnean eros. The subtle moments of sensory closure that I have just looked at in stanzas 2-4, find their fullest expression in the figure of the "pale Titan-woman" of stanza 6. These earlier examples sort of build up to her, as one at a time Baudelaire's senses shut down until she happens, as an event. Interestingly, until we reach her, there are no whole bodies in the poem (not even Baudelaire's), just body parts (mouths, eyes, ears). The stanza reads:

Now all strange hours and all strange loves are over,
Dreams and desires and sombre songs and sweet,
Hast thou found place at the great knees and feet
Of some pale Titan-woman like a lover,
Such as thy vision here solicited,
Under the shadow of her fair vast head,
The deep division of prodigious breasts,

The solemn slope of mighty limbs asleep,
The weight of awful tresses that still keep
The savor and shade of old-world pine-forests
Where the wet hill-winds weep? (ll. 56-66)¹⁴⁵

The difficulty of Swinburne's erotic bodies and figures begins here with a non-figural poetic element, the ambiguous meter. The metrical environment of *Ave Atque Vale* is somewhat contested: some scholars identify the meter as ten lines of iambic pentameter and a final trimeter line, while others identify two entwined, iambic tetrameter, *In Memoriam* stanzas within the eleven lines.¹⁴⁶ This uncertainty is part of the poem's performance of desire for the obscure dead.

In this stanza, metrical disruptions begin right away, in the second foot of line fifty six, and intensify as it approaches the poem's crux. The iamb that opens the first line—"Now **all**"—quickly gives way to a spondee with "**strange hours**," creating what feels like a triple-stressed foot—"all **strange hours**." The substitution of a spondee for an iamb is repeated in the second half of the line, making "**all strange loves**" another triple-stressed foot. This parallel metrical construction, balanced and hovering on the caesural "and," slows the rhythm of the line because the sequential, heavy stresses require more time to enunciate than would easily undulating iambs.

¹⁴⁵ There is a strong imagistic resonance in this stanza to the representation of Moneta in Keats's "The Fall of Hyperion."

¹⁴⁶ Peter Sacks sees two *In Memoriam* stanzas embedded and scans the stanza as tetrameter; Yisrael Leven identifies the stanzas as iambic tetrameter as well, writing that "the ten consecutive four-beat lines in each of Swinburne's stanzas echo Tennyson's iambic tetrameters" (86). He continues: "By simultaneously referring to and destabilizing the Tennysonian form, Swinburne expresses a sense of grief too intense to be contained within the strict poetic form we find in *In Memoriam*" (86).

I propose this scansion for a specific reason: this stanza appears to carry forward Swinburne's hope that Baudelaire's death is silent and restful, but something odd is afoot. Although "all strange hours and all strange loves are over, / Dreams and desires and sombre songs and sweet," what is actually strange, and counterintuitive, is that these things—time, love, dreams, desires, music—are poets' fundamental materials and desires, the things they trade in, what they live and die for. This irony—that what they need to be poets are the very things that cause them suffering—suggests that "strange" carries particular significance here. As one of the over-arching intellectual and rhetorical conditions of Swinburne's poetics, the term often carries an unexpected metrical stress throughout his work.¹⁴⁷ Such strangenesses of meter and meaning are written into many earlier parts of the elegy: it is implicit in the catachreses of "Half-faded fiery blossoms" (l. 8), "fervid languid glories" (l. 12), and "lovely leaf-buds poisonous" (l. 25); it is explicit in the "strange dreams in a tumultuous sleep" (ll. 30); it lurks in the paradoxical "unopening closure of [pleasure's] lips" (l. 41), and in the metaleptic "end and the beginning" that "are one thing to thee, who art past the end" (ll. 45-46). Thus, when it

¹⁴⁷ To be clear, this is more an impression than a specific observation—I have not actually counted. Charlotte Ribeyrol, in "Swinburne: A Nineteenth-Century Hellene?" (a title appropriated from William R. Rutland's *Swinburne: A Nineteenth-Century Hellene*, 1931) addresses the implications of "strange" in Swinburne's poems: "In his play [*Atalanta in Calydon*] Swinburne deliberately shifts attention to Atalanta, who is described throughout as 'strange' because of her refusal to conform to gender roles: 'She the strange woman... even she / Saw with strange eyes and with strange lips rejoiced' (Swinburne 1904, 4.307; 2000, 300). This adjective encoding homoeroticism (Pulham 2007, 162)" she continues, "is significantly used in both 'Hermaphroditus' and 'Fragoletta'. By refuting the *telos* of marriage and social conformity, Atalanta embodies a dangerous otherness, verging on the barbaric" (64-65). As I will explain shortly, the Titan-woman in *Ave Atque Vale* similarly embodies a "dangerous otherness" in her resistance to concrete description, which also is a kind of resistance to normative gender roles. Her strangeness also manifests in her imposing physicality, which holds power over both Baudelaire's body and Swinburne's verse, and is thereby a similar kind of blurring of gender roles. This female body dominates the both the dead male body and the living male voice. Furthermore, as I explain below, "strange" implies also Swinburne's uncertain knowledge of how to write her properly as an object of both poets' desire and at the same time a kind of negative agent. In her imposing physicality that resists concrete description and puts pressure on the meter, she, like Atalanta, is a "dangerous other."

occurs in this stanza it is reasonable to expect the term to be particularly important, and accordingly read with a stress that it would not otherwise hold in a regular iambic line. This piling of stressed syllables, effected by the gravity of a single word, allows only a brief pause for breath at “and” and “are,” making this first line feel dense, laborious, and sets a slower pace for the rest of the stanza.

The second line, after an initial trochaic inversion, wants naturally to fall into iambs (“**D**reams and **d**esires and **s**ombre **s**ongs and **s**weet”), but the homophony of these words effects a different rhythm. Alliteration, assonance, and consonance are among the most prominent features of Swinburne’s poetry, and these sonic echoes create the rhythmic momentum, the sonorous spell, that has long been associated with his work.¹⁴⁸ Their effect is usually to quicken a phrase or line, as the repeated allophones allow for a faster repetition of labial movements without the need to change the shape of the lips or the position of the tongue. This is not always the case, of course, depending on the particular phonemes that are repeated, but the two alliterative-consonant sequences here—“Dreams and desires” and “sombre songs and sweet”—contain within them three assonant, hard “e” sounds (in “**D**reams,” “**d**esires,” “sweet”) and successive, rolling, sibilant “s”’s that slide one word quickly into the next.¹⁴⁹ We would expect these sonic resonances to close the connection of the words and thereby speed up the iambs, but the accumulated sonic effect is in tension with the diction and meter; as with “strange,” the enunciative weight of these words resists a quicker tempo. The inconsistent relation

¹⁴⁸ Early receptions of his work tended to dismiss its sonority as a distraction from its lack of substance.

¹⁴⁹ Susan Wolfson’s essay, “*Romantic Measures: Stressing the Sound of Sound*” (*Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2011: 53-77), inspired and authorized this reading of letters and sounds.

between word, sound, and meter is yet another indication of ambiguous poetic knowledge, and we should not expect a stable rhythm or epistemological ground going forward.

It is helpful to note at this point that the stanza has actually not yet posed its question. This deferral compounds the rhythmic uncertainty because the vocal inflection and stress of interrogative syntax is different from that of declarative syntax. At this point, we cannot tell whether “Hast thou” (l. 58) is an iamb or a trochee, and so the intention of this stanza is not yet clear. The elision of the indefinite pronoun “that” in line fifty six—“Now [that] all strange hours and all strange loves are over”—and the postponement of end-stopped punctuation, further suspends this determination. If “Hast thou” is read as an iamb—“Hast **thou**”—the line sounds more like the beginning of an assertion that Baudelaire has indeed found a restful place death. Yet, to recall Swinburne’s strong skepticism over the existence of an afterlife, such potential moments of elegiac satisfaction, whether implied by the meter or posited by the language, should not be uncritically accepted¹⁵⁰. Only with the final punctuation mark does the stanza reveal itself as a question; with this knowledge, we can re-scan the line with a trochaic stress—“**Hast** thou”—which is a more natural inflection for a question. This seemingly minor difference in stress has a disproportionate effect on the stanza’s meaning: it makes the difference between an optimistic knowledge of death’s restful calm, and what is actually a subtle yet crushing acknowledgment that death and the dead will (to some degree) always remain obscure to Swinburne, just beyond his sensory and linguistic grasp. This metrical alternative is a prosodic performance of the epistemological

¹⁵⁰ I have noted Antony Harrison on Swinburne’s conception of death, above.

indeterminacy of death, which will next be embodied in what I consider the central erotic body and figure of mourning in the elegy, the “pale Titan-woman.”

“Like a lover”: Swinburne’s Devastating Simile

Margot Louis has identified Apollo, who first appears in stanza thirteen, as the elegy’s “chief mourner” (153), and in conventional, referential reading, he clearly is. The “god of all suns and songs,” Swinburne tells the dead poet, “Mourns thee of many his children the last dead, / And hallows with strange tears and alien sighs / Thine unmelodious mouth and sunless eyes” (ll. 145-52). Apollo, who touched Baudelaire’s lips “with bitter wine, / And nourished them indeed with bitter bread,” from whose hand the “soul’s food came,” and who now seeks to “save thy dust from blame and from forgetting,” fits the conventional status of elegiac muse (ll. 138-47); interestingly, Louis notes in contrast, Sacks claims “‘the bitter Venus, another fatal mother,’ as the elegy’s muse.¹⁵¹ She helpfully reminds us, though, of Apollo’s limitations: “while paying high tribute to the French poet, Swinburne is careful not to exaggerate Apollo’s power. The ‘God of all suns and songs’ can only hallow the ‘unmelodious mouth and sunless eyes’ of the dead; he cannot call them back (151-4). The consolations of art will not ‘make death clear or make life durable’ (171-2)” (215 n.7).¹⁵² But Swinburne, as we know, likes to

¹⁵¹ Sacks, Louis notes in contrast, “‘suggests that Swinburne’s muse in this poem is the bitter Venus, another fatal mother (*English Elegy*, 223-4)” (Louis 215 n. 7).

¹⁵² Levin remarks: “As Louis writes, the poem provides us with ‘the earliest careful celebration of the art-god’s power in Swinburne’s poetry’ (*Swinburne and His Gods* 71). ‘Ave Atque Vale’ marks Swinburne’s transition from a mythological to a mythopoeic approach to Apollo. While Swinburne’s earlier writings merely *allude* to Apollo, the mythological figure, ‘Ave Atque Vale’ presents the first instance in which Swinburne reshapes Apollo according to his own poetic needs” (86). “In many respects, the Apollo we find in ‘Ave Atque Vale’ is a typical post-Keatsian Apollo; he is a complicated figure that evokes conflicting reactions in the poet” (86).

think beyond poetic tradition: he has already challenged a conventional elegiac symbol by offering “pale flowers,” rather than “rose or rue or laurel,” to Baudelaire in the first stanza. We know, too, that Swinburne tends toward alternate muses like the mortal Sappho and Proserpine, the goddess of death. With this in mind, I propose another mourner as the central figure of grief in the elegy: the “pale Titan-woman like a lover.”

The “pale Titan-woman like a lover” is prime example of the various bodies and figures of speech that I identify as central to Swinburne’s elegiac eroticism. As an embodiment of Baudelaire’s poem, “The Giantess,” she fits the corpse-corpus metonymy because in this moment she is the corpus, a text within a corpus, which is now in another poetic text (Swinburne’s). The “Titan-woman” exceeds her intertextual and referential functions and comes to signify the intersection of knowledge and pleasure in the elegy.¹⁵³ Though silent and passive, when Swinburne’s language reaches her body it confronts a monument to Baudelaire that is also a monument to the silencing of speech and the closure of the senses in death. She seems without agency, inanimate and ekphrastic, and indeed she is; but she is also much more.

Firstly, she is an immediate contradiction. Her presence undoes the stanza’s initial implication that in death, “all strange loves are over,” by suggesting that Baudelaire might now find himself “at the great knees and feet / Of some pale Titan-woman like a lover” (ll. 58-9). If “all strange loves are over,” is she then something like an ideal

¹⁵³ Sacks and Brennan both read her intertextually, identifying her origin in Baudelaire’s poem “The Giantess,” but they read her in different directions, toward different ends. “The description of the giantess,” Sacks writes, “is itself perfectly appropriate to an elegy [...] She is the idealized maternal figure for whom so many elegists have sought and to whose protective presence so many have desired to return.” “Unlike Baudelaire,” he continues, “he calls the giantess a ‘Titan-woman,’ hence pointing to her fallen stature. She is herself a figure of loss. She evokes a landscape marked by weeping winds. Even her breasts, the source of nurturing power and the conventional site of calm union, are threateningly ‘prodigious’ and marked by a ‘deep division’” (214).

love(r)? As a being “Such as thy vision here solicited” (l. 60), she is a familiar, aestheticized object of desire that Baudelaire had imagined into existence.¹⁵⁴ Has Swinburne let slip some further hope that the poet’s death is not just a dreamless sleep in perfect silence, but an experience that may satisfy Baudelaire’s, and thereby his own, desire for a death that is not oblivion?¹⁵⁵ This possibility would challenge scholarly readings that argue that, for Swinburne, death is simply oblivion, not some kind of amorous afterlife in an idyllic or mythic realm. It would also challenge Sacks’s claim for her as a consolatory site of displacement for Swinburne’s grief that would fend off his sinking into melancholia. But that Swinburne opens up this possibility through an apostrophic address to one who he knows still cannot answer, shows the line to be more a fleeting hope than a firm belief.¹⁵⁶ Nonetheless, to recall my argument about Keats’s “quick Dreams,” which Shelley lovingly reanimates in *Adonais*, when Swinburne writes her into being as an embodiment or monumentalization of Baudelaire’s own poetic desire, he performs a metonymic act that I interpret as an instance of erotic love.

Secondly, the “Titan-woman” is silent and starkly undefined, existing only as a “pale” outline. She has a “fair vast head,” but no face or mouth with which to speak or kiss; she has “mighty limbs,” but they are nondescript beyond their “solemn slope”; she has “awful tresses” of hair, but their only specific quality is the vague scent of “old world

¹⁵⁴ I draw a parallel here, which I also mention below, to a key part of my argument about *Adonais*, concerning Shelley’s metonymizing of Keats’s poetic inventions as an act of textual love (though unlike them, Swinburne does not reinvest her with life in the elegy).

¹⁵⁵ On Swinburne’s references to Baudelaire as a reflection of his own ideas about death, Brennan writes, “Bloom, McGann, and Sacks make clear that Swinburne appropriates Baudelaire’s refusal to believe in immortality beyond its survival in his reputation. Death has led Baudelaire out of “the mystic and the mournful garden” of life (l. 180). ‘Ave Atque Vale,’ therefore, can be read as Swinburne’s recognition of his own mortality through meditation on Baudelaire’s” (254).

¹⁵⁶ Because the dead love object cannot reply, maybe Barthes, “No Answer”: “The amorous subject suffers anxiety because the loved object replies scantily or not at all to his language [...]” (167).

pine-forests” (ll. 61-65); and she is “asleep” (l. 63), unmoving and unresponsive to the dead poet and the living speaker alike. In these ways, she is ekphrastic, a statuesque body in eternal repose. She might also be considered an epitaphic body, akin to a gravestone, though one which does not call out to anyone. Uttering nothing, motionless and emotionless, she is without subjectivity or agency, an inscrutable object that represents death as the void of consciousness and the stilling of epistemological possibility. Her vacancy and opacity reflect Swinburne’s awareness of the limits of elegiac figuration—it cannot construct subjects.¹⁵⁷

At the same time, however, as she appears to close off the possibility of subjectivity and knowledge in death, she exerts a subtle yet significant influence over the dead poet in the poem and the living speaker of the poem. Her body is oddly sexualized, with a “fair head,” “prodigious breasts,” and “solemn[ly] slop[ing] limbs” (ll. 61-63); as a mere object of the male sexual gaze, she seems to be without agency. Yet this is misleading, for while in this regard she signifies both poets’ visual pleasure and the possibility of the dead poet’s sexual satisfaction, she simultaneously signifies the bodily vulnerability of those who would love her, like Baudelaire, and the linguistic vulnerability of those who would write her into being, like Swinburne.¹⁵⁸ She towers over the dead Baudelaire at her feet, and the language Swinburne uses to describe her is tinged

¹⁵⁷ I return to this problem of figurality and subjectivity later, in my discussion of the “effaced unprofitable eyes” in stanza VIII. The facelessness and speechlessness of so many of the bodies in the poem offers an important point of contrast with *Adonais* over the figure and force of *prosopopeia* to give life in elegiac poetry. This also recalls Brennan’s claim, which I discuss earlier, that “The opacity of the corpse to light, as well as to ‘day’ and ‘night’ [...] highlights that a knowing subject or mind is to him simply a fiction” (262). He continues, “What looks like a negation of Baudelaire, therefore, is really Swinburne’s way of continuing to raise his work as a problem. Death is unremitting,” and “all of Baudelaire’s striving and all the fruits of his striving cannot accrue to him in any way” (262).

¹⁵⁸ Of course, as she refers to Baudelaire’s poem “The Giantess,” he, too, has written her into being, but that is not at issue here, in this moment.

with violent potential in the “*deep division* of [her] prodigious breasts,” the “solemn slope of [her] *mighty limbs*,” and the “*weight* of [her] *awful tresses*” (ll. 62-64, italics mine).¹⁵⁹ She is, after all, a Titan goddess.¹⁶⁰ Swinburne’s eroticized bodies—living and dead, mobile and monumental—here and in so much of his other work, seem always to mix the promise of physical and poetic pleasure with the threat of destruction.¹⁶¹ She is, then, a kind of negative erotic agent whose imposing physicality exerts power over Baudelaire’s body and Swinburne’s speech. Though she is not a proper subject, her body, under which Baudelaire might find shade and contentment (but also possibly danger), and over which Swinburne must press his language, is a site of epistemological resistance. We have already felt her influence on the meter in the scansion of line fifty-nine. As the stanza moves forward, we will hear and feel her negative agency again, this time more strongly, in the devastating simile “like a lover.”

The first part of this line scans easily enough, as an anapest followed by two trochees: “Of some **pale Titan woman**”; the second part of the line is less straightforward, and has two possible scansions with dramatically different implications:

¹⁵⁹ Sacks argues similarly, writing, “Even her breasts, the source of nurturing power and the conventional site of calm union, are threateningly ‘prodigious’ and marked by a ‘deep division’” (214). Even though, etymologically, in the nineteenth century “awful” usually meant “awesome,” our contemporary sense of “awful” as fearful also fits with these intimidating characteristics.

¹⁶⁰ She also contrasts strongly with the poem’s earlier representation of a female body—Sappho—who was “vex[ed] and work[ed] wrong” by the “wild sea” and “green gulfs” (ll. 20-21). Though Sappho was “the supreme head of song” (l. 18), she is now without any agency. The “Titan-woman,” on the other hand, seems unaffected by anything; unlike Sappho she is not abused by a scornful sea, though she is used as an object of both male poets’ gaze. But as I will show, she is also a negative agent with influence over both poets.

¹⁶¹ Rosenberg writes: “The association of love with death is the underlying theme of almost all Swinburne’s major poetry. He is of course best known for a variant on that theme—the pain implicit in all pleasure. Virtually incapable of using the word *pleasure* without its alliterative opposite, Swinburne *is* undeniably sado-masochistic, but this lurid aspect of his lyricism has obscured his true achievement. His greatest love poetry is addressed not to these literary ladies with sharp teeth—Dolores, Faustine, and the rest—but to his bitter, salt mother the sea, and to those bleakly beautiful, ravaged margins of earth that yield their substance to her” (171).

“like a lover” can be read as an anapest (with an elided final off-beat/unstressed syllable)—“like a **lover**”—which would make the line a tetrameter and create something like a metrical chiasmus (anapest-trochee-trochee-anapest); or, it can be scanned as two trochees in a pentameter line—“**like a lover**”—in keeping with the trochaic rhythm of the two preceding feet. If it is an anapest—a scansion that feels more natural—scanning it as anapest-trochee-trochee-anapest feels, at first, to be a more natural cadence because the second anapest rolls over the preposition “like” while the rising stress emphasizes “lover.” Rolling over the preposition minimizes the aural impact of the simile and masks the rhetoricity of the Titan-woman as Baudelaire’s “lover.” By concealing her status as a figure of speech—she is now a simile as well as a metonym—this scansion encourages us to interpret her as a figure of posthumous love for the dead poet.

We reach a very different conclusion, however, if we read the line as a five-beat pentameter, which scans as an anapest followed by four trochees: “Of some **pale Titan woman like a lover**.” This scansion emphasizes her status as a simile, drawing attention to the figurality and fiction of posthumous love. The stress on “like”—which would now have an equal stress and weight as “lover”—exposes Swinburne’s unhappy knowledge that there is no posthumous love for dead poets.¹⁶² Meter and figuration are supposed to be how poets discover and attain knowledge, how they come to understand the relational nature of language that links them to the world. When, however, a mourning poet speaks across the threshold between the living and the dead, the knowledge he gains can only be about the limits death imposes on his poetical instruments.

¹⁶² This concept of “unhappy consciousness” comes from Hegel and Schiller, through Pfau; this metrical self-consciousness pops up again in stanza X.

Although the Titan-woman is a silent and static simile, she is also a negative agent whose imposing physicality dominates Swinburne's verse. Neither sight, nor sound, nor speech can pierce through her mass and opacity, and so these lines are forced to slow down, to wind around her body and pass only over her surface—her “skin,” as Barthes would put it—leaving both poets unsatisfied in their desire to know her. In a moment like this, when poetic speech, in its pursuit of deathly knowledge, presses against an impenetrable body, the elegy becomes, in figure and meter, a lover's discourse.¹⁶³ In this stanza, Swinburne's language, its rhythm and rhetoricity, trembles as it moves along the outline of her body, insisting that the mourning poet submit to the sheer textuality of an amorous elegiac relation.

For an inanimate, immobile, unspeaking being, she is surprisingly flexible in her tropological status. As an erotic body and a figure of speech—actually, two figures, a metonym and a simile—she is the central nexus of pleasure and epistemological possibility in the elegy; and yet she is vacant. Pressing his language against the Titan-woman's body yields Swinburne only a negative knowledge of death. This unknowingness, however, is what propels the poem forward into the prosodic and rhetorical agitations of the following four stanzas, where Swinburne resigns himself to this impossible love. Barthes reminds us that the relationship between lovers is, in the end, unknowable: the lover is “caught in this contradiction: I believe I know the other better than anyone and triumphantly assert my knowledge to the other,” he writes (134).

¹⁶³ Lacan offers a helpful link to Plato: “In the *Symposium*, we may find this allocution: it may well be Agathon whom Alcibiades is addressing and whom he desires, though he is being monitored by an analyst, Socrates. (Love's atopia, the characteristic which causes it to escape all dissertations, would be that ultimately it is possible to talk about love only according to a strict allocutive determination; whether philosophical, gnomic, lyric, or novelistic, there is always, in the discourse upon love, a person whom one addresses, though this person may have shifted to the condition of a phantom or a creature still to come. No one wants to speak of love unless it is *for* someone)” (74).

Earlier, when Swinburne drew our attention to Baudelaire’s “subtler eye” that perceived “[s]ecrets and sorrows unbeheld of us” (ll. 24-26), and now, when he imagines the Titan-woman as a lover “[s]uch as thy vision here solicited” (l. 60), he demonstrates how well he understands Baudelaire: this is Swinburne asserting his knowledge of the other. Yet, as the tangled syntax, uncertain meter, and superficial level of his description of her indicate, Swinburne is painfully self-conscious of the fact that this knowledge will always be circumscribed, because “the other is impenetrable, intractable” (Barthes 134). And when this impenetrable other is dead, its resistance to poetic speech and interpretation is even stronger: the dead poet and his images (like the “Titan-woman”) will remain mysterious to the elegist and his images. Seduced by a relational knowledge he knows will always be just beyond his grasp, Swinburne “shall never manage to solve the question the other asks,” and so when he admits here, through meter and figure and image, that “the other is not to be known,” he is, in Barthes’s articulation, “seized with that exaltation of loving *someone unknown*, someone who will remain so forever [...]” (135). Through the failure of his speech to establish an intimate relation with the dead poet, Swinburne now “knows what he does not know” (Barthes 135). The Titan-woman’s impenetrability to language forces Swinburne to recognize that only by representing her as an object of his beloved poet’s own desire, as an aestheticized body, an immobile work of art—in other words, a poetic *text*¹⁶⁴—can he write his desire for Baudelaire.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Though it contrasts with the Shelley in terms of the direction of desiring subjects and objects, and with regard to the fact that, unlike Urania, this Titan-woman does not speak her passion, eros finds voice in both elegists’ textual figurations of what Barthes calls “a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations” (*TPoTT* 16). Barthes continues: “thus with the text” which significantly replaces “the common notions, the fundamental assumptions of ancient philosophy. Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological need” (16).

¹⁶⁵ As Barthes asks, “[I]sn’t *knowing someone* precisely that—knowing his desire?” (134).

A Cadence of Dead Sighs

After the encounter with the “pale Titan-woman,” the poem turns its focus back to Baudelaire’s senses, but what were once acute (in stanzas II and III) are now obscure and enigmatic at the poem’s midpoint. In stanza VIII, the once-acute ear now hears only “**Some** dim derision of mysterious laughter,” “**some** little sound of unregarded tears,” “**some** cadence of dead sighs.” The imprecision of this language is the result of death’s obscuration of its sounds, sights, and objects, and the repeated indefinite pronoun reinforces the inexactness of his perceptions.¹⁶⁶ His adjectives and nouns, too, are formless, tenebrous: “dim” and “mysterious” are just that, and a “cadence” is more a descriptive term for a poetic rhythm than a specific term identifying a particular rhythm. Moreover, this is a “cadence of dead *sighs*,” a doubly inexact expression in which the idea or concept of a sound is the only thing with substance.¹⁶⁷ A sigh, like a laugh, is a vocal expression that is not properly speech; rather, it is a bodily utterance, “a word from the body,” as Barthes puts it (15). Only the spondaic stress of “**dead sighs**” grants these speechless sounds a perceivable form, as meter can give material substance to things otherwise immaterial and unperceivable. The poet’s “subtler eye” is also thwarted. He gets only a “gainless glimpse” of the goddess Proserpine’s head, and so, like the “blind warders of the dead,” he, too, is effectively sightless. Rosenberg rightly observes that

¹⁶⁶ We must be careful to remember that the direction of cause and effect is constantly in question in *Ave Atque Vale*: is it death that makes language inadequate, or language’s unavoidable imprecision that makes death uncommunicable? This is another instance of metaleptic poesis that the elegy has struggled with from the beginning.

¹⁶⁷ On the materiality of sound and meter see: Peter de Bolla, “The Materiality of Aesthetic Experience,” Stephen Arata, “Rhyme, Rhythm, and the Materiality of Poetry: A Response,” and Vincent Colapietro, “Love and Death: And Other Somatic Transactions.

Swinburne's "focus [is] less upon things seen than forces felt. At times he is nearly a blind poet, all tongue and ear and touch" (163). In *Ave Atque Vale*, though, even Swinburne's other senses submit to the unintelligibility of death. When trying to hold converse with the senseless dead, the elegy reveals that the living, too, are rendered functionally blind, deaf, and mute.¹⁶⁸

Within the uncertainty of reference over whether these deathly sounds and sights reflect images from Baudelaire's poems, or whether they are Swinburne's imaginings reflected back at himself, the poem begins to blur and meld the speaker and the love-object.¹⁶⁹ Like Swinburne, who loses sight of the "sweet strange elder singer," we lose sight (and sound) of the poets as individuated, distinct voices and bodies. What Swinburne's senses can perceive in this moment are only the discomfitingly ambiguous sounds and sights of his own forsaking. The spectral din of the Charon-like "blind tongueless warders of the dead" who mock him with their "effaced unprofitable eyes" and "pale mouths" (ll. 82-86), is scornfully aimed at his own "hearkening spirit" (l. 87).

Facing the foreclosure of his vision and hearing, and the inexactness of his language for them, Swinburne can turn only to the non-verbal sounds of speech to convey understanding. Here, the echoic figure of alliteration produces a sensation perceivable to the senses but not interpretable by the rational and cognitive faculties; what else might it

¹⁶⁸ The last two lines of stanza IX, which I address in depth below, are explicitly resigned to this sensory failure: "Still the foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind / Are still the eluded eyes" (ll. 98-99).

¹⁶⁹ The "dim derision of mysterious laughter," the "gainless glimpse of Proserpine's veiled head," the "little sound of unregarded tears," and the "cadence of dead sighs" (ll. 81-86), may be intertextual references to events or experiences in Baudelaire's poetry, reverberations and images from the poetic corpus that drew Swinburne's original affection. Brennan, too, raises this possibility in his discussion of the intertextuality of the Titan-woman in stanza VI: "The logic of 'Ave Atque Vale,' he writes, "is not one of Oedipal rivalry with the dead but one in which the dead and the living represent moments in a collective flow of desire that precedes their organization into individual and autonomous subjects [...] In the process of evoking Baudelaire, Swinburne himself gets lost in the flow of images much as Baudelaire is lost in the woman. In a sense, he becomes the "thou" he addresses" (254).

allow for if not rational, empirical knowledge? I suggest it a bodily apprehension or somatic impression that are embodied modes of knowledge. The odd mixing of sound and sightlessness in the “gainless glimpse” posits the sonic materiality of poetic speech in an attempt to endure death’s closure of thought and sensation. But the “gainless glimpse” is sound without sight, created by an alliterative syntax that admits it cannot see. Even more troubling is that this sound, the only thing in this moment that has presence and mobility, is not a sound from the dead but from Swinburne himself, and gives no knowledge of erotic relation.

These lines insinuate yet another obstacle to Swinburne’s elegiac knowledge in the failed figures of *prosopopoeia*. *Prosopopoeia* should allow a poetic speaker to breathe life into his textual bodies by ascribing them a face, and thereby speech and subjectivity. In *Adonais*, this ascription is an act of love. But in *Ave Atque Vale*, the linguistically animated bodies and body parts—the “warders of the dead,” the “unprofitable eyes,” and the “pale mouths”—that might have shared Swinburne’s loss, as convention would hold, are, to adopt de Man’s term, “disfigured.” The “effaced unprofitable eyes” (l. 84)—eyes without a face, that see nothing—are representative of a consistent pattern of facelessness in the poem. Throughout the elegy, there are bodies without faces, faces without functioning sense organs, and faces that despair has made unrecognizable.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Swinburne reveals an understanding of elegiac speech that anticipates what de Man proposes in “Autobiography as De-Facement” about the figure of *prosopopoeia*: “As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of *prosopopoeia* as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way understanding” (81). In *Romanticism after Auschwitz* (2008), Sara Guyer comments similarly on this passage in de Man.

If *prosopopoeia* posits a subject in (or as) a text by granting an object a face and facial organs, it is this elegy's consistent undoing of this figure, its continual de-facing of bodies, that exposes the unhappy consciousness lurking within elegiac figuration: the sad self-knowledge that death will always, in the end, forbid all but a textually erotic relation with the lost object, and even that will remain to some extent obscure. From the "unopening closure" of pleasure's mouth (ll. 40-41), to the featureless "pale Titan-woman," the "effaced unprofitable eyes" of death's warders, through Baudelaire's "unmelodious mouth and sunless eyes" (l. 152), and finally to the "obscure Venus" with "face no more called Erycine" (ll. 157-60), the poem again and again insists that the dead, their objects of desire, their warders, and even their godly mourners, are all in some way de-faced, to some degree undone.¹⁷¹ If an embodied affect like "stingless pleasure," or someone, like Baudelaire, has a mouth, it does not work: a mouth that is an "unopening closure" is a doubly-silenced speech organ, and a poet's "unmelodious mouth," a mouth which cannot sing, is not truly a poetic mouth. "Sunless eyes," too, are eyes that do not see. "The erasure or effacement, de Man writes, "is indeed the loss of a face [...] to be disfigured means primarily the loss of the eyes" (100).¹⁷² All of these bodily organs and faculties that fail to do what they should are functionally dead.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Of the mourning goddess, Venus, Brennan writes, "Swinburne's imagining of her in the present results from an erasure or forgetting of her past images. She is 'That thing transformed which was the Cytherean' (l. 158) and 'the face no more called Erycine'" (l. 160). By speaking of Venus as a 'thing' and a 'face,' Swinburne emphasizes that she is an artifact thought and made by human beings. In this process, past images of her—the Cytherean and the Erycine, are necessarily remembered and forgotten" (268).

¹⁷² "This trajectory from erased self-knowledge to disfiguration is the trajectory of *The Triumph of Life*" (100).

¹⁷³ Furthermore, and more devastatingly, even if one does have the agency to hear and to see, like the speaker, these faculties are cruelly curtailed by death's sensory obscurity. In the last line of the stanza, he laments that his own "foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind / Are still the eluded eyes (ll. 98-99).

I contend that *Ave Atque Vale* takes one step beyond even this revelation of this fiction, of “the prosopon as mask and not as face,” to say that these faces are more than “disfigured” and this figure is more than undone: what the poem creates are anti-prosopon, negative reflections of figures that actively resist efforts to have converse with the dead. Although Swinburne calls on prosopopoeia to speak his love for Baudelaire, it is just as much an anxious voicing of his own death—in his desire for the dead, Swinburne renders himself among them.¹⁷⁴ “[I]n the rapture of love,” Julia Kristeva writes, “the limits of one’s own identity vanish, at the same time that the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love’s discourse [...] The ordeal of love puts the univocity of language and its referential and communicative power to the test” (2). It is an achievement of *Ave Atque Vale* that, although language and knowledge are severely “blurred” by the facelessness of all these figures, the poem acknowledges this by emphasizing, through repetition and metrical stress, the limit-word “only” in the final two lines of stanza VII: “These only,” Swinburne mourns, “these the hearkening spirit hears, / Sees only such things rise” (ll. 87-88).

Though Swinburne’s “flying song flies after” Baudelaire, in a gesture that attempts to touch with speech what cannot be touched with the body or perceived clearly by the other senses, the vast facelessness in the poem concedes that elegiac speech falls short of its desire for the dead: “Our dreams,” after all, “pursue our dead and do not find,” he laments (l. 96). The only thing he can know, it seems, is that he cannot fully know the dead, and that his pursuit will be an infinite asymptote, an endless approaching of the lost

¹⁷⁴ To paraphrase de Man, this figure simultaneously gives life to the dead and brings death to the living.

object that will not become a reaching.¹⁷⁵ In stanza 10, I take the opportunity opened here to discuss the idea of an “endless approaching” of language to the boundary of death as a figural process.¹⁷⁶

An Endless Approaching

Through the miasmic dolour of the sensory field, Swinburne conveys the dimness of this moment in his relationship with Baudelaire. After his submission to the failure of the prosopon in the previous stanza, he intensifies his efforts in stanza IX when the visual and sound “strata” of the verse performs itself more fully, speaks out more insistently, in repetitions of sound (allophones), diction, and even typography.¹⁷⁷ Yet these things that are the material substance of language with which Swinburne tries to “touch” Baudelaire’s ear and eye, have instead the opposite effect. He laments, he resigns to the impossible distance always between them:

Thou art far too far for wings of words to follow,
Far too far off for thought or any prayer.
What ails us with thee, who are wind and air?
What ails us gazing whence all seen is hollow?
Yet with some fancy, yet with some desire,
Dreams pursue death as winds a flying fire,
Our dreams pursue our dead and do not find.
Still, and more swift than they, the thin flame flies,

¹⁷⁵ Guyer has already made a parallel claim about prosopopoeia: “Even at the moment of understanding prosopopoeia, we only discover that understanding is our limit” (43).

¹⁷⁶ “Touching never does away with the interval between us, but turns the interval into an approach” (Nancy np.)

¹⁷⁷ *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: “Since alliteration is a device of the *sound* stratum of poetry, the vagaries of spelling systems must be discounted: is it sounds not letters that count” (36).

The low light fails us in elusive skies,
Still the foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind
Are still the eluded eyes. (ll. 89-99)

Let me begin on the level of sound. The profusion of alliterative “f” words (of which there are fourteen), and the repetition of anaphoric phrases (“far too far,” “What ails us,” “Dreams pursue”), are palpable in a stanza whose imagistic and insubstantive atmosphere is, like the dead poet himself, of “wind and air” (l. 91). The incantatory pleasure of this stanza, the rolling rhythm of the speaker’s breath, nearly distracts from the emptiness of the scene; but, like the “gainless glimpse” in the previous stanza, the material, somatic effect of sound, gives a measure of concreteness to such vaporous, non-sensory concepts as “wings of words,” “thought,” “prayer,” and “Dreams.” Once again, we hear and feel the elegy attempting to give sonic form and sensory possibility to what is physically formless.

As I have been arguing, Swinburne relies consistently on the somatic rhythms and affect of verse and poetic sound to impart sensory potential to conceptual abstractions. Sadly, in yet another bitter elegiac irony, the “thin flame” of Baudelaire’s spirit recedes ever farther away into “elusive skies” the more Swinburne speaks to him. The exhalation of breath necessary to pronounce the fricative cascade of “f” sounds expels a rush of air from the mouth that risks driving away the very thing he desires.¹⁷⁸ Positing the materiality of words, granting substance to words made of “wind and air” to impress an affect—in this case, despair—also risks undermining the intimate relation those words

¹⁷⁸ Further, the “Dreams [that] pursue death as winds a flying fire” is a potentially self-conflicting simile, for while wind can fan flames into a blaze, they can also put them out; as one can blow on a flame to kindle a fire, one can also extinguish a flame with a breath.

sought to establish in the first place. Furthermore, in the recurrent “ll” words—“follow,” “all,” “hollow,” and the thrice-repeated “still”—the two parallel, vertical lines that form the doublet of the letter create a kind of visual barrier that repeats typographically the boundary across which the elegiac speaker cannot adequately image, and ultimately cannot speak.¹⁷⁹

Lastly, rhyming words like “follow” and “hollow”—to recall my earlier claim about the rhyming of “bloom” and “gloom” in stanza VII—is a veiled implication that pursuing the dead in speech is a vain endeavor. Arbitrary or not, the rhyme/the rhymed words echo with, echoes with its own emptiness.¹⁸⁰ If Baudelaire is now indeed “far too far for wings of words to follow,” Swinburne must be aware that he is essentially speaking to himself. This is yet another instance of apostrophic address that turns back on its speaker to reveal nothing but its emptiness.¹⁸¹ The repetition of these apostrophes also problematizes a genre convention: the “sense of continuity” through repetition to which Sacks has already drawn our attention in *Adonais*. There, repetition propels Shelley forward by allowing him to speak in an “unbroken pattern such as one may oppose to the

¹⁷⁹ I have appropriated here Matthew Kaiser’s concise articulation of the visual imagery evoked by typography in his discussion of Walter Pater’s use of parentheses in *Greek Studies* (1895): “The swell of Pater’s parentheses echoes typographically the contours of the statue’s mouth, in which our lingual eye is encouraged to enter” (51). Also, Susan Wolfson’s “Romantic Measures: Stressing the Sound of Sound,” in *Meter Matters* (2011), is very helpful for articulating this idea.

¹⁸⁰ Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner argues: “Swinburne approaches language as a system of sounds whose grammar and names for things are arbitrary and therefore full of nonsemantic connections and coincidences [...]. His sound poetry does not set itself up against meaning; nor does it seek ‘pure sound’ in the manner of his symbolist or decadent contemporaries. What his poems do attempt is to attend to the associations that arise whenever the sounds of language are joined together, to follow patterns of sound toward meaning” (21).

¹⁸¹ This is a way the elegy remains skeptical about the nature of apostrophic address, in that it must invent in language the object to which the poet desires to speak, in order to create a relationship between himself and the absent presence he has recreated in language through this figure—a “hollow” figure—who cannot actually be and cannot actually respond.

extreme discontinuity of death” (Sacks 23). However, because the repeated words, phrases, sounds, and questions in *Ave Atque Vale* are addressed directly to the dead, it becomes an incessant acknowledgment of the sensory and epistemological gap—the erotic discontinuity—between elegist and elegized.

This gap opens another way of interpreting Swinburne’s self-awareness of this problem as itself an erotic experience. His unknowingness has a compatible model in the figure of the Barthesian lover.¹⁸² In the “efforts of the amorous subject to understand and define the loved being ‘in itself,’” he says, the lover is “caught in this contradiction: on the one hand, I believe I know the other better than anyone and triumphantly assert my knowledge to the other [...]; and on the other hand, I am often struck by the obvious fact that the other is impenetrable, intractable, not to be found; I cannot open up the other, trace back the other’s origins, solve the riddle” (134). The erotic event, for Swinburne as for Barthes, manifests as a negative epistemology, a negative knowledge, of the other.

This problem of negative erotic knowledge returns us to the earlier dilemma of breath when speaking or reading the poem. It is not only Swinburne as amorous, speaking subject who is complicit in the epistemological conflict/distance between knowing what one desires and knowing what one is able to say of that desire. A reader of *Ave Atque Vale*, too, participates in this distancing: when we read these words aloud, we are engaged in the same breath acts and lingual movements as the speaker; in reading, we can feel this somatic effect which, in effect, places us in the subject position of the mourner

¹⁸² My intention for Barthes is not just to use his *Lover’s Discourse* as a model or framework to be applied to *Ave Atque Vale*, though this is helpful for my interpretation. I hope that by bringing Barthes into conversation with my elegists to reevaluate his place in and relevance for Platonic, nineteenth-century, and modern theories of the rhetoric of elegiac and erotic love.

speaker ourselves.¹⁸³ The sounds of poetic speech, the “sounds of thy sad soul,” seek a somatic understanding of the dead as they cross from one sense perception (sound) into the medium of another sense perception (the body), or as they cross from one register of poetry (the sonic strata) to another (the somatic strata) disallow such intimacy within the text itself.¹⁸⁴ While Swinburne’s intention is to fashion a textually erotic intimacy with Baudelaire, it is the materiality of poetic speech that keeps them ever apart.

Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner is particularly lucid on the inlucidity of the movements of poetic sound between subject and object, between the living sensorium and the sensory vacancy of the dead. Swinburne’s “own sensuous experience of the sounds of language during the act of composition also leads him to meaning and insight” she writes. “In particular, these sounds lead him to a kind of knowledge whose meanings are generated by means of a recognition of the space between language and the world. In this way, the sound-driven poems once again invert the strategies of the descriptive poems, dwelling not in a world that must be mediated by language but rather in a language severed from direct connection with the world. Thus the divergent strategies Swinburne uses in both his sound-driven and descriptive poems foreground poetic language as a vehicle of meaning and pleasure” (26). In multiple poetic registers—speech, sense perception and sensation, and mind—this stanza recreates the distance between them that Swinburne has been trying to traverse; it is sad, then, if not surprising, that “dreams pursue our dead” but

¹⁸³ Christopher Craft writes similarly about the problem of speaking homoerotic desire.

¹⁸⁴ In a recent essay on knowledge and poetic form in Swinburne’s later poems, Stephanie Kuduk-Weiner concisely and compellingly explains this kind of shared experience: “The sounds of poetic language, the most visceral elements of the reader’s experience of poetry, are at once the poet’s most direct link to the sensuous aspect of the reader’s aesthetic attention and technique for modeling the poet’s own relation to sound” (22).

“do not find” them. Now “far too far for wings of words to follow,” the “sweet strange elder singer,” is an absent presence, a marker of the chasm between life and death.

The Shut Scroll

Up to this point in the poem, neither figures (like prosopopoeia and simile) nor sounds of speech have allowed Swinburne the subtler knowledge and intimate relation he seeks from the dead poet: “Not thee, O never thee, in all time’s changes,” he cries, “Not thee, but this the sound of thy sad soul, / The shadow of thy swift spirit, this shut scroll / I lay my hand on, and not death estranges / My spirit from communion of thy song—” he cries (ll. 100-104).¹⁸⁵ These lines sustain the knowledge that it cannot ever be Baudelaire himself that poetry will allow him to embrace.¹⁸⁶ But while the primary bodily senses of sight and sound closed in the opening stanzas, the faculty of touch is activated here. In this figurally transformative moment, the sound of Baudelaire’s soul and the shadow of his spirit are metonymized to inhabit the “shut scroll,” and the dead poet becomes a body of text within the textual body that is the elegy itself.¹⁸⁷

The metonymy of corpse and corpus in the “shut scroll” holds out for Swinburne the possibility of intimacy across the boundary of death, which now cannot “ estrange”

¹⁸⁵ Sacks makes a somewhat similar claim about a different part of the stanza: “Narrowly speaking, Baudelaire’s death cannot keep Swinburne from the former’s poems” (217). This lament is conventional except for the apostrophic nature of the lines.

¹⁸⁶ Brennan makes the opposite claim: “Baudelaire is not ultimately displaced in ‘Ave Atque Vale’ but continually embraced by Swinburne. The older poet inhabits his thought, memory, language, and sense. Instead of representing a future to him, Baudelaire merely impresses on him the continuing flow of images in the present that iterates repetition. Swinburne’s accomplishment is to realize that any poet, instead of standing apart from this flow, may be able to refine his perception by becoming one with it” (256).

¹⁸⁷ Again, Brennan argues in parallel: “By clasping the book and not the dead man, Swinburne thus submits himself to the task of living and working in language even though his ‘pursuit of images’ does not hold out the possibility of bearing any fruit (Sacks, p. 223). We can also see that the ‘barren’ pursuit of images’ resembles the oblivion described by Bloom: for both critics Swinburne borrows images of his precursor in order to make a place in the tradition for his own endeavor” (253).

them.¹⁸⁸ The somatic knowledge afforded by versification, the rhythms of speech that move through the body, a sensory experience at the limit of sensation—what Jakobson calls the “sound shape of language”—is the materiality of poetic speech.¹⁸⁹ Touch is the most intimate of the sense perceptions even as it is the most diffused throughout the body and has no single locus like the eye or ear. And, because it is diffused throughout the body, it is the most encompassing or most fully embodied mode of sense perception and somatic knowledge. Yet touching the dead with language remains a problem for the language of touching, and also for the speaking body that is touched back when its speech touches the dead.

Swinburne can, though, lovingly recall Baudelaire’s “memories and melodies” as if they were material, tangible: “These I salute, these touch, these clasp and fold” he says, “As though a hand were in my hand to hold” (ll. 105-08). Very quickly, it seems, the already—and now doubly—immaterial “sound” of a soul and “shadow” of a spirit are transfigured into the materiality of speech; in other words, they materialize in the poem as Baudelaire’s poetic corpus. I want to look more closely now into the figures of line 108, “As though a hand were in my hand to hold.” This has 3 figural levels or dimensions to clarify: “As though” is simile; the comparison of reading a poetic text to holding hands, is an analogy; but, the figure or mechanism for this connection is metonymy. The metonymic analogy of reading a text as holding hands—something one does with a

¹⁸⁸ “The repetition of Baudelaire’s corpse in both his and Swinburne’s *corpus* allows both poets to imagine an ‘afterlife’ for their work in terms of future readers (p. 116). Most importantly, regardless of whose body we situate in this process, the process itself, as Prins suggests, raises the problem of subjectivity (132). However, where she sees a non-naturalized rhythm—or poetic text—as the marker for the corpse, I extend this process to the position of the reader” (Brennan 252).

¹⁸⁹ The stanza also performs his contentment through its metric stability; in contrast with the previous stanzas, there are no jarring trochees or spondees here to upset the iambs, no sharp or dissonant sounds, or broken rhythms.

proton philon, an intimate friend or lover—for a moment has a strong consolatory effect. For Swinburne, holding Baudelaire's words in his hand is the only thing that can grant him intimate contact: in language alone can he embrace the beloved poet.¹⁹⁰ Still, something holds him back from committing fully to this ideal. Swinburne never quite revels in his poetic idealizations in the same way or to the same degree that Shelley does, and an irrepressible doubt intrudes on this fragile moment in the subtly pointed simile "As though" (l. 108).¹⁹¹

As a material signifier for reading, touching Baudelaire's poems can only ever be a figural experience, can only ever be *like* holding his hand, and the iambic meter emphasizes that Swinburne understands this more clearly than before. The earlier simile I looked at, the "pale Titan-woman like a lover" (l. 59), falls anapestically at the end of the line, making its rhetoricity subtle by stressing "lover" rather than "like." In contrast, by beginning this line with the iambic simile "As though," the stanza foregrounds the rhetorical nature of this touch¹⁹². The indeterminacy at play in the last two lines of stanza 10, created by the conditional conjunction "Or" and amplified by the passive

¹⁹⁰ In the text, Swinburne's hand, too, is a synecdoche of his own poetic imaginary.

¹⁹¹ Potential complication in that, as an iamb, "As" is unstressed while its object, "though," is stressed, which de-emphasizes it as a simile, which is the opposite of what I want to say here about its significance. Not sure how to reconcile this with my earlier reading of the simile "like a lover" in stanza 6, where it is an anapest that allows us to read right over it. My attention to Swinburne's use of simile here is in partial conflict with my discussion of "like a lover" in stanza VI. There, the simile is nearly elided by the meter (iambic—"like a lover") and its placement at the end of the line. Here it is less susceptible to reading over because it begins the line, and, as an iamb, "as" is unstressed while "though" takes the stress, so technically the simile "as" is de-emphasized and not as insistent as its object.

¹⁹² Sacks draws a smart contrast to *In Memoriam* through the scene when Tennyson reads Hallam's letters and feels a mystical reunion with him, observes: "Swinburne remains resolutely with the scroll itself. The swell of compensatory verbs—*Salute, touch, clasp, fold*—may seem to redress the privations listed in stanzas 7-9. But the object of these verbs is only the sound, the shadow, the shut scroll, never the hand. The 'As though' reminds us not just of the difference but of the fact that such a difference is precisely that of figuration itself. 'As though' indicates the distance through which the mourner has turned. The act and fabric of that figuration lie between him and the dead" (217).

grammar, further threatens to expose this happy fiction: “Or through mine ears a mourning musical / Of many mourners rolled” (ll. 109-110). After the first rhetorical remove in the metonymy of touching Baudelaire through his text, and the second remove created by the simile, the shift from active to passive voice across a conditional conjunction indicates yet another barrier between them. It is as if Swinburne cannot decide which sense (of touch or of sound) and which figure of speech (metonymy or simile), can bring them most closely together across the divide of death.

Clearly, much rests on the status of figures of speech. As a heuristic model and philosophical framework for my hypothesis of elegiac eroticism as an experience of pleasure and knowledge, I turn to a paradigmatic example of this linguistic phenomenon in post-Enlightenment aesthetic theory: the “as-if” of Kant’s “Analytic of the Beautiful.”¹⁹³ In aesthetic judgment—which is essentially what Swinburne is doing in this stanza—Kant claims that the beautiful resides not in the object of contemplation but within the mind of the disinterested, contemplating subject.¹⁹⁴ In response to what only

¹⁹³ Two essays on the Kantian “as-if” that illustrate how crucial yet problematic this linguistic construction (simile) is for aesthetic judgment, have been invaluable for my thinking about figuration in *Ave Atque Vale*: Eva Schaper’s “The Kantian ‘As-If’ and Its Relevance for Aesthetics” (Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, 65 (1964-1965, p219-234)); and Kalliopi Nikolopoulou’s brilliant comparative reading of Adorno alongside Kant, “‘As-If’: Kant, Adorno, and the Politics of Poetry” (*MLN* 121.3, p757-773, 2006)). Though neither Schaper nor Nikolopoulou address *Ave Atque Vale* or elegiac poetry specifically, their essays help clarify the relation between the structure of figural, poetic speech and the unhappy elegiac consciousness of Hegel/Schiller, and have helped me to develop a parallel line of thinking about the erotic affect and effect of simile. Schaper refers to an older translation which, interestingly, employs the “as-if” in different passages from those I will look at, indicating the prevalence of this language in Kant. In her translation, Section 45 reads: “Nature was beautiful, when it appeared as art; and art can only be called beautiful when we are conscious of its being art whilst it yet appears to us *as if* it were nature [...] Fine art must exhibit the appearance of nature, though we recognize it as art” (229, italics mine, J.G.). She states: “Here Kant’s aesthetic term, ‘beautiful’, indicates the fundamental requirement for an aesthetic object: that it must appear. Natural objects must appear *as if* wrought by art, art objects *as if* produced by nature; yet in both cases we know that this is only an appearance” (229).

¹⁹⁴ He writes, “In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (89).

can be called a “beautiful object,” the imaginative faculty operates in harmony with the bodily senses of perception to create a stable, congruent image of the external object in the mind; in other words, this image is a mental representation—but not a conceptualization—of the thing, the imagining of which gives the subject pleasure. And because the pleasure experienced in the presence of the beautiful object rests upon the possibility of its communication to others, aesthetic judgement is a relational experience predicated on the notion of the *sensus communis*.¹⁹⁵ As such, this judgment is ultimately dependent on the problematic assumption that language can adequately to convey this mental representation to others. Kant, perhaps despite himself, indirectly admits this in his own explanation of aesthetic experience, writing, “if [a person] pronounces that something is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others: he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. Hence he says that the **thing** is beautiful [...],” while in fact the beautiful resides in the reflective subject (98). The necessity of the “as if” in Kant’s determination reveals a mournful, elegiac—or, some would say, tragic—consciousness of the aesthetic event as a figural condition, a product of speech that situates beauty only in language.¹⁹⁶

Kalliopi Nikolopoulou offers a brilliant rereading of the Kantian “as-if” that helps to concretize my claim that the elegy’s self-conscious rhetoric reveals Swinburne’s deep-

¹⁹⁵ “By ‘*sensus communis*,’” Kant explains, “must be understood the idea of a communal sense, i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else’s way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment” (173-74). His emphasis on “as it were” in this passage suggests a similar figurativeness to the “as-if.” He puts it another way just one page later, in order to refine his meaning with regard to the non-conceptual nature of aesthetic experience: “One could even define taste as the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of concepts” (175).

¹⁹⁶ The “tragic consciousness” of Kantian aesthetic theory was a shared concern of Hegel and Schiller; I should note that de Man argues that Schiller misreads Kant; also see Thomas Pfau, “Mourning Modernity.”

seated anxiety over the possibility of a textually erotic relationship with Baudelaire.¹⁹⁷ She states that Kantian aesthetics “is based on conceptual indeterminacy,” which can be seen in how he “constructed many of his philosophical arguments by way of analogy, using the structure of the ‘as if,’” a rhetorical structure that shows how “art speaks in the language of pure possibility, that is also, of impossibility: if art points to the possible, it is also by allowing for the impossible” (761). I propose that Swinburne’s metonymic analogy, “As though a hand were in my hand to hold,” should be understood similarly: it allows for something physically possible—touching a text with one’s hand, reading it with the eye and ear—while simultaneously admitting the impossibility that this experience could translate into an intimate touch of the dead poet himself; yet for a fleeting moment, the poem holds out this impossibility as being within reach.¹⁹⁸

When the love object is dead and his body unavailable to the living speaker’s senses—that is, when the senses cannot clearly differentiate the various bodies and body parts of the dead—we see the potential for the figure of metonymy, because of its contiguous reaching, to allow the speaker to touch the love object. It is due to the contiguity of this figure that the poetic text becomes an extension of the poet’s body, unlike metaphor, which is a figure of identification between formally discernable objects.¹⁹⁹ Swinburne’s aesthetic judgment of Baudelaire’s corpus, his assertion of the dead poet’s text as beautiful, manifests metonymically in the erotic pull of reading (as a

¹⁹⁷ Her argument, however, is aimed in different direction than mine, as she focuses on how “Adorno’s understanding of the universality of the lyric bears a structural resemblance to Kant’s aesthetic judgment” (767, n. 22). I am claiming a conceptual parallel to her analogical argument.

¹⁹⁸ Nikolopoulou writes, “analogy as resemblance, but also as dissimilarity, marks a moment of poetization of the concept [...] In other words, analogy foregrounds and performs the aspect of indeterminacy, common to both Adorno’s and Kant’s aesthetics” (761).

¹⁹⁹ This characteristic is the reason Jakobson associates it with narrative fiction rather than poetry, for which metaphor, a figure of identity, is centrally operative.

touching of) his poems, and in the seductive analogy of holding hands.²⁰⁰ These figurations—metonymy and analogy (or synecdoche and simile)—are the epistemological and affective structures of Swinburne’s understanding of love and death. Yet, because they admit, in their very structure, their rational impossibility, these relations that the figures create are not conceptual thoughts, not products of cognition or reason, but products of poetic language. Just as in Kantian aesthetics, as Nikolopoulou tells us, “beauty *is* simply whenever it is announced” (767), Baudelaire-as-text *is* where Swinburne’s speech posits him to be: in “These memories and these melodies,” and in the “mourning musical” that rolls through his—and now our—ears (ll. 105-110).²⁰¹ Swinburne thus inscribes the lost love-object as an erotic text (the “shut scroll), in his own erotic text (the elegy), as a means of embracing him; nonetheless, he recognizes the tenuousness of the language that makes this textual relation possible in the first place. In this moment, Swinburne wants to take one step beyond his reality, even while knowing that the somatic and figural difficulties of poetic speech will keep him always one step behind his desire.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ I recognize the potential problem with saying that Swinburne is “doing” Kantian aesthetic judgement because he clearly is not disinterested (although he is somewhat distant), and he is communicating only with the dead poet, so there can be no similar *sensus communis*.

²⁰¹ She says, “A beautiful object is not so *because of* the sum of its predicates, for this formulation presupposes concepts and reduces the aesthetic judgment to causality. Instead, beauty *is* simply whenever it is announced. Beauty stands beyond justification, legitimation, or qualification, and yet it is because of this capacity that it becomes in Kant the site of potential universality—hence, the site of legitimation” (767). Sappho, Swinburne’s ideal poet, defines beauty as *otto tis eratai*, “whatever one loves,” an interestingly similar formulation.

²⁰² Again, Nikolopoulou offers an elegant explanation of this double-bind: “For Kant, this ideality could be understood within his overall project of searching for conditions of possibility, a search that always throws him at least one layer behind reality” (768).

CHAPTER IV

NECROPHILIC EROS IN THOMAS TOD STODDART'S *THE DEATH-WAKE; OR, LUNACY: A NECROMAUNT IN THREE CHIMERAS*

I began this project with the proposition that historical and genre-oriented criticism have not sufficiently accounted for the amorous and epistemological conditions of elegiac speech in the nineteenth-century. I suggested that by attending to the figural and formal registers of canonical and non-canonical poems, we might gain a different conception of elegy, as an amorous, rather than competitive, poetic mode that represents the lost object as a figure of love and knowledge. In Chapter One, I claimed that in *Adonais* it is the figure of metonymy that allows the intimacy of touch through the textual body. By directly reaching for a particular aspect or element or part (synecdoche) of the lost object itself, metonymy establishes a more intimate relation with the dead. In Chapter Two, I focused on how the desire for the dead undoes a crucial figure of speech, prosopopoeia.²⁰³ This figure posits a face on a dead, inanimate, or non-human object, which is to say that it grants speech, subjectivity, and agency, to what should be and remain dead. Prosopopoeia is meant to vitalize (or revitalize) the dead, but in doing so it destabilizes knowledge of the distinction between what is living and what is dead. In Swinburne's elegy, this already unstable figure undoes itself to become anti-prosopon, the de-faced bodies of death.

This chapter has two aims: to introduce Thomas Tod Stoddart's poem to literary scholarship, and to find out what happens to language, bodies, and knowledge when mourning speech cannot console grief, and the mourner turns not to a corpus, but to the

²⁰³ See de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement" and "Shelley Disfigured," and Cynthia Chase, *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.

corpse itself as the literal, rather than the textual, remains of the love object. In their desire for the dead, I argue, prosopopoeia and metonymy are necrophilic figures, linguistic performances that seeks to reinfuse the dead with life and give subjectivity to a dead love-object. The challenge of this poem is that its figures and bodies operate on two registers due to the poem's double frame of narration and figuration. What *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale* perform in speech becomes, in *The Death-Wake*, a performance of Julio's grieving body and of the narrator's speech. I begin with a synopsis of the poem and a look into the scant publication and reception history, before moving into the focal points of my argument.

Reading Stoddart's poem, the full title of which is, *The Death-Wake, or Lunacy: A Necromaunt in Three Chimeras* (1831), is a singular, and singularly disorienting, experience. Its closest analogue in terms of formal and figural unpredictability and sheer strangeness is probably Thomas Lovell Beddoes's *Death's Jest Book* (1850); there are also strong echoes and powerful inversions of Coleridge's *Rime of the Antient Marinere*.²⁰⁴ Stoddart's poem relates the tragic romance and posthumous love between a monk, Julio, and a nun, Agathe. In an unnamed monastery, impossible to situate in time or place, Julio and Agathe meet secretly and quickly fall in love, finding in each other a kindred loneliness and a longing for intimacy they each had been denied throughout their lives.²⁰⁵ But Agathe dies suddenly, and Julio's unbearable grief turns what might have

²⁰⁴ Lang remarks: "His mood is that of Scott when Scott was young, and was so anxious to possess a death's head and cross-bones. The malady is 'most incident' to youth, but Mr. Stoddart wears his rue with indifference. The mad monkish lover of the dead nun Agathé has hit on precisely the sort of fantasy about to inspire Théophile Gautier's *Comédie de la Mort*, or the later author of *Gaspard de la Nuit*, or Edgar Poe. There is here no 'criticism of life'; it is a criticism of strange death; and, so far, may recall Beddoes's *Death's Jest-Book*, unpublished, of course, in 1830. Naturally this kind of poetry is 'useless,' as Mr. Ruskin says about Coleridge, but, in its *bizarre* way, it may be beautiful" (6).

²⁰⁵ See Chimera I. 80-111 and 157-78.

been recognizable as a conventional mourning poem—in other words, something identifiable as an elegy—into a bizarre tale of necrophilic love and despair that stands well outside the elegiac tradition. Yet *The Death-Wake* resonates with the epistemological and textual eroticism of the canonical elegies of the nineteenth century in ways that pose questions not only about the elegiac genre, but more broadly about the century's aesthetics and poetics of death and mourning. These questions regard the issues of elegiac knowledge and pleasure which I engage in the chapters on *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, but here they are reoriented around a narrative of necrophilic love and loss. I return to these issues in depth after a synopsis of the poem.

The Tale of Julio and Agathe

Agathe's untimely death drives Julio to the brink of madness, and on the night of her burial, unable to let go of his libidinal attachment to her, he furtively digs up her corpse and absconds with her to the sea. After finding on the shore a "silver shell, / That had been wasted by the fall and swell / Of many a moon-borne tide into a ring" (I. 37-39), he performs an impromptu marriage ceremony before setting out into the "great heaving solitude" (I. 85) on a kind of perverse honeymoon that is eerily reminiscent—in tone, image, and event—of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798).²⁰⁶ During their aimless voyage, they encounter a ship full of sailors who are horrified at the sight of Agathe's propped-up corpse and the seeming madman at the helm, "[l]ike a sea demon" (II. 178), who yet looks over her so lovingly. After miraculously surviving a storm that wrecks the larger ship, and attempting but failing to save a sailor who recoils at the sight

²⁰⁶ This seashell ring is important to note because—as the remains of a dead sea creature—the shell is (like) a corpse, and by making it into a sign/symbol of his love for Agathe, it becomes a signifier for necrophilia itself.

of her, the poem takes an hallucinatory turn—reminiscent of Coleridge’s *Rime*—in which nightmarish apparitions from the “desolate repose / Of the deep waters” (II. 480-81) rise up to torment Julio for his transgression.

After an uncertain period of time at sea, Agathe’s body, up to this point inexplicably untouched by the physical signs of death (save a few suggestive instances), begins to decay, and, as if in some kind of somatic sympathy, Julio’s body deteriorates even further. Near the end of the poem’s second Chimera, they land on an unnamed, seemingly uninhabited island, where Julio hopes to remain with her forever, unbothered by the world. Once there, however, as they both continue to decompose rapidly, Julio falls ever further into despair and madness, and pleads with the heavens and the ocean to relieve his wretched agony and let him join Agathe in death.

Unexpectedly, there is another person on the island, a nameless hermit, who witnesses Julio’s desperate behavior and fearfully approaches him on the shore. He asks Julio to “tell thy dismal tale” (III. 184), which he does, before begging the hermit to “leave me to my madness, or to die! (III. 194). The poem nears its end with Julio’s death. A wave crashes over them as he embraces Agathe for the last time, and as they are carried out into the oblivion of the sea he bellows out her name in a final love cry. Their bodies, still entwined, wash back up on the shore, and the hermit buries them together, granting them a shared eternity in the grave (III. 449-63). Shortly after, he makes a Dickensianly serendipitous discovery when he sees in the water where the doomed lovers once lay, a small, gold cross, which he recognizes as the very same one he had given to his young daughter so many years ago, before sending her off to the monastery! (III. 474-89). We learn that this hermit is Agathe’s father, who in penance for his neglect of her as

a child has isolated himself on the island in an act of contrition. From this shock of recognition and regret, the old man dies, his body resting atop the lovers' grave like a macabre headstone (III. 490-535). The poem closes with the narrator's lamentation for all three of them, a final note of sorrow that serves as their epitaph.

Publication & Reception History

The Death-Wake is an outlier poem in this project in multiple ways. Almost the entirety of Stoddart's work is angling poems; *The Death-Wake* stands out for its controversial subject-matter (necrophilic love) and its oddly Romantic modes of speech. The poem received scant acknowledgment by the literary establishment of its time: two rather unkind reviews were published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and it was dismissed by Stoddart's own professor at Edinburgh University, Christopher North (Lang 10). Curiously, the poem was plagiarized by someone named "Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro," and Lang reports that Edgar Allen Poe "praised the piece while he was exposing Tasistro's 'barefaced robbery'" (11).²⁰⁷ In her memoir of her father, Anne Stoddart mentions *The Death-Wake* only twice, the first time writing that his childhood ambition to write an "immortal tragedy exhausted itself in 'Death-Wake' and 'Abel Massinger'" (20-23), and the second time noting only that Christopher North was "severe" toward it (98). Beyond this, Andrew Lang's thirteen-page introduction to an 1895 edition of the poem seems to be the only extant critical engagement with the text.²⁰⁸ In his brief, laudatory introduction to Stoddart and the poem, Lang writes of "an accent original, distinct, strangely musical, and really replete with promise. He has a fresh unborrowed melody and mastery of work,

²⁰⁷ See Ingram's biography of Poe for more.

²⁰⁸ Though there is no commentary, a brief excerpt of *The Death-Wake* appears in Jerome McGann, *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. 747-50.

the first indispensable sign of a true poet” (3-16).²⁰⁹ *The Death-Wake* is “a breath of the spirit of romance, touching an instrument not wholly out of tune, but never to be touched again,” a work that “strikes, of course, on the common reef of the Romantic” (14).

Chimerical Narrations

From the synopsis it should be apparent that *The Death-Wake* stands quite apart from the other elegies I look at. How to place it within the elegiac current of the nineteenth century, then, is a crucial question of this chapter. In this section, I introduce certain obstacles to answering this question, which are also, and more importantly, the grounding conditions and events that shape its unique form and modes of speech, and raise the question in the first place. The canonical elegies from Spenser through Swinburne are written as first-person lyrics in which the speaker himself is the primary mourner. In *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, the poet and the mourner are the same figure; in *The Death-Wake*, the narrator speaks in the figure of the “poet,” while Julio speaks as the poem’s primary mourner. The voice that frames the text, and the voices that speak in the text, introduce a second register of mourning to the poem—while Julio mourns Agathe, the narrator mourns them both—that obscures the relationship among them. At times he speaks from the remove of a distant observer, a disinterested witness and conveyor of their tragic affair; at other times he is intimate, impassioned, and speaks of Julio and Agathe as if he knew them; there are even instances when he speaks as if he were Agathe’s lover, and their identities begin to blur; and there are moments when he speaks directly to them, and occasionally to us. The shifting between third-person and first-person speakers creates an unstable multi-frame narrative that is complicated even

²⁰⁹ He continues: “His rhymed heroic verse is no more the rhymed heroic verse of *Endymion*, than it is that of Mr. Pope, or of Mr. William Morris. He is a new master of the old instrument” (5).

further when narrator's voice shifts without warning among the past, present, and future tenses, a temporal disorientation that is central to its eroticism.

The inconsistent narration resulting from the division of speaker and mourner raises the second line of inquiry of this chapter. The split between primary speaker and primary mourner destabilizes the figures of speech—metonymy and prosopopoeia—that I have proposed in the previous chapters are central to nineteenth-century elegiac eroticism. Furthermore, neither Julio nor Agathe are poets and so do not, like Keats and Baudelaire, leave behind a corpus to, as Swinburne says, “clasp and fold, as though a hand were in my hand to hold.” The textual intimacy that Shelley and Swinburne seek through metonymy is not possible for Stoddart's mourners. I return to this and the related problem of prosopopoeia later in this chapter.

The third concern of this chapter is the effect of Agathe's dead body on acts of touch and touching. In *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, the corpse is not physically present to the speaker, but available to him only in language. Agathe's corpse, however, is directly available to Julio's physical touch, though not the narrator's. The immediacy of the corpse and the possibility of touching the dead body itself changes the nature of the elegiac relation among the three characters. For the necrophilic lover Julio, this is the most intimate contact the living can have with the dead. Though Burke has stated that “death is only an *idea*, not something known by us as we know our bodily sensations” (369), and de Man calls “death” “a displaced name for a linguistic predicament,” I propose that in a necrophilic elegy like *The Death-Wake*, the faculty of touch offers a relational knowledge of death. Specifying the exact nature of this knowledge, however, is a challenge because Agathe's corpse signifies on multiple levels: for Julio, the corpse *is*

Agathe; that is, he looks on her dead body not as a symbol or representation of death, but as his still-embodied beloved. For the narrator, Agathe's corpse is the material signifier of death, and unlike Julio, he can only know her through the language and figures of touch. Throughout this chapter, I examine the epistemological resistances faced by the amorous subject Julio, who rejects Agathe's death, and by the unstable narrator who tells their tale, and at times speak his own desire for the dead. The double-register of mourning produced by the presence of two speakers creates two, often indistinguishable, amorous relationships within the poem.

The further epistemological danger of necrophilia is that it blurs the distinction between what is living and what is dead. When touch collapses the physical distance between them, it unsettles not only the amorous subject's relation to the dead, but also the self-knowledge the subject should gain from confronting the corpse: a recognition of his or her own inevitable mortality. These interrelated tensions touch upon the major innovations of Stoddart's poem, and it is important to set them up here as interconnected. In the following discussion I address each one individually and in greater depth in order to illustrate their particular tensions.²¹⁰

Narration is not the common mode of elegiac speech. In the English tradition, elegies are spoken by a first-person lyric speaker who is the primary mourner in the text. This is in part due to the fact that, historically, an elegy is an occasional poem, composed in response to the actual death of a friend, respected poet, or, in my conception of the elegiac relation, lover. In such instances, the elegiac poet is the mourning speaker himself, or an aestheticized self-representation. In the elegies I examine—*Adonais*, *In*

²¹⁰ Credit is due to Heidi Kaufman for this helpful signpost.

Memoriam, *Ave Atque Vale*—respectively, Shelley mourns Keats, Tennyson mourns Hallam, and Swinburne mourns Baudelaire. Historical and genre scholarship has claimed that the lived relationship of each pair of poets grounds these elegies in the poets’ biographies; it makes sense, then, that mourning poets write their grief in the lyric “I.”

The Death-Wake is not rooted in an actual loss in Stoddart’s life, and so we cannot identify his narrator or the character Julio with Stoddart himself. There is no historical or paratextual evidence to suggest that any of the characters actually existed or that any of the events actually occurred, or that the poem has any basis in Stoddart’s life.²¹¹ Unlike Keats, Hallam, and Baudelaire, Julio and Agathe exist only in the text, born solely of the language of the poet’s imagination. The numerous indeterminacies of time and place, and the absence of identifiable references or allusions to historical people or events in the poem, further support this. Under Rosenberg’s criteria, then, because it is not personal, *The Death-Wake* would not be considered an elegy; it also does not easily fall under Sacks’s rubric of genre conventions or the psychoanalytic “work of mourning.” However, these determinations of elegy do not sufficiently account for the range of narrative, figural, and epistemological forces that drive *The Death-Wake*.

Beyond its non-biographical, ahistorical basis, the fact of the poem’s narration further distances *The Death-Wake* from the elegiac canon. Instead of the conventional lyric “I” who speaks in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, Stoddart’s poem is spoken by a third-person who stands in an uncertain relation to the ill-fated lovers. Generally, the narrator speaks from outside the central erotic relation between Julio and Agathe, as an

²¹¹ I have found no evidence to suggest that an actual death spurred Stoddart’s poem or that he was mourning a real person in his life. Relatedly, due to Stoddart being unknown, in addition to his poem having a narrator, I cannot use “Stoddart” as a metonymy for his poem, whereas this is standard practice for canonical poets like Shelley and Swinburne.

observer of the tragic events that befall them; yet at certain desperate or perilous moments in their voyage, he seems to be an agent within the poem, speaking as if he knows Julio and Agathe, and interjecting himself and his own desire into the tale. These interjections are so fevered and forceful that they erupt out of the narration altogether and into apostrophe, the mode of lyric.²¹²

The narration of *The Death-Wake*, which separates the central speaker (the narrator) from the mourning lover (Julio), is a key point of distinction from *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, and it remains a problem for interpretation throughout the poem. Here, I look into the figural conditions of the narrative to see what challenges the poem may raise for poetic theory. *The Death-Wake*, like *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, like all poetry, relies on figurative language to make meaning, to represent the multiple dimensions of (human) experience in and as text.²¹³ In Chapters One and Two, I sought to reconsider the critical privileging of metaphor over metonymy in Shelleyan and Swinburnean eros, and claim the latter as the central erotic figure of elegy. The figural dynamics of a heterogeneous text like *The Death-Wake*, though, troubles the alignment of metaphor with poetry and metonymy with narrative that we have inherited from Jakobsonian linguistic theory. In *Fundamentals of Language* (1956), Jakobson explains “[t]he primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism,” and “the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called ‘realistic’ trend” in narrative fiction.” But *The Death-Wake* is a narrative split by two often-indistinguishable speakers, and its multiple figural registers cross suddenly and unpredictably between both

²¹² See Jonathan Culler, “Apostrophe.”

²¹³ Lisa Downing comments similarly: “[I]t is important to remember that nothing in poetry is ever merely a figure: figurative language is the substance of poetry itself, the heart of the poetic” (73).

axes of language, and do not, until its final words, come to rest.²¹⁴ And it poses still a further problem: “Similarity,” Jakobson writes, “connects a metaphorical term with the term for which it is substituted,” while “contiguity”—the mechanism of metonymy—operates linearly: “Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realist author metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. He is fond of synecdochic details” (92). This poem’s movements in time and space, however, are severely discontinuous.

The Death-Wake is already unstable on the levels of narration and figuration. The third focus of this chapter arises in light of these complications, but shifts from the register of language to the register of the body because the necrophilic mourner Julio cannot be satisfied by a textually-mediated relationship with Agathe.²¹⁵ Put differently, whereas the conventional elegist mourns in language, the necrophilic elegist mourns with the body.²¹⁶ As I noted above, Agathe’s corpse signifies on a corporeal level for Julio and on a figural level for the narrator, though as we will see shortly, the blurring of their identities will often reverse this. The materiality of death in *The Death-Wake* negates the

²¹⁴ The poem’s hybrid nature also presents a challenge for genre classification. I mentioned earlier that the elegiac rubrics of Sacks and Rosenberg seem, in light of my arguments, either too narrow and limiting or too broad and universalizing, respectively. *The Death-Wake* fits neither the genre conventions and “work of mourning” that Sacks considers the core of elegy, nor the personal loss and grief that Rosenberg finds there.

²¹⁵ I should note, though, that Julio’s relationship with Agathe always remains chaste. He does not, as common understandings of necrophilia would have it, engage in sexual acts with her corpse. His touch is limited to a caress, an embrace, a kiss on the cheek or brow.

²¹⁶ When I write “necrophilic elegist” I generally intend the narrator; as the primary poetic speaker of an elegy, he can properly be called an elegist (or an “elegiac speaker” if elegy cannot be narrated). Julio poses more of a problem: he mourns in poetic speech, too, when he sings to Agathe in *Chimera II* (“A rosary of stars, love!”, “‘Tis light to love thee living, girl”, and “To the Harp”); and again later when he apostrophically invokes, implores, and curses the heavens and the sea and the all the forces of nature for their plight. In these moments when he mourns in song, I consider him an elegist (or elegiac speaker); and yet, his primary mode of relation with Agathe is through touch, and secondarily in language. These continually shifting subject positions are the result of narration and the dual-register of mourning.

metonymic necessity of conventional elegy. Unlike Keats and Baudelaire, her body is not a static object preserved in language. *The Death-Wake* traces Agathe's deterioration in horrific detail:

The ladye, she hath lost the pearly hue
Upon her gorgeous brow, where tresses grew
Luxuriantly as thoughts of tenderness,
That once were floating in the pure recess
Of her bright soul. These are not as they were,
But are as weeds above a sepulchre,
Wild waving in the breeze : her eyes are now
Sunk deeply under the discolour'd brow,
That is of sickly yellow, and pale blue,
Unnaturally blending. The same hue
Is on her cheek : it is the early breath
Of cold Corruption, the ban dog of Death
Falling upon her features" (II. 559-71).²¹⁷

Julio, however, is not repelled, and his love for Agathe does not waiver. I noted above that at certain moments in the poem, Julio steps into the position of the elegist when he mourns Agathe in song. While they are at sea in Chimera II, he sings: "‘Tis light to love thee living, girl, when hope is full and fair, / In the springtide of thy beauty, when there is

²¹⁷ By the time they reach the island, at the very end of Chimera II, even the narrator is in disbelief at the severe transformation of her corpse. She is "A faded flower! with all the vernal dews / From its bright blossom shaken, and the hues / Become as colourless as twilight air— / I marvel much, that she was ever fair!" (II. 696-99). From this point forward, until the end of the poem, the beauty is "off the rose," as the cliché poets say, and her corpse no longer possesses any of the outward loveliness it once had; yet, even though her beauty is passed, Julio loves her still.

no sorrow there— [...] But when the brow is blighted, like a star of morning tide, / And faded is the crimson blush upon the cheek beside; / It is to love, as seldom love, the brightest and the best, / When our love lies like a dew upon the one that is at rest” (II. 209-20). Not only does Julio not turn away from her, he loves her even more. This, I would argue, is a defining characteristic of the necrophile, and a clear point of distinction from *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*: necrophilic desire for the dead does not cease at the precipice of its beauty.

Disinterment and Necrophilic Anti-Prosopon

I turn back now to a scene in Chimera I with the hope that understanding the basic problems of necrophilic elegy will allow us to navigate this bizarre text. Immediately after Agathe’s sudden death, *The Death-Wake* veers sharply into gothic nightmare and madness. On the night of her burial, Julio descends into madness when descends into her grave to retrieve her body. He “wields a heavy mattock in his hands,” and over the grave he “hath bent him down in speed”; “[A]nd he is flinging the dark, chilly mould / Over the gorgeous pavement” of the flagstone that sits atop it (277-93). This scene reveals three difficulties that continually disrupt the text’s logic, voice, and language: 1) the temporal indeterminacies effected by shifting grammatical tenses; 2) the uncertain nature of the narrator’s relationship to Julio and Agathe; and 3) the positing and undoing of faces in the face of death. The simultaneity of these issues heightens the figural and epistemological disruptions they cause throughout the poem. I begin with the grammatical inconsistencies as these are the most immediate and accessible; but more significantly, because what might be seen as a minor, surface inconsistency belies a deeper level of disorientation that is the poem’s overarching epistemological condition.

The shifting verb tenses in the lines above, and which continues throughout the poem, call into question the time of these events and the time of their narration; it is unclear if these events are being narrated as they occur in the present, or if these are past events the narrator is conveying in the present. Julio “*wields*” the mattock (l. 277) but then he “*hath bent* down” over her grave (l. 283); he “*is flinging*” the dirt off her coffin (l. 292), but then he “*would dash*” his pick through the other bones there (l. 296); soon after, he “*went / To his wild work,*” (l. 314-15), but then he “*hath stolen* the dark chest / Where the fair nun lay coffin’d” (l. 326-27). And once he has taken her body from the casket, “*Julio bends o’er / The sleeping girl*” (l. 354-55), and he “*is holding* his pale lips / Over her brow” (360-61), yet he then “*breathed* a cold kiss on her ashy cheek” (l. 366). Over the course of what seems just a few hours in a single night, Julio appears simultaneously to act in the present and in the past, and the text offers no guidance for understanding these temporal shifts.²¹⁸ These grammatical inconsistencies, however, are not accidental or arbitrary, nor, I think, the result of careless editing; they are one way the poem performs the linguistic and temporal disorientations that reverberate from Julio’s necrophilic act.

In an attempt to comprehend death, our sense of the past and the present are the fundamental points of temporal orientation. Their distinction and transformation—that is, when the present becomes the past, when the living become the dead—marks the event that drives mourning; to confuse them collapses the chronology and history of the relation between Julio and Agathe, and between the narrator and the doomed lovers. The

²¹⁸ Time is not the only thing disturbed in the poem: place, too, is left unclear. Stoddart provides few indications of the setting of this tale, leaving us to extrapolate from such clues as the monastic setting, the gothic tones, the Italianate names Julio and Agathe, and the archaic diction and spelling, such as “*ladye*” for “*lady*.”

necrophile, by rejecting the absence of the love-object, by refusing to relinquish his hold on the dead, essentially seeks to undo the movement of time in order to keep his desire present in the present: Julio's disinterment of Agathe is an attempt to resist and reverse time. As Scott Dudley writes (though of the seventeenth century), the desire to "have conference with the dead" is to seek "a past that can only be experienced as rupture" (291).

These inconstancies of grammar and time are not yet so confused as to prohibit us following the plot, but there is in this same scene a truly unsettling moment that throws time, grammar, figuration, and narration into chaos: Julio's inexplicable discovery of other, older, bones in Agathe's grave. The temporal and logical disorientations of the poem become more severe when Julio finds in the "cold / Sad grave [...] many a relic there / Of chalky bones, which, in the wasting air, / Fell smoldering away [...]" (I. 293-96). How is it possible for there to be bones so old and fragile that they fall to dust at the mere touch of air, buried above Agathe's just-interred coffin?²¹⁹ What are we to make of this strangeness? I read it as another indication of the disorientations of time and knowledge that the poem continually thematize as a consequence of Julio's necrophilic transgression.

This puzzling discovery pales in comparison to what happens next: a moment that fundamentally ruptures subjectivity, yet leads to a surprisingly clear example of prosopopoeia. As Julio continues his mad digging, he "fell upon a skull,—a haggard one, / With its teeth set, and the great orbless eye / Revolving darkness, like eternity [...]" (II. 300-302). This discovery marks Julio's confrontation with the material(ity) of death, a

²¹⁹ While burying more than one corpse in a single grave was not uncommon at the time, this was most often done in pauper's graves, but Agathe was a nun.

devastating encounter with the Real that he does not fully recover from. This skull, like the other old bones that “in the wasting air, / Fell smoldering away,” cannot be Agathe’s, as her body would barely have begun to decompose; yet in his need to reclaim her from the grave, Julio’s desperate imagination impossibly transforms the skull into her face: “And in his hand he held it, till it grew / To have the fleshly features and the hue / Of life. He gazed, and gazed, and it became / Like to his Agathe—all, all the same!” (ll. 303-06). As I have discussed in the previous chapters, this figure posits a face on an inanimate, nonhuman, or dead object, thereby granting it the possibility of speech and subjectivity. By imbuing this anonymous skull with the face of his lost desire, Julio momentarily (even if mistakenly) resurrects his dead beloved; I want to suggest that in so doing the poem reveals that the figure of prosopopoeia itself is necrophilic. As Dudley very concisely and aptly states, necrophilia is “the displaced, uncanny desire to dig up the past and make it live again” (291). In other words, prosopopoeia is the figure and performance of necrophilic desire.

The double frame of the poem, the presence of two speakers, further complicates how figures operate and unravel, and it will take some time to elaborate this fully. *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, I have explained, are spoken in the first-person, lyric voice by poetic speakers who are themselves the primary mourners. For Shelley and Swinburne, then, prosopopoeia is solely a figurative act. In their elegies, the speaker mourns by recreating (or attempting to recreate) the love-object’s face, but the poems recognize that this is possible only in language. Their speech admits this positing is a self-conscious fiction because the corpse is not actually present to the poets—their dead exist only in figures. Similarly, the events in those elegies, such as the procession of

mourners, are purely rhetorical acts. The account of Julio's mourning, in contrast, is narrated in uncertain time, yet presented as if these events actually occurred: for him, Agathe's face actually appears on this skull (even though it is a momentary hallucination), while it is the narrator who recreates this experience in poetic speech.

A double register of speech and mourning obscures the agent and site of figuration. When Julio hallucinates Agathe's face on this skull, he—as a character within the poem—does not “do” prosopopoeia; to him, Agathe's “face” is not the result of poetic speech, but of his lovesick mind.²²⁰ He does not speak or write her face onto this skull, but imagines it as real; it is the narrator who performs the figural act in the speaking of the poem. This is a special problem for a *The Death-Wake* due to the continual confusion of speakers: the events that occur in the poem, the experiences of Julio and Agathe, cannot be identified with the event of the poem's narration. The narrator of *The Death-Wake* should be read as the one who “does,” who performs, the necrophilic speech acts of prosopopoeia, while it is Julio who acts necrophilically. By making Agathe's face present and “real” to Julio the poem relocates the figure of prosopopoeia from the rhetorical field to the material.

Julio's prosopopoeiac hallucination is broken by the stench of this skull, a sensory intrusion of death into his body: “He drew it nearer,—the cold, bony thing!— / To kiss the worm-wet lips. ‘Ay! let me cling— / Cling to thee now, for ever!’ but a breath / Of rank corruption from its jaws of death / Went to his nostrils, and he madly laugh'd, / And

²²⁰ In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud writes that when “the loved object no longer exists [...] it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition” in the subject that “can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis” (244). We can understand Julio's wishful hallucination to be the result of his inability to let go of his desire for Agathe, and not, as it is for the narrator, the result of language.

dash'd it over on the altar shaft" (I. 299-312). That the narrator refers to this stench as a "breath" exhaled from the mouth is an inversion of the status of the mouth as primary erotic organ in *Adonais*. It is not until Julio is about to kiss it on the "worm-wet lips," which is also the moment that the skull, via its "stench," touches his body, that he recognizes it for what it is—the decayed remains of some other dead body. This "breath" of "rank corruption" is not the breath of eros that is for Shelley, and when the fetor of decay enters his body, the truth of this moment is revealed to him, and it is unbearable: "he madly laugh'd, / And dash'd it over on the alter shaft." When Urania yearns for a kiss from Adonais, it is a transmission of love and knowledge that she seeks; here, too, in *The Death-Wake*, a (near) kiss is a revelation of knowledge, but of a different kind. Julio, by (nearly) kissing the skull, approaches the treacherous boundary between what is living (himself) and what is dead (the skull), and when the stench of death crosses this boundary it touches his body. In this moment he is "at the border of [his] condition as a living being," as Kristeva writes of the abject in *Powers of Horror* (3), and only by dashing the skull to pieces does he "thrust [it] aside in order to live."

There is another moment in this scene that deserves attention for how it reinforces the indeterminacy of the narrator's relationship to Julio and Agathe: "There is a flagstone lieth heavily," the narrator says, "Over the ladye's grave; I wist one of three / That bore it, of a blessed verity! / But he hath lifted it in his pure madness, / As it were lightsome as a summer gladness" (I. 285-89). The narrator speaks here as if he knows them from the monastery, since he was "one of three" who helped lay the headstone on her grave. Additionally, his occasional self-representations as Agathe's (vicarious) lover further blur this relationship: once Julio has dug up her body, the narrator shifts from describing

Julio's actions in the third-person to an ambiguously amorous, first-person lyric ejaculation: "Yes! yes!," he exclaims when Julio bends to kiss her, "and he is holding his pale lips / Over her brow" (I. 361-62). I read this odd interjection as an expression of his own desire that momentarily interrupts the narration, and he repeats this ecstatic "Yes!" as if he himself were experiencing the pleasure of kissing her.

The Look of Being

We have seen Julio's descent into madness after Agathe's death, his prosopopoeiac hallucination of the skull in her grave. The repercussions for the linguistic and epistemological conditions of the poem only intensify when he sets off to sea with her body. While the poem preserves Agathe in her beauty throughout Chimera I, the narrator acknowledges that the nature of her beauty has changed in death. When alive, she was "a fair sister girl, / With a brow changing between snow and pearl, / And the blue eyes of sadness [...]" (I. 144-46); she was "bright / In her own self,—a mystery of light!" (I. 152-53), "with cheeks that flush and fade" (I. 175-76); and when she and Julio speak during their courtship, both "seem'd the hue / Of deepest crimson" (I. 193-94). Now, in death, she is "An image of cold calm" with a "pale cheek," a "yet unwither'd flower" that is "still unfaded" (I. 330-40).²²¹ The cheek that once flushed crimson with love for Julio is now "ashy" and "bloodless as a marble stone," and though the narrator admits that she is "Susceptible of silent waste alone," her body does not waste until the end of Chimera II, a unknown period of time that may be days but seem more like weeks (I. 367-70).²²² Julio,

²²¹ This scene displays an awareness and strong echoes of certain elegiac conventions, such as the metaphorization of the dead beloved as a flower.

²²² The passage of time is a persistent problem for the poem. In addition to the confusing temporal shifts evoked by the inconsistent verb tenses that I looked at earlier, there are few indications of just how much time passes during their voyage, making it difficult to determine how long it is until Agathe's corpse begins to show signs of waste. It could be 9 days, or it could be a few weeks.

on the other hand, appears strangely corpse-like from the very beginning of the poem: He is “[I]ike a pale spirit [...] that looketh wan and white,” and “had the youthful look / Which heartfelt woe had wasted”; his “brow was as wan as if it were / Of snowy marble,” and “his fine features [were] stricken pale as morn” (I. 35-50). The narrator comments often on the odd transposition of their physical conditions, and these early examples foreshadow how necrophilia will continue to blur the distinction between what is living and what is dead. This indistinction makes necrophilic desire and figuration a problem of epistemology as much as a problem of language and materiality.

Throughout Chimera I and most of Chimera II, although Agathe’s body remains an object of beauty that has not decomposed into abjection, it is still a corpse, and the two levels of signification will begin to blur: for Julio, she is not a figure but his beloved nun; for the narrator, she is usually a material signifier of death. As a dead thing that Julio keeps in the living world, her corpse “infects”—to adopt Kristeva’s term—not only Julio’s body but also the narrator’s speech, metastasizing in syntactic contortions and imagistic uncertainties that are severe enough to overturn even the rhythms of the natural world.²²³ He exclaims:

Beauty in death! A tenderness upon
The rude and silent relics, where alone
Sat the destroyer! Beauty on the dead!
The look of being where the breath is fled!
The unwarming sun still joyous in its light!
A time—a time without a day or night!

²²³ Kristeva’s conception of “the abject” is crucial for understanding the status of the corpse in *The Death-Wake*.

Death cradled upon Beauty, like a bee
Upon a flower, that looketh lovingly!—
Like a wild serpent, coiling in its madness,
Under a wreath of blossom and of gladness! (I. 345-354).

In this description, Agathe's corpse resembles the idealized female body common to Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite poetry (and art). Her beauty has a "tenderness" that appears to defy the "destroyer" death. And though death sits on the "rude and silent relics" of her material remains, from which her "breath has fled," she still has the "look of being." At first, the passage seems to imply that beauty is a force of life, a power that might fend off death's corruption. The narrator's language betrays this possibility, though, as "Beauty" gives the corpse only the "look" of life, not life itself; its power here is limited to surface appearance. By making what no longer has breath appear to still be alive, this "look of being" approximates prosopopoeia; but, as in the earlier example of the skull on which Julio superimposes Agathe's face, we will see that this figure of speech cannot survive the base materiality of death. In revealing the rhetoricity of this moment, the poem insinuates the impossibility of reviving the dead.

Agathe's corpse strains the narrator's speech and knowledge in other ways as well. Grammatically, the series of mixed prepositions confuses the spatial, representational, and ontological relation between death and beauty: when "Beauty *in* death" becomes "Beauty *on* the dead," and death is then "cradled *upon* Beauty," how is any orientation—of Julio and Agathe, of the narrator, of the reader—possible? While "beauty *in* death" is a viable metaphor, I find the prepositional shift from "in" to "on" to "upon" makes this

passage impossible to image clearly.²²⁴ This chaos of meaning and signification exposes the cruel arbitrariness of language that seeks the body of the dead.²²⁵ We also see her destabilize the narrator in the anacoluthic syntax of the passage, when he attempts, through syntactic parallelism, to speak death and the dead body. Though the phrasing and end-stopping of lines 347-350 elide the copula “is” (which would construct an overt identification), “Beauty on the dead!,” “The look of being where the breath is fled!,” and “The unwarming sun still joyous in its light!” are syntactically parallel, such that “Beauty” *is* the “look of being,” which *is* (like) an “unwarming sun,” which then *is* “a time without a day or night.” Each of these parallels is metaphorized into its opposite, or into a logical impossibility.

The syntactic identification of these conflicting images and arrangements exposes still another symptom of the corpse’s infection of the living, but one that is external to the narrator; by this I mean it does not inhere in his speech like the unstable prepositions, but manifests in the undoing of the rhythms of nature itself. Though Agathe’s corpse has not yet decomposed, its mere presence among the living negates the heat of the sun and removes this moment from time altogether by erasing the difference between day and night.²²⁶ Kristeva would call this atemporal event the “nontime of love,” which is “both instant and eternity, past and future, [and] abreacted present” (*ToL* 6). Taken toward its symbolic conclusion, this moment, the “nontime of love,” obscures the distinction

²²⁴ Heidi Kaufman notes the possible significance of the linguistic differentiation over the use of “in” and “on” in British and American English: in England, one says “I live *in* Oak Street,” while in the U.S., one says, “I live *on* Oak Street.”

²²⁵ I suggest this is an example of what de Man considers “the madness of words” (“Shelley Disfigured”).

²²⁶ More precisely, the uncertainty of time discussed above with regard to the inconsistent shifts in verb tenses becomes here a total elimination of time altogether, not just a confusion of the difference between past and present, and day and night.

between light and dark, which stand symbolically for life and death. Necrophilic love, which has already intermixed the living body and the dead body, now threatens the possibility of spatial and temporal orientation altogether.

What I hope to have shown by this point is that necrophilic eros collapses into temporal, visual, and rhetorical uncertainty a number of fundamental perceptions by which the living situate themselves in time and space, perceptions around which human life is oriented: the perception of difference between night and day, dark and light, dead and living, past and present; in essence, desiring the dead undoes (our knowledge of) the world. The perversion of the necrophilic consciousness is that it negates the knowledge we are supposed to gain through sensory perception; loving the dead even undoes the epistemological expectations of language. And further, as a narrated elegy, in which bodily touch is as essential for Julio's mourning as the touch of language is for the narrator, *The Death-Wake* blurs the line between metonymic touch (which I have argued is the central erotic figure of speech in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*) and physical touch. In other words, the poem makes language material and makes the body rhetorical: by exposing the materiality of language and the rhetoricity of Agathe's dead body, Julio and the narrator stand together as mourning lovers at the threshold of speech and touch, which the text now represents as the threshold of life and death.²²⁷

The Unepitaph'd Dead

The disinterment scene contains even more to unpack, and in a truly strange moment in a poem full of them, there is an opportunity to investigate what necrophilic mourning does to the knowledge expectations of reading and writing. Once Julio has removed Agathe's body from the grave, he is compelled to kiss her: "he is holding his

²²⁷ Credit is due to Veronica Alfano for suggesting this elegant formulation.

pale lips / Over her brow” and “breathed a cold kiss on her ashy cheek, / That left no trace—no flush—no crimson streak, / But was as bloodless as a marble stone” (I. 360-68). No “stench” of “rank corruption” emits from her dead body, and in this moment, the rest of the world ceases to exist: though the night sky is alive with clouds dancing “like infant elves at play,” Julio “gazed on, and never lifted / Himself to see the broken clouds, that drifted / One after one” (I. 376-78). When he is startled out of his trance by the church bells that call him back into reality, he quickly fills the empty grave back up with dirt and replaces the massive flagstone on top:

The heavy bell toll'd two, and, as it toll'd,
Julio started, and the fresh-turn'd mould
He flung into the empty chasm with speed,
And o'er it dropt the flagstone. One could read
That Agathe lay there; but still the girl
Lay by him, like a precious and pale pearl,
That from the deep sea-waters had been rent—
Like a star fallen from the firmament! (I. 384-91)

Just the briefest, passive mention of reading here reverberates beyond the text and has urgent implications for interpretation. By removing Agathe from the grave, what “[o]ne could read” on her tombstone is no longer the truth. *'Hic jacet Agathe!'*, the epitaph reads (I. 282), but now in fact she does not. The ironic double meaning of “lies” here is a direct result of Julio’s actions. As an intransitive verb, “Here lies Agathe” is a conventional epitaphic address that indicates her body rests in the ground below, yet which we know

now to be not true; used as a transitive verb, the epitaph lies twice, once in saying that her body is there, and again in essentially calling Agathe a liar.

Whatever else they are meant to do (and this is multiple), an epitaph should truthfully convey who rests in the ground beneath it, but Julio's actions vacate the truth of the epitaph. Because Agathe's body is no longer where it is expected, where we read it is, the poem subverts the truth of writing and the epistemological expectations of reading: to read this epitaph is to not know the truth. A general presumption about reading is that to read is to know, that reading offers knowledge; but this is not the case here, and so what should be a concrete, textual marker of Agathe's final resting place is emptied of its proper signification. Julio's desire for the dead nun—which has just unraveled time, dissolved figures, and erased distinctions between the living and the dead—now nullifies writing and reading.

The epitaph is a particular problem for necrophilic elegy, moreso, I suggest, than for a conventional elegy because unlike the necrophilic mourner, the conventional mourner does not physically touch the dead body or remove it from the grave. In *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, there is no risk that Shelley or Swinburne's speech acts might undo the truth of epitaphic speech; try as the poets might, the materiality of language does not allow them to move concrete objects in the world. Yet this is what happens in *The Death-Wake*: Julio's refusal to let go of Agathe's body, to leave her where she lies, voids the knowledge that certain writing, like epitaphic inscription, purports to offer. The truth status of language will remain ambiguous and suspect throughout the poem. A moment in Chimera II, for example, recalls this false epitaph that lies about Agathe. Having been at sea for days, or possibly weeks, Julio despairingly imagines their death: "Down, down,"

he weeps, “through azure silence, we shall go, / Unepitaph’d, to cities far below” (II. 588-97). When he removes her body from the grave in Chimera I, Julio undoes the epitaphic text and de-epitaphs his beloved Agathe, and now they both risk an anonymous death.²²⁸

In the final scene of the poem, epitaphic signification is fully transformed. When the hermit—who we learn is Agathe’s neglectful father—dies atop their shared grave on the deserted island, his corpse signifies as a grave marker, an unwritten epitaph, a text of flesh and bone:

And mariners that have been toiling far
Upon the deep, and lost the polar star,
Have visited that island, and have seen
That lover’s grave: and many there have been
That sat upon the gray and crumbling stone,
And started, as they saw a skeleton
Amid the long sad moss, that fondly grew
Through the white wasted ribs; but never knew
Of those who slept below, or of the tale
Of that brain-stricken man, that felt the pale
And wandering moonlight steal his soul away,—
Poor Julio, and the ladye Agathe! (III. 542-53)

In this moment, the hermit’s body becomes its own epitaphic text. This macabre event reverses the mechanism of metonymic figuration that is so vital to the erotics of mourning in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*: instead of replacing the absent body of the

²²⁸ Interestingly, an event later in the nineteenth century repeats a disinterment, but the desired object is not the beloved’s body. In 1869, Dante Gabriel Rossetti infamously dug up the grave of his wife and muse, Elizabeth Siddal, to retrieve the book of poems he had, in his grief over her death, buried with her.

love-object with language, *The Death-Wake* replaces language (in the form of the unepitaphed text) with Agathe's body.

The last section of *The Death-Wake* that I explore focuses on the personified deities, natural forces, and terrors that rise from the depths of the sea in Chimera II. These beings do not come to mourn Agathe, nor do they sympathize with Julio's suffering or offer him any respite from it by allowing him some distance from death. These nightmarish figures perform the opposite function. Appearing as "maladies," "griefs," "Famine," "Despair," and "Death," they are more like curses than consolations, and when they "saw the skeleton / Grisly beside them, the wild phantasies / Grew mad and howl'd; the fever of disease / Became wild frenzy—very terrible! / And, for a hell of agony—a hell / Of rage, was there, that fed on misty things, / On dreams, ideas, and imaginings" (II. 497-512). Clearly, these are not fellow mourners in sympathy with Julio, and they exacerbate his mental and physical deterioration by providing him a rare moment of self-knowledge. While "some were raving on philosophy, / And some on love, and some on jealousy, / And some upon the moon [...] Julio knew them by a something dim / About their wasted features like to him!" (II. 513-18). These adversaries leave him anything but protected from death, and the self-knowledge he gleans from the "something dim" is that of his own "wasted features," his own transformation into a corrupted body.

As we know from Sacks, the procession of mourners is a performative element in elegy, a "staging device[s], a convention that draws attention to the mourner or mourners," the effect of which is "to place the dead, and death itself, at some cleared distance from the living" (19). But it is precisely this distance that the necrophile rejects:

Julio seeks to fully close this distance, to intertwine his body with hers. Within the verbal economy

economy of the poem, necrophilia destabilizes what we take as an epistemological given: the distinction between the living and the dead. In demonstrating how *The Death-Wake* overturns this convention, though, I do not wish to claim that the poem is outside the elegiac tradition, but to show how a poem so seemingly alien to the tradition that it reverses some of the very things that characterize it as a genre, presents an opportunity to reimagine the possible shapes and bounds of elegy.

CODA

“A HAND THAT CAN BE CLASP’D NO MORE”: NOTES ON

RETURNING TO TENNYSON’S *IN MEMORIAM*

Throughout this project, I have aimed to read the eroticism of a selection of canonical and non-canonical nineteenth-century English elegies as an epistemological experience, an intellectual and affective desire for the dead beloved as a textual figure of deathly knowledge. For a project that seeks to rethink erotic experience in nineteenth-century English elegiac poetry not to include what is, despite the eminent strangeness of its speech and form, perhaps the master text of the elegiac tradition among its main chapters may seem an odd choice, but my decision has been strategic. As a coda, then, it may be insightful to test my theory of elegiac eroticism against the most immediately biographical and most openly amorous elegy in the canon, Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850).

To do so, however, requires putting pressure on the predominant modes of criticism in scholarship on *In Memoriam*, the biographical and the historical. Of the elegies I explore, *In Memoriam* presents the strongest temptation to biographical and historical interpretations as it is grounded on the intimate, lived friendship between Tennyson and Hallam.²²⁹ Unlike the textually intimate but personally distant relationships in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, which desire their dead as poets first, Tennyson’s love is rooted firstly in his affection for Hallam as an intimate friend, a bond

²²⁹ The poem, Craft writes, “revolves around Hallam as around ‘the centre of a world’s desire,’” and refers to Carol Christ’s assertion that Hallam is “‘the absent center around which the poem moves’” (47).

that is the central reference point for the majority of readings of the poem.²³⁰ As the text openly invites biographical readings, critics have long noted the homoerotic under- and overtones of the poem as implying or betraying homosexual desire between the two. Its originary event lends itself to the interpretation that its sexually suggestive speech is evidence of Tennyson's homosexual longing for Hallam.²³¹

The limitation of this approach that seeks a correspondence between the events of the poem and the events of Tennyson's lived reality is that it tends to overlook certain figures of speech that, within the verbal economy of the poem, perform in language what Tennyson can no longer experience in life—Hallam's presence, his voice and touch. Though contemporary interpretations are not simplistically mimetic in positing a direct correspondence between the events in the poem and the events of the Tennyson-Hallam

²³⁰ Though Hallam was himself a poet, and there are instances in *In Memoriam* where Tennyson reads him as a poetic text, his status as man and friend is always primarily to Tennyson. It is Hallam's role as intimate friend that is Tennyson's primary focus, and so the corpse/corpus metonymy which is so central to my overall argument is more difficult/resistant in *In Memoriam*. Contributing to this temptation is the fact that although Hallam was himself and poet, and though at multiple moments in the elegy Tennyson represents him as a poetic text he can (or at least can try) to read, there is no poetic corpus of similar breadth and depth to make the corpse/corpus metonymy that Shelley and Swinburne embrace.

²³¹ *In Memoriam*, Craft writes, is a "Victorian text whose passionate discursivity and sexual obliquity everywhere marked its constitutive submission to the agonistic Victorian imperative 'to refine and spiritualize' so problematic a desire." Craft turns to Havelock Ellis for a contextual perspective on the elegy's sexuality: "Various modern poets of high ability have given expression to emotions of exalted or passionate friendship towards individuals of the same sex, whether or not such friendship back properly be termed homosexual. It is scarcely necessary to refer to *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson enshrined his affection for his early friend, Arthur Hallam, and developed a picture of the universe on the basis of that affection' (Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 339)" (Craft 46). Craft does not simply interpret *In Memoriam* as homosexual, as evidence of Tennyson's homosexuality. He argues that *In Memoriam* is "more than a machine for the sublimation, management, or transformation of male homosexual desire; it is, rather, the site of a continuing problematization: the problem not merely of desire between men, but also of the desire (very urgent in the elegy) *to speak it*" (47). Craft also directs us to more contemporary responses to the poem's homoerotic potential, citing Ricks on Reade (1970): "Was Tennyson, so to speak, abnormally abnormal? A new anthology entitled *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850-1900* does not hesitate to quote extensively from ten sections of *In Memoriam*; its editor, anxious to enlist or if necessary pressgang Tennyson, quaintly says 'the fact that Tennyson evolved an emphatically heterosexual image in later life does nothing to disqualify him as homosexual when he wrote *In Memoriam*'" (Craft 51).

relationship, biographical and historical approaches exert the strongest critical pull.²³²

“Such work,” Herbert Tucker reminds us, however, “is less literary history than it is cultural history haunted by the specter of the literary criticism it severely circumscribes” (5).²³³ This historical “haunting,” in Tucker’s view, what I refer to as the biographical and historical temptation of elegy, “circumscribes” the possibilities of criticism that seeks to understand the rhetorical and formal nuances of the elegiac relation that exceed the potential of genre-based, biographical, and historical interpretations.

One problem raised by this biographical strain of scholarship on *In Memoriam*, and by *In Memoriam* itself, is the uncertainty of what it means to refer to the elegy as a “love poem.” Donald Hall has claimed *In Memoriam* as “the most beautiful homoerotic elegy in the English language”; more recently, John Rosenberg has called *In Memoriam* “one of the great love poems in English” (44), but what exactly this means beyond a poem of amorous desire and affection remains unresolved. In its common usage, such a characterization would not hold for *Adonais* or *Ave Atque Vale* due to the lack of a close, personal relationship between elegist and elegized; the intimate friendship of Tennyson and Hallam, however, encourages readings that reinforce the circumscribed perspective that eros is synonymous with sexual desire and pleasure.

As I have aimed to demonstrate how erotic love can be understood as an epistemological drive, and how knowledge itself is, for my poets, an object of amorous

²³² Contributing to this pull is the poem’s adoption of sorts as a national text after Queen Victoria’s embrace of *In Memoriam* for solace in the years after her husband’s death in 1861. This cultural adoption places extra weight on the historical significance of the poem and the necessity of scholarship that examines this aspect of the elegy’s reception. For more, see Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.

²³³ Tucker continues: “If historical research reduces literature to the fact, and critical interpretation reduces it to the idea, we should remember (as Tennyson did most of the time) that the idea itself has a history and that the fact itself always comes to us interpreted” (9).

desire, a poem like *In Memoriam*, with an already overdetermined homoeroticism, all too easily encourages the common notion of eros as sexual desire and bodily pleasure, a position I have sought to reimagine. Urgently for this project, such a view reinforces the interpretation of eros as sexual, an association this project has attempted to complicate by pursuing the Platonically erotic longing for knowledge that underpins elegiac speech. The poem's temptation to the biographical and the historical, as I have suggested of *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, cannot adequately account for the textual nuances and figurative excesses that perform the erotic relation between the elegist and the lost-object.²³⁴ By focusing firstly on works that do not fit the standard model of eros-as-sexual desire, and that do not suggest the possibility of homosexual desire between elegist and elegized, I hoped to avoid an overdetermined interpretation of elegiac eroticism as I developed my hypothesis about the Platonic nature of the erotic relation. My goal was to establish a way of reading that would conceptualize eros without the weight and burden of historical determination. In discussions of erotic experience, the desire for knowledge is too often subsumed by the desire for sexual pleasure, but my argument has been that knowledge itself can be the object of amorous desire, that it is the motive force and ultimate aim of poetic mourning, and that the elegiac speaker arrives at this knowledge through certain figures of speech (primarily metonymy and synecdoche) that illuminate—and sometimes create—the intimate textual relation between speaker and lost love-object. This alternate

²³⁴ Despite its fragmentary and non-linear movement from grief to consolation, the scope of the poem provides its own history of the Victorian era, referencing over the passage of its three years (and written over seventeen) fundamental problems faced by England at the time, such as the tension between scientific discovery and religious belief. Also, Queen Victoria's embrace of the poem for personal solace after the death of her husband, coupled with Tennyson's laureateship, makes the poem a voice of the nation in a time of significant social and political change. Despite tracing three years of Tennyson's mourning, despite being written and revised a lot before its publication in 1850, the poem maintains a sense of immediacy by referencing and alluding to contemporary social and political concerns, such as the debate over evolution.

and, I believe, more precise articulation allows us to see how eros operates in a different register in the context of elegy.

A few brief readings should suffice, for now, to show this different register of intimate desire in *In Memoriam* and how the burdens of biography and history weigh more heavily on this poem's eroticism. One passage often referenced in support of homosexual readings falls in section XIII:

Tears of the widower, when he sees
A late-lost form that sleep reveals,
And moves his doubtful arms, and feels
Her place is empty, fall like these;

Which weep a loss forever new,
A void where heart on heart reposed;
And, where warm hands have rest and closed,
Silence, till I be silent too;

Which weep the comrade of my choice,
An awful thought, a life removed,
The human-hearted man I loved,
A Spirit, not a breathing voice" (XIII. 1-12).

The gender ambiguity and shifting subject positions are apparent in the conflicting metaphors of "widower" and "comrade," "human-hearted man" and "Spirit," which blur the nature of the speaker's relation with Hallam. Are Tennyson and Hallam like husband

and (now dead) wife, or are they fraternal “comrades”? Is Hallam a man or a spirit, or both? If Hallam is a “human-hearted man” Tennyson risks charges of homosexuality; but if he is a spirit, there is lesser possibility of misconstruing this love as carnal. The gender-shifting marital language and the rhetoric of bodily touch (“A void where heart on heart reposed; / And, where warm hands have rest and closed”) seems to suggest, as Craft suggests, a homosexual longing for the dead poet.²³⁵

I look now to a sampling of instances where what has been interpreted as erotic (sexual) desire is actually erotic (epistemological) desire, which seeks the sensuous, somatic pleasures of poetic knowledge. Rosenberg directs us to section 18 as a prime example of the intrinsic sexuality of Tennyson’s mourning:

Ah yet, ev’n yet, if this might be,
I, falling on his faithful heart,
Would breathing thro’ his lips impart
The life that almost dies in me;

That dies not, but endures with pain,
And slowly forms the firmer mind,
Treasuring the look it cannot find,
The words that are not heard again. (18. 13-20).

“Despite the classic status of *In Memoriam*,” Rosenberg writes, “much of its power resides in its power to shock. Thus in Section 18, in which the poet lays Hallam to rest in

²³⁵ It is not surprising, Craft writes, that *In Memoriam* “should identify the hand as the site of passionate interchange, since the elegy’s explicit recommendation that ‘Love clasp Grief lest both be drown’d’ specifically cathects the hand with an erotic charge that oscillates obscurely between the homosocial and the homosexual. At times the poet’s desire that Hallam should ‘strike a sudden hand in mine’ (14) takes on a startling sexual configuration” (56).

language that recalls the stately simplicity of the Anglican service for the dead, he also throws himself upon Hallam's body in a veiled but unmistakable image of a kiss" (43). Rosenberg has a complicated understanding of Tennyson's sexuality, one that reflects the difficulty of elaborating the distinction between sexual and erotic experience. My approach to this passage is to read it as a sorrowful epistemological recognition, that even his "firmer mind" cannot truly know the dead, but only remember "the look it cannot find, / The words that are not heard again." Rosenberg, in focusing on Tennyson's physical acts—"lying down upon his friend, lips pressed to lips," he writes (44)—misses the possibility that the immortalizing kiss Tennyson seeks here is more than a sexual pleasure: this kiss is also an epistemological act, an act that "imparts" new knowledge, as the life that "dies not, but endures with pain," "slowly forms the firmer *mind*."

In the infamous ninety-third section, another often considered as evidence of the poem's homoerotic consciousness, Tennyson yearns for Hallam's spirit to "Descend, and touch, and enter: hear / The wish too strong for words to name, / That in this blindness of the frame / My Ghost may feel that thine is near" (93. 13-16). In *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, there is nothing quite like the quiet ache of sensual longing we hear and feel in these lines. The sexual imagery is difficult to overlook, and the spiritual language of "Ghost" only partially allays the worry over physical longing for another man's caress: as an immaterial presence, there is no real possibility of intimate bodily touch. Whether "Descend, and touch, and enter" are to be read as acts of the sexual body or as figures of bodily speech, or both, remains uncertain, as Tennyson's ambiguous longing for Hallam's posthumous touch recurs multiple times, in various ways, throughout the poem.

Another key passage on Tennyson's desire to touch and be touched by Hallam suggests not a physical or carnal touch, but a touch of language that is analogous to those in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*. My interest lies in those touching moments when amorous contact is represented as a textual want, a desire for (the touch of) language. This passage from section 95 is a clear example: "So word by word, and line by line, / The dead man touch'd me from the past, / And all at once it seem'd at last / The living soul was flash'd on mine" (95. 33-36). Tennyson's love for Hallam is here a desire for "words" and "lines," metonyms for Hallam's poetry and letters that allow the "dead man" to "touch" him with language.²³⁶ But even when, as it is here, the nature of this touch is figurative, its meaning is still ambiguous. I offer two possible interpretations: "touch'd" can mean intransitively and affectively—a heartfelt thanks—as in, "I am touched that you thought of me"; or, "touch'd" can mean transitively and materially, as Tennyson imagines Hallam's words to have material substance that can make contact with (touch) and move through his reading, speaking body.²³⁷

We have seen how metonymies of poetic touch occur in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*, but their difference from *In Memoriam* lies in the fact that we cannot quite be sure whether Tennyson's yearning for Hallam remains in the poetic imaginary (as it does for Shelley and Swinburne) or if his desire seeks the bodily pleasure of Hallam's actual, physical touch. Yet, all three elegies work with figures of speech that represent a desire for the dead poet's corpus and allow an intimate textual touch between the living and the

²³⁶ Three stanzas prior, Tennyson states: "A hunger seized my heart; I read / Of that glad year which once had been, / In those fallen leaves which kept their green, / The noble letters of the dead" (95. 21-24). The pun of "fallen leaves" that "kept their green" relates to both the strangeness of a season where leaves fall (Autumn) yet remain vibrant and alive, which is Tennyson saying that Hallam's letters—his speech—remain vital after his death.

²³⁷ For an alternate reading of this passage, see Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire* 34.

dead. This resonance with *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale* is what allows me to claim that an epistemology of touching runs through nineteenth-century elegiac poetics in which erotic experience imparts a knowledge that exceeds the confines of the sexual body.

If in its speech, *In Memoriam* is consistently unsure of itself (as we see most urgently in the poem's relentless self-questioning, self-skepticism, and the ambiguous erotic figurations I have just looked at), it seems powerfully assured formally.²³⁸ The most immediate formal feature of the poem's textual eroticism is the eponymous *In Memoriam* stanza. The internally chiasmic and self-enclosed *abba* rhyme structure (though it is at times enjambed across stanzas and even sections) is the only element of the nearly three-thousand line poem that remains consistent throughout the poem. For Denise Gigante, the stanza form is a model performance of the "mechanics" of Tennyson's desire for Hallam: the "'lost desire' that Tennyson laments in *In Memoriam*," she asserts, "is materially cathected" in this form (481).²³⁹ And John Hollander has playfully imagined the central *bb* couplet as "Lines holding hands as lovers do" (16), a formal metaphor that becomes ever more apt when we consider how important the acts of

²³⁸ Of the many possible examples of Tennyson's self-skepticism one could cite, two examples should suffice to show just how deeply anxious he is about speaking his love for Hallam. See Craft: *In Memoriam* is "the site of a continuing problematization: the problem not merely of desire between men, but also of the desire (very urgent in the elegy) to speak it" (47).

²³⁹ Denise Gigante lucidly explains how the "question of form" and the "question of desire" in the poem are "root[ed]" in "the one consistent—indeed, insistent—thing about the poem that has been consistently overlooked: the eponymous *In Memoriam* stanza itself" (481).

touching and holding hands are to Tennyson's poetics of elegiac love.²⁴⁰ Even formally, Tennyson's verse enacts the touch he so forlornly longs for.²⁴¹

Furthermore, the sheer length of the poem creates a reading experience quite different from that of the other elegies I look at. Its incessant, almost obsessive, stanzaic repetition performs *in extremis* the formal work of mourning we encounter in *Adonais* and *Ave Atque Vale*.²⁴² The continual barrage of identical stanza after stanza, and section after section, that carries us through three years of mourning creates an effect of readerly exhaustion that mimics Tennyson's own mourning exhaustion over the course of the seventeen years during which he wrote the poem.²⁴³ While his extensive examination of his grief may indicate Tennyson's confidence in elegiac poetry to console his loss and allow him knowledge of the dead, a more compelling view is that "The sheer extensiveness of Tennyson's discourse of desire (no one ever wished the poem longer) writes against desire's own desire to end" (Craft 68). Tennyson's continual piling of stanzas and his frequent revisiting of it over such a long period of time, reveals the anxiety that his sorrow and mourning may never cease. Despite these differences that

²⁴⁰ See Craft for more on the problem of touching and the status of the hand as the poem's "primary synecdoche for presence [...]; for absence [...]; and for the medial condition between these two." He notes: "*In Memoriam* is almost obsessive in its concern for the human hand and in its desire for a restored male touch" (55).

²⁴¹ Both Craft and Rosenberg have noted the centrality of hand imagery to the poem's eroticism. "*In Memoriam*," Craft states, "is almost obsessive in its concern for the human hand and in its desire for a restored male touch" (55).

²⁴² For more on the purpose and effect of elegiac repetition, which I have explained in the previous chapters with regard to Shelley and Swinburne as an aspect of their elegiac eroticism, see Sacks, *The English Elegy* (1-37, 166-203).

²⁴³ Rosenberg comments on the "inordinate length" of the poem, its "first transgression [...] against genre." "He strains the generic seams of elegy to the bursting point," he continues, "yet he remains eminently Victorian in mourning at such elaborate length." Queen Victoria herself "was never more Victorian than in her inconsolably protracted mourning over Albert, and the bonds of respect and affection between the Queen and her Laureate derived in part from their being world-class mourners, the most celebrated of the century" (41).

make *In Memoriam* an unexpected outlier in the elegiac tradition, they situate the poem within the Platonic current of erotic desire in the nineteenth century. The Platonic ideal of “spiritual procreancy” (*Symposium* 209a), which Linda Dowling explains as “that pure intellectual commerce between male lovers which brings forth the arts, philosophy, and wisdom itself” (xv), is the connective thread that runs through my chapters on Shelley and Swinburne, and foregrounds the epistemological dimension of Platonic eros.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Though Dowling is concerned with the historical conditions under which late Victorian writers reinvigorated the study of Platonic eros through the “pure and intellectual dimension of Uranian love” insists that Aestheticism is much more than “a convenient blind for carnal appetite” (115). The “intellectual dimension of Uranian love” finds earlier expression in Shelley’s Platonic poems like *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Adonais*.

REFERENCES CITED

- Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978. Print.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975. Print.
- Craft, Christopher. *Another Kind of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994. Print.
- De Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-Facement. The Rhetoric of Romanticism. *New York: Columbia UP, 1984. 67-81. Print.*
- . "Shelley Disfigured." *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1984. 93-123. Print.
- Dowling, Linda. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994. Print.
- Downing, Lisa. *Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-Century French Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Friedman, Geraldine. "The Erotics of Interpretation in Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': Pursuing the Feminine." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1993: 225-243. Print.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Joel Weisenheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London and New York: Continuum International, 2006. Print.
- Gigante, Denise. "Forming Desire: On the Eponymous *In Memoriam Stanza*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53.4 (1999): 480-504. Print.
- Guyer, Sara. *Romanticism After Auschwitz*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007. Print.
- Harrison, Antony. *Swinburne's Medievalism: A Study in Victorian Love Poetry*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1988. Print.
- Jakobson, Roman. *Language and Literature*. Ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge: Belknap, 1990. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Print.
- . *Tales of Love*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1987. Print.

- Kuduk-Weiner, Stephanie. "Knowledge and Sense Experience in Swinburne's Late Poetry." Ed. Yisrael Levin. *A.C. Swinburne and the Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011. 11-28. Print.
- Plato. *Symposium*. Trans. Christopher Gill. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print.
- Ricks, Christopher. *Tennyson*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989. Print.
- Ribeyrol, Charlotte. "Swinburne: a nineteenth-century Hellene?" *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*. Ed. Maxwell, Catherine and Stefano Evangelista. New York: Palgrave, 2013. 52-68. Print.
- Rosenberg, John D. *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature*. London and New York: Anthem, 2005. Print.
- Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985. Print.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2nd ed. Ed. Neil Fraistat and Donald H. Reiman. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.
- . *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*. South Bend: St. Augustine's, 2002. Print.
- Stoddart, Thomas Tod. *The Death-Wake; or Lunacy: A Necromaunt in Three Chimeras*. London: Forgotten Books, 2012. Print/Web.
- Tennyson, Alfred. *Tennyson's Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*. 2nd ed. Ed. Robert W. Hill, Jr. New York: Norton, 1999. Print.
- Ulmer, William. *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. Print.
- Wagner-Lawlor, Jennifer. "Metaphorical "Indiscretion" and Literary Survival in Swinburne's "Anactoria." *Studies in English Literature* 36.4 (1996): 917-34. Print.
- Wasserman, Earl. *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971. Print.
- Weisman, Karen, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.