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***Mourning and Recovery in Tess Gallagher's
Moon Crossing Bridge (1992)***

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Abstract

Becoming the basis for psychoanalytical examination and analysis of grief, Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" aptly explains these two modes. Critics like Peter Sacks and Jahan Ramazani have appropriated Freud's work to study the elegy, the former developing a "normative (i.e., restitutive, idealizing) model while the latter adopting a melancholic (violent, recalcitrant)" one. This paper argues that in the contemporary American poet Tess Gallagher's Moon Crossing Bridge (1992), a volume written after the death of her lover and husband the well-known writer Raymond Carver (1938-1988), Sacks' paradigm of the mourner's movement from loss to consolation and Ramazani's paradigm of violent mourning overlap, though Sacks' paradigm persists to the end. She displays an interplay between melancholic and consolatory mourning, some of her poems tend more in one direction, others move dialectically between the two. Her move from her initial numbness to her decision to resume her life as a human being and as a poet shows that her elegies express the various stages of her grief though not in a definitely ordered sequence (only occupying herself literally with her lover's body and her visit to his grave may seem to follow a logical sequence). To emerge from her grief, Gallagher works through complicated feelings of attachment, loss, and bereavement until she becomes "free and uninhibited again." She is driven to bear her sorrow alone, and her experience of grief comes to be sometimes bizarre, oftentimes pathetic,

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but strongly painful. She repeatedly confronts loss, anger and denial, recapitulates her relationship with Carver, creates an internal satisfactory image of him, and finally giving him up to the larger forces of nature. She shows elements essential to mourning such as becoming aware of the reality of loss, confronting anger, recollecting and then severing attachment to her dead lover, reckoning with substitutive signs of him.

Keywords: *Mourning-Melancholy-Elegy.*

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Becoming the basis for psychoanalytical examination and analysis of grief, Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" aptly explains these two modes. Admitting the overlap between the two, Freud lists some common features in both: the two conditions have "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity." In both, the ego does not vent its negative feelings outwardly but rather turns it to the inner substitute of the lost person. In melancholia, there is low self-regard (this is the major difference), but in mourning there is not; in mourning it is "the world which has become poor and empty" contrary to melancholia in which the ego itself has become so. Both the mourner and the melancholic begin basically with denial of their loss and unwillingness to recognize it. But after "a lapse of time" the mourner gradually becomes aware of:

the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfaction it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished (244-245).

The melancholic remains sunken in his loss, clings to the lost object destructively, internalizes it in his ego, and further controls the conflict pertaining to loss. The mourner does not hold on constantly to loss but begins to be convinced of reality thus saving himself from embracing melancholia, which is a morbid pathological condition. He accepts reality

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by tempering his sorrow and rejoining the community of the living. He has to move from an idealized image of the lost person to a real one. In this manner, the working of grief becomes" emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships" (Lindemann 143). It turns out to be a gradual decathexis from the deceased and resumption of the mourner's independent lifestyle. Mourning is then completed when the mourner undoes the ties that bind him to the lost object and becomes psychologically healthy again. It is thus recognized as a healthy and normal process that is necessary for recovery from loss.

Critics have appropriated Freud's work to study the elegy. Peter Sacks, for example, designates the elegy as a movement from "loss to consolation" in a language that, paradoxically, seems to conceal and reveal. Because of its intertwining of "emotion and rhetoric," "loss and figuration"(7-xii), he views it both as a process of mourning and a literary construct. Departing from Sacks' paradigm, Jahan Ramazani proposes a psychology of melancholia, arguing that the modern elegist "tends not to achieve but to resist consolation, not to override but to sustain anger, not to heal but to reopen wounds of loss." He also maintains that the difference between him and Sack is the difference between two modes of mourning: "the normative (i.e., restitutive, idealizing) and the melancholic (violent, recalcitrant)" (xi). Both Sacks and Ramazani agree that the sources of consolation available for the modern elegists have become fewer than they were for Milton and Tennyson for whom religious rituals were adequate. They also agree that there are less consolation and less regeneration in the modern elegy. The redemptive narrative of the traditional elegy is replaced by "a defiant contemporary poetics of

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grief." This is because "pastoral contextualization," the "movement from grief to consolation," and "traditional images of resurrection," out of which the truly comforting materials of "Lycidas" and "Adonais" were constituted—"seem to have exploded in the mud of No Man's Land"(Gilbert 184)—caused by the experience of World War 1.

In *Moon Crossing Bridge* (1992), a volume written by Tess Gallagher (b.1943), an "outstanding" (Farrell n.p.) contemporary American poet, after the death of her lover and husband the well-known writer Raymond Carver (1938-1988), Sacks' paradigm of the mourner's movement from loss to consolation and Ramazani's paradigm of violent mourning overlap, though Sacks' paradigm persists to the end. She displays an interplay between melancholic and consolatory mourning, some of her poems tend more in one direction, others move dialectically between the two. Without feeling low self-regard, Gallagher's immediate response is physical numbness. She begins to feel that the world around her has become poor and empty: in it nothing is "what it was" ("Now That I am Never Alone" 12:13) because death has shaken everything with "a yellow / trilling silence" ("Legend with Sea Breeze" 13-14:18-19) and caused things around her to lie in an "unacknowledged coma" ("Strange Thanksgiving" 42:33). In her silent world, she appears to have been shattered. And in state of disbelief, she refuses to accept her loss: recalcitrant, she insists that she still lives in Carver's "birdness" ("Corpse Cradle" 6:20) because she is not "quite empty enough to believe he's gone" ("Legend with Sea Breeze" 39)—and, moreover, believes that "the door will open / and [he] will be standing there /, a little surprised I'm not with anyone yet" ("Meeting Beyond Meeting" 43:7-10). She feels he still lies deeply in her with

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his sweetness "like a trail of cut flowers from [her] doorstep to his" ("Incomprehensibility 85-86:35). She remains sunken in her grief and clings to her lost lover, internalizing him in her poor ego that now verges on dangerous borders: she hints at a death wish, at crossing over to join him.¹ In her bursts of grief she shows bizarre clinging to his body, undertakes visits to his grave, recalls her memories with him, reflects on relics he left behind, and remembers that she is still a poet—a vocation in which she can never be disappointed. This gradual realization of the verdict of reality leads her to disengage from her dead lover and resume her independent lifestyle both as a woman and a poet. And towards the end of the book the death wish is countered when she writes, "I don't want / to take a step toward death / in any one's company, not even / for love's sake" ("I Don't Know You" 87:11-14)—a significant move from loss to consolation that shows a strong determination to go on with the business of living no matter who is lost. She does not want to share her lost love's fate and is now "persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfaction" she "drives from being alive to sever" her "attachment to the object that has been abolished," according to Freud. Thus the desire for "joining" with Carver she was "certain of" that the title poem expresses is not a crossing over to the other side of life or the dark place where Carver lies (the epigraphs preceding section five of the book suggests that any attempt at such a crossing requires one's death), but it is a crossing over to her life with him, reflecting "glimpses" of it while progressing toward recovery—and this is the task that the whole book fulfills².

The immediate moment following Carver's death sees her as a shattered woman who responds to his loss in an unusual manner that violates the boundary not only between life and death, but also between death and sex. His death, "what is forever beyond speech," pulls certain actions from

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her such as talking to him while standing before his body and, crossing over the boundary between life and death, rubbing his feet with oil. The atmosphere in the house, which her friend left so that she "could be alone with the powerful raft of his body" (4), is a graceful atmosphere as "Paradise" (49) shows. The flow of her thought is mirrored in the flexible free-verse style of the poem which combines a confessional tone with unusual collocations of words and surreal images: except for the first line of the poem and the last line of each stanza, all the lines run one; the morning and night are "uncoupled," and so she stays awake before "the powerful raft of his body" (raft being suggestive of both the flatness and largeness of that body) and realizes the "body's surety" as it becomes "one muscle." Her life is viewed against his "afterlife," an "afterlife" that she finds hard to accept. She is here (in life) to speak, and he is there (in afterlife) to listen, and her talking is a childlike act that seems to satisfy her needs at the moment. She tells him things she needed to hear herself tell him. And in a surreal image she describes how her voice is heard by her (as it might have been heard him) "like the nostrils of any mare blowing softly over / the damp presence he was..." (12-14). She speaks until "there [is] nothing unfinished between [them]" (15). But she crosses over the boundary between life and death by rubbing his feet with oil, something she thinks he now enjoys just as he enjoyed when he was alive, insisting that it "was the right last thing" she could do. She enjoys such an intimate act like a child who enjoys humming "to the stick / it is using to scratch houses into the dirt— (24-26)—an image suggestive of the violation of the sanctity of death.

Even if this act seems childlike as she says, it implies a deeply hidden desire in her for physical union with him,

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the strongest aspect of their relationship that is most affected by death. Therefore, she does not only transgress the boundary between life and death as this poem shows, but also the boundary between death and sexual passion as other poems suggest. In those other poems she shares her dead lover's bed, joining him in "otherworldly or supernatural realms" (Heuving 148), violating "taboos" (Bowers 14) relating not only to death, but also to death in relation to sex. "Red Poppy" (4), for example, recalls her awareness of the serious "warnings" of the lover's terminal illness and her immediate reaction to his loss. The title of the poem itself mixes beauty, life, sex, and death. The beauty of that flower is fragile and temporary, its red is suggestive of sensuousness, and its black center implies death, and it remains fixed even after its petals drop. With its flexible free-verse (three stanzas of varying length written in asymmetric lines—mostly run-on—with no fixed rhymes) deft vocab (the "pinnacle of dying," "the soft unconscious praise of bells," "the last of warmth, kissless kiss / he would have given"), and surreal images (the auditory image of sleep's roaring and the abstract image of love as a Bedouin god), the poem proceeds to describe the immediate moment before Carver's passing away. The lovers held hands through the bars of the hospital bed and slept. Their sleep made a "canopy" over them, and the speaker heard that sleep's "durable roaring in the companion sleep / of what must have been [their] Bedouin god" (5-6) —their mad, "thunderous, sea-starved love" as she describes it in "Legend with Sea Breeze" (13-14: 46). They become like "shaggy ponies" who stare into the void with their "cool flux / of blue and white" (14-15). And "the red poppy" transforms into a symbol of their life and death; though it symbolizes life's abundance and richness, it has death at its center, and similarly, though Carver's love is a symbol of her life's abundance and

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richness, it also has death at its center. The truth of the moment becomes lucid as her life is "simplified to 'for him' and his thinned like an injection wearing of" (18-19) and, therefore "the real (Carver's life) gave away to / the more-than- real (his death)" just as the rich abundance of the red petals gave away to the black at its center. When his "breathing stopped," she kissed his lips to "know an ending." She kissed because she wanted to taste "that plush of scarlet / which is the last of warmth, kissless kiss / He would have given" (25-27). In the introduction to her *Portable Kisses* (1992), Gallagher writes that there are "as many nuances and inflections for kisses as there are lips in which to bestow them," adding that, when they are especially written down, they "seem to carry the entire world. They are communications beyond and including the sexual" (9). Here, the kiss she takes, which "he would have given," tastes like a "plush of scarlet" which, seen against the "carmine" of "reddest petals," becomes a kiss not of love but of passion, thus violating the sanctity of death. By taking such a kiss, she attempts to diminish the distance between her (life) and his (death). She feels that it is her right to extend her kiss beyond the limit of life, to go into the world of death "to bend and take" it.

She does the same transgression in "Wake" (5) where she climbs up into her dead lover's bed and sleeps beside him. She does not only violate the sanctity of death by touching the dead lover's body, but she also transgresses the limits of sexual passion. What she misses most is sensual attachment to her love—described in "I Don't Know You" as "a river that is always waiting" (87-88: 7) the absence of which results in a "soft hunger" of her body, as she says in "Two Locked Shadows" (78:9), that remains now unsatisfied. The repetition of "three nights" at the beginning

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of the poem implies that that act was something akin to a ritual as it was done on "their high bed, bed / [they'd] loved in, slept in, married / and unmarried" (6-8). They were "married" on that bed (setting of the most important aspect of their relationship—physical communion), and they were also "unmarried" (when that communion discontinued because of the lover's illness). Now the lover is dead, and they will remain forever "unmarried." But she finds it hard to accept the fact that they will be forever physically separated, and, therefore, shares her dead lover's bed even for a last time--elsewhere, she felt that lying next to him "was to have the gardens in all its seasons" ("Ebony"50)—because in spite of his physical demise, she sees him sleeping with his sweetness "like a hive of wild honey..." ("Incomprehensibly" 85:14). Now his death and her passion are placed in one context—symbolized by "the chill" of his body and the "halo of cold" around it felt against her own "warmth" that is now taking

...the silver white
of a voice sent unbroken across snow just to hear
itself in its clarity of calling. We were dead
a little while together then, serene
and afloat on the strange broad canopy
of the abandoned world. (10-15)

The formal devices that the first stanza is built on such as repetition ("Three nights you lay in our house / Three nights in the chill of the body") and parallel structures ("bed / we'd loved in and slept in, married / and unmarried") give way in this second stanza to the abstract images of the "halo of cold" around the dead lover's body and the mourner's "warmth" that takes on a "silver-white" quality of a "voice" that Gallagher links to trespass. The "idea," she says, "that I am involved in trespass is important to the idea of a voice because I think voice can go everywhere. For a woman to be

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able to go everywhere is pretty powerful" ("Personal Interview with Bowers" qtd. in Bowers 15). She crosses the real world to join her dead lover in the world beyond. The real world has become abandoned temporarily by her and permanently by him. There, they become "serene and afloat." Expressed in a typically surreal image, this "trespass" becomes important to her "voice" that is "silver-white" in its "clarity of calling" not only in the world of the dead— from which that voice appears to be temporarily echoing—but also in the world of the living from which it will be constantly echoing, bringing "glimpses" from her life with her lover, thus saving it from sinking into oblivion.

Gilbert argues that modern elegists develop a poetics of grief that begins with both "unbelief and disbelief—*unbelief* in an afterlife, a resurrection, a transmigration; *disbelief* in the reality of individual death itself" (author's italics). They then try to come to terms with loss through "a meditation on the actual scene of the dying"; "preoccupation with the literal body" of the lost one; "a retelling of the details of the past" as if to ensure their cessation; "a resignation that sometimes involves a hopeful (but often sardonically hopeful or fantastic) resolution and sometimes merely a stoic acquiescence in the inevitable" (182-183)³. Until now Gallagher shows "disbelief" in the reality of Craver's death let aside showing "unbelief" in an afterlife of him. And her "disbelieve" translates into preoccupation with his literal body in what seems to be transgression of the boundary between life, death, and sexual passion.

Her preoccupation with the dead lover's body along with her meditation on the actual setting of his loss shows that her mourning is still until now melancholic. But he has become out of physical reach, and she has to confront the "verdict" of that reality. And her confrontation of it does not

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begin directly by retelling "details of the past" as Gilbert argues, but by undertaking visits to his grave. Though the burial place means the end of their physical attachment, it does not mean the end of their spiritual` connection. In her visits to the grave, Gallagher seems to challenge Joseph Jacob's contention that the "hurry-scurry of modern life leaves no one time to mediate among the tombs," making the retaining of "a sufficient space for the psychological necessities of mourning" difficult (qtd. in Ramazani 14). Gallagher decorated Craver's grave with flowers, and at his gravesite, there was a black metal box to which were affixed poems, letters, and business cards from his admirers. Additionally, his poem "Late Fragment" was inscribed there, a poem, requested for inscription on other graves and used at weddings, in which he admits that he got from life what he wanted: "To call myself beloved, to feel myself / Beloved on the earth" (qtd. in *Soul Barnacles* 230). The spot where the deceased lover is buried "manifests physical death" while that spot and the inscription on it assert "the continuing 'social being'" of him (Scodel 2). The epitaph or inscription protects the remains of the dead lover from violation and keeps his memory alive. Therefore, the silence of his tomb may be broken by the voice of any visitor who may read the inscription on it.

In a world characterized by quick tempo, "increase in life span," decline in religious faith (Jacob qtd. in Ramazani 15) in addition to "urbanization, medicalization, bureaucracy and technological warfare" (Ramazani 15), mourning becomes a psychological necessity. In such a world which denies public grief, elegy provides a private place for mourning where the mourner is saved from continuing depression and melancholia. By defining the dead lover through her responses as a living person, Gallagher defies society's admiration for those who "hide their grief so

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that no one would guess anything had happened" (Gorer xiii)—in one of her visits to Carver's grave, she was caught kneeling before it, an act dubbed sentimental by a *Washington Post* reviewer. But this public showing of grief becomes psychologically effective because it proves to be, one way or another, a release of her depressive feelings, thus saving her from entering a morbid psychological state. She visits the grave alone or in a company, and visits it in all kinds of weather. In "After the Chinese" (30), she drifts into his burial place at daybreak, defying cold weather and the "north wind" (1) that her "Tartar horse" (lover) prefers—in many poems the horse symbolism figures strongly⁴, and the "Tartar horse" here becomes a symbol of power, desire, and courage. The questions she asks to the dead lover indicate that neither the "north wind" nor "a little time and death" would stop her from visiting his grave. The "north wind" creates an identification between the dead lover and the mourner, who has come to the resting place to exercise some rituals: "I have worn a little path, an egg-shaped circle / around your grave keeping warm / while I talk to you" (10-12). His grave is changed into a holy shrine, and he is transformed into a saint, and she has become a worshiper. In that harsh weather, she is the only person in the graveyard—a sign of her stubbornness (the reason why he chose her). Elsewhere, she experiences feelings of sorrow and guilt while standing alone before the "pool / the sunken grave has made of him" ("Fathomless" 51: 4-5). In such an atmosphere, there develops a strange connection between the peacock eating the "poison orchid" while shaking it into "beauty of feathers" and the mourner's hair "unlatching its "black" pins into that "pool." The peacock creates its beauty, and the mourner develops her own feeling of guilt—suggested by the surreal image of the hairpins that continue

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to drop, striking "bone / that could be eye-socket, or pelvis or / sternum" (8-10). But guilt is mixed with sorrow because the sound of the hairpins is not the "startled gold / of his wedding band" (10-11). What she listens to is not her hairpins hitting his "bone" like arrows, but "the soft plinging of arrows shot in a dream toward [her] face"—arrows turning back at her as a punishment.

If, here, she is silent with her sorrow and guilt, elsewhere she breaks that silence and speaks aloud. She does this in "Valentine Delivered by a Raven" (45) which records a visit she makes to the grave while a raven flies over there, a raven who is known for "tending the dead for long," who usually comes to the grave and "flaps away on [her] love's errands" (25). She makes a connection between her lover sleeping guarded by that raven and the holy Roman Emperor Fredrick (1194-1250) who also sleeps "guarded by ravens." The dead lover is the royal emperor of her heart whose protection by such an agent of nature seems to be deserved. And responding to the raven's errand over the grave, she bends in "recognition" and picks up "a holly bough" to add to its decoration. She then internalizes that world in a metaphor of love that sounds grotesque:

I stand on my love's grave
and say aloud in a swoop of gulls over
the bay, "I kiss your lips, babe," and it's not
grotesque, even though the mind knows what it
knows, and mostly doesn't. Language,
that great concealer, is more than generous,
gives
always what it does not have.(7-13)

The narrative string of the poem and its lyrical tone—not lyrical in the formalist sense because there are no rhymes, no fixed stanzas but vital rhythms and evocative images—show that this mourner has chosen not only to speak, but speak

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aloud about her love in such a strange manner. She speaks aided by the generous power of language. By describing language as a "great concealer" and revealer, she brings to mind both the inadequacy of language and its importance in the grieving process that Tennyson was aware of: *In Memoriam*, he speaks about the limitations of words to express the inexpressible—"these wild and wandering cries, / Forgive them where they fail in truth" (Prologue 41-43)—and their generosity in providing relief and guidance—"But, for the unquiet heart and brain, / A use in measured language lies" (5: 5-6). Though she realizes the inadequacy of language to express her grief, she insists on speaking and speaking aloud in order to break the silence that other bereaved persons may opt out for. In breaking out that silence, another "heat" of creativity shines through the words of her poetry. By speaking aloud, she gains: she comes to terms with loss by transforming that loss into "meaningful contributions" to her own becoming. By speaking again and again, she overcomes her initial shock and brings loss into some "meaningful consequence" ("The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief" 103) for her life. Gallagher has described the death of Carver as "the strongest experience of [her] life," personally—compared to other losses such as her father's, her brother's, and her uncle's (*The Soul Barnacles* 226)—and poetically—because that experience was a calling to writing poetry that would be a "reservoir" ("The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief" 104) of her grief over his death and a maintaining of his legacy, (and hers as well, given the fact he was her literary collaborator). And therefore what matters then is not the act of speaking itself but "the glow / of that [she] spoke" ("Embers" 19: 11-12).

The "glow" of what she spoke reveals how honored the dead lover was by the raven and by her. In another visit

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she again tends the grave that has been this time desecrated by some teenagers who "walked their hieroglyphics across the poem ["Late Fragment] / carved there..."("Picking Bones"71-72: 5-6). This visit represents an attempt on her part to maintain her lover's legacy while coming to terms with his loss. She and a Japanese translator of Carver's poems carry roses to the grave though they cannot light a candle because of the breeze. The translator, whose "voice is like a porcelain hand / on silk," is delighted. He refers to the Japanese ritual of "picking bones" of the dead after cremation, "Two by two with chopsticks lifting / each bone from the ashes, dropping it / into an urn" (22-24). The pun in "picking bones" brings together the realities of Carver's life and death by making an association between the bones of the dead and food (in addition to chopsticks, the mother's warning and "the low black table" describing the grave stone suggest cannibalism). At this stage of grieving, translation does not only refer to Carver's work rendered in Japanese, but also to his translation into the fabric of her life nourishing her creative work.

Gallagher visited the grave every day for two and a half years after Carver's death. She then started to visit it once a week and later as the occasion demanded—such as when there were foreign visitors wishing to visit it. Freud calls this a "process of relinquishment" (244) that the mourner experiences due to the passage of time. Thus in another burst of grief, she brings up and hypercathects each "single one of the memories and expectations" (244-245) that are bound to her lost love. Some of those memories are sad, and some else are joyful. What she first remembers is the final moment before dying. The memory's "untidy room" ("Black Pudding" 10-11: 5) opens on that painful moment when something was about to be taken from "the good and cherished beast on loan" to them (life, that is). It was a

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moment in which tender feelings were overshadowed by the lover's approaching death: they held each other all night retelling their "love between gusts of weeping (12). The lover's approaching death has become a repetition of a previous injury from her earliest childhood when she woke from a "nightmare" to find her parents "intimate and still awake" without being able to "fathom /what their danger and passage had been for (21-24). Although she was a child, she could feel the "scald of their cheek" (injury) and taste the "salt" (bitterness) of "the unsayable" (their suffering) though she did not know its reason then. But because of her painful passage from innocence to experience, she could do now. Her parents knew what their "danger and passage' had been for, and like them she, at the moment, knows what her current "danger and passage" is for—it is for a life of grief.

Another premonitory moment is recalled in "Two of Anything" (20-21), a poem that foregrounds the idea that life depends on pairs or "two of anything" to continue, and when one is missing the other feels lack. The remembered scene shows a perfect pair whose existence was threatened by impending death. Early in a deep blue morning, the two lovers were discussing a plan for the future while two ducks were flying by, two boys were viciously flinging morning papers to houses down the hill, two horses from her childhood emerged, and the two "pearled hair combs" he gave her made a chilly mouth on the sill. There were two horizons before her, one reached and entered with him (the course of their life together) and so was under her, the other was "far enough away to be the dead mate" of the other one (that is the course of her life without him—the little water in the glass in front of them was a premonition of this other horizon).

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She is then left behind to feel lack while remembering their life together. She recalls two moments of "less than torment" that they lived so fully: the first was when her beloved placed a "Japanese maple into a hole" with an awareness that it was going to outlive him, and the second was when he, at Reno airport, came back "glazed over from blowing all his loose change" ("Sad Moments" 22-23: 12) guessing that it was the "last slot" he would ever play. These moments and their like "outlive what makes [her] forget," and remembering them is an acknowledgment of a vision that is both pleasant and unpleasant simultaneously.

No moment is sadder than the one recalled in "Anniversary" (62-63) where the realities of love and death are strongly brought together. The moment is that of their belated marriage when Carver was seriously ill. In the reflective first section of the poem Gallagher makes a parallel between the progression of the intimate moment and the rhythm of Carver's "breath that returns, withdraws, / returns again" (7-8). The mode becomes narrative, and it continues to the end of the poem mirroring the flow of her thoughts that she condenses in evocative images. The "wedding feast" was quite as they sat "near the hush / of the gaming tables, the icy click / of dice in the half-closed hand / before they are thrown" (11-14). Their marriage was denied "toast" because a new day was about to begin and then it would sink into "oblivion." She recalls the failure of language to capture the truth of the moment:

What would I tell you
of love at that moment
that would be simple and true enough
since words are candles I blow out
the moment I set them down? (20-24)

Love was true and simple, a feeling which language would not aspire to articulate because words are "candles" she

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blows out the moment she sets them down. The loss of the beloved was larger than grief and her grief was larger than language. If she failed to describe her love at that moment, now what she writes glows with grief, with love mixed with loss. The words she sets down here describe the bleakness of the moment: she scrapes her fingernail on the table's edge in frustration because their desire cannot be consummated. Words bring again the horse symbolism, suggestive of power and desire that are threatened by the foreboding moment. In terms of their wild vowels and energetic consonants, they also explain that the lovers' "lips were kept from touching / by the great sleep of space" (32-33)—their sexual thirst was not quenched in such "a liquid and tranquil" atmosphere because "everything poured into [them] / hard and true" ... (34-35). Words continue to be set down, and so are their glasses. By then the horse's overflowing eye closes over them, enshrouding them in (sexual) darkness. So in spite of the failure of the moment, her words succeed because they become candles that are not blown, but glow with her grief and frustration the moment she sets them down in poetry. The setting down of their glasses represents their frustrated desire, and the setting down of her words marks the consummation of her poetic desire.

"Now That I Am Never Alone" (12) presents a happy memory. Driven by the sight of stranded moth ("pressed like a pair of unpredictable lips / against the white wall") while taking a shower, she remembers a "beautiful mischief" that lasted for a moment in which he pulled her "head against his thigh and dipped / a rivulet down [her] neck of coldest water from the spring / [they] were drinking from" (6-8). The "mischief" generated in her a beautiful "shiver" due to the warmth of love. Now the water is hot, but it is not hot enough to "drive the shiver out," a "shiver" resulting this

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time from the vanishing of that warmth. Now everything is not what it was, and, therefore, she is making of him a "raw fluttering" (by writing poems of mourning) just as he has made of her his "watch-fire" (keeper of his legacy) and "killing light" ([15]—moving from the dark shadow of his death to the light of her creative life by writing poems that keep his memory alive and confirm her poetic-presence). Another intimate moment is recalled in "Trace, in Unison" (9) in which she returns to the site of love where her body is penetrated by that act. The intimate act has taken place against a rainy night. The rain continues, but the intimate act does not, and what remains of it is just the gentle touch of his arms, his careless breathing, and his lips grazing the bow of her neck. However, in such an atmosphere she remains free and happy. And the image of the buds of jasmine that thread through her hair, opening after dark, brightening the room is psychologically accurate, suggesting as it does the joyous state that that intimate act incurs in her.

Some of the remembered moments are sad, and some are happy, but all are reviewed in a gradual process of detachment from the lost lover. Although Gallagher appears to be never forgetting, she is now learning to get through her bereavement. Although we cannot know for sure like Freud whether her gradual progression toward recovery "begins simultaneously at several points or follows some sort of fixed sequence," it is "evident that first one then another memory is activated" (256) in different forms. She has slowly to rebuild what Dennis Brown calls "a sense of selfhood through the common stages of memory-replay..." (352). In addition to bringing up and reviewing her memories with the dead lover—and previously occupying herself literally with his body and visiting his grave—she is taking another step by which she can come to terms with his loss: reflecting on items he left behind as a way of

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emphasizing his "dead-aliveness" and keeping her memory inhabited by him. She now seems to accept his loss and is able to retain her identity by what Freud calls a healthy work of mourning that requires "a withdrawal" of affection from the "lost object" and subsequent reattachment of affection to some substitute for the object (249). These items or relics become "substitutive signs" (Sacks 6) which fill the gap resulting from his loss. Gallagher holds those items close to her heart because they are what make her life worth living. They constantly hold her alive as much of love is kept in them. For example, though of little value, "half-a-matchstick," which appears in "Reading the Waterfall" (7-8), means for her life itself, her whole life with him. This is because it reminds her of his voice flying across rooms when he is called to "hear some line / of poetry read aloud in [their] two-minded way," an indication of the joint flights of their imagination. In this relic both their life and work together are embedded. Therefore, its presence becomes a substitute of his absence. And as a "substitutive sign," this "half-a-matchstick" is now replacing him just as are the unfinished pages of poetry he left behind. In those pages there is also much love curved "where his pen bracketed / the couplet mid-page"... (22-23). The unfinished book remains a constant reminder of his loss and, paradoxically, of his an enduring presence. The "unwritten pages" of that book "lift an ongoing dusk" ("Spacious Encounter" [60: 10]) in her, and now she has become his only reader. But in the midst of her grief, she holds the incomplete book so close to her heart. She derives from it a spiritual force that helps her carry on with the cruel business of living: "Book I am wearing in my night-rushing / to overtake these kneelings and contritions of daylight" (14-15). As one of two persons who lived intimately close to each other—they were "two beings"

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who shared "one retina" (26)—she embraces the book. It is an embrace she now cannot empty:

Embrace I would know with my arms
cut away on no street in no universe
to which we address so much unprofound
silence. (31-33)

The impassioned lyrical tone of the poem, without rhymes or fixed stanzas, but with moving rhythms (especially the iambic pentameter of the last two lines), indicates that by embracing the book, she is indeed embracing her whole life with him. It is embrace unbounded, an embrace beyond their universe, which is now empty, subject only to "unprofound silence." She shelters the book in her heart, and the choice of "wearing" and "embrace" powerfully indicate that it has become for her a source of sustenance and tenderness in her silent universe.

Similarly, a shirt continues to be a source of tenderness that even death cannot stop. She says that she has stopped writing poetry to do ordinary chores such as the folding of this shirt. She still experiences feelings of tenderness on folding this shirt because by bringing the arms of it against each other, she brings their worlds together—elsewhere she seems to be hysterically attached to a leather jacket he left behind: "Guttural and aslant, I chew the leather sleeve / of his jacket, teething like a child on the unknown pressure / budding near its tongue" ("We're All Pharaohs When We Die" [55-56: 18-20]). She holds the giant shirt in her hands while "somewhere a small girl / standing next to her mother / watching how to see it's done" ("I Stop Writing the Poem"64: 10-12). The shirt is "giant"—reflecting the stature of the lost love, and "giant" in the sense of being a huge source of tenderness in spite of his loss—and the girl is small—a regression to a state of innocence associated with childhood to which she now escapes. She was crossing over

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to her mother who suffered in the past just as she (the speaker) is suffering at the present. So at the moment, she crosses over from her former life with her love to her life without him where she is still folding his shirt. Elsewhere, she finds that tenderness in a white "shawl" he bought her when he was terminally ill. Now she imagines that he is coming to set the shawl across her shoulder. And she is then lowered "gently down / and made to sleep again on earth" ("Cold Crescent" 29: 24-25). Symbol of their "commemorative lives," this item of clothes has become for her a source of consolation in his absence. She also gets consolation when she looks at a "crazy menu"—in a poem of the same title (38-39)—he left behind, a menu which includes his "toothpaste" and "Wheat Chex," "5-Quick-Cinnamon-Rolls-With-Icing" and "Pop Secret Microwave Pop-corn," and "Deluxe Fudge Brownie Mix." She is using these items because she imagines him urging her to do so in order to consume his "loss"—although she admits that consuming his loss is like consuming a meal that is hard to digest.

The ongoing dusk that the book left in her along with the meal that is hard to digest are indications that melancholy, though in a slight degree, still penetrates what appears to be a normal mode of mourning. In that mode, she sometimes she reflects on other items with mixed feelings as she does with a ring—in a poem carrying that title (24-25)—they bought together in a little shop in Oregon, a ring other than the one buried with him. Like "every article of clothing, every casual scrap of paper with his handwriting," this ring has "signed [her] consciousness" (*Soul Barnacles* 231) with a strong tenderness in spite of his physical absence. However, she tries to surprise the "power" that that ring exercises on her consciousness with "treason" by giving it to

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a friend who needs it for luck. On discovering that it was not rightly honored—the friend left it "among lesser things in a drawer" (10)—she recovered it. Losing and recovering the ring points to the changing state of the mourner who swings between feeling of treason and feeling of faithfulness. She even seems confused because when she wore the ring on a chain around her neck, she feels "awkward / like a high-school charm, the sign of love a girl / outgrows..." (12-14). She is not sure whether it is proper to wear it now that she has outgrown the initial charm of a love usually a school girl experiences. She wonders if it is convenient to abandon it now the charm of their courtship has gone (because of losing him, as a matter of fact) or to keep it in some "abject safety" (as a relic to be returned to from time to time and a reminder of his continuous presence in her life). The narrative string of the poem does not settle her confusion because when she loses the ring again, its signing of her memory crushes her lucid, and she starts to believe what she does not believe in "the way of true apparitions—that he uses / [her] longing to call himself to [her]," that he inhabits all her senses, and that his ongoing presence is both "volatile" and "sacramental" (23-24)—another sign of her confusion.

However, her readiness to dispense with that ring as a substitutive sign of her lost love is indicative of her search for consolation in something else, something that endures, and what endures is writing poetry. By its own very nature, poetry offers some sort of a psychological health for the poet and provides the reader with truths about himself and human experience in general. In her essay "The Poem as a Reservoir for Grief" Gallagher speaks about poetry's capacity to release both the reader and the poet from suffering by providing "a private access" to the handling of grief and bringing "loss into communion with other deaths and mythic elements which enlarge the view of solitary death" (104). In its verbal

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evocation of loss, poetry performs a psychic function by becoming an important source of release from grief when other sources cannot effectively deal with it. By writing poetry Gallagher tries to comfort herself by drawing attention to her "surviving powers" which is, according to Sacks, "a crucial feature" of elegy. And instead of "nymphs, envoys of nature, and spectral visitors who appear in most elegies" (Gilbert 194), poetry becomes her strongest guide toward consolation and a manifestation of her will to carry the work of mourning to a successful conclusion although she does not place it in a religious context.

If then the object of loss has become her "vanishing / dialogue" ("Spacious Encounter" 60-61:34-35), she could still renew her dialogic relationship with poetry that remains not only a medium through which her grief is released in deft syntax and psychologically accurate imagery but also "a substitute object for the missing" lover (Schweizer 183) and a maintaining of her legacy (and his as well). Poetry turns out to be the best possible way she can keep her life going on, the best possible sort of consolation when other sorts are either absent or invalid. And her dialogic engagement with it is carried through in terms of the private language she uses and the poetic presence she insists on fulfilling. Like Sacks, she believes that "any consolation must depend upon the texture of language" (186). Therefore, she, in "Knotted Letter" (67-68), ties together the letters of her words that she in turn uses to create that language:

... the great illiteracy
of rain keeps writing over may days
as if to confirm the possibility
of touching everything so it glistens
with its bliss bent aside by some soft
undirected surpassing. (3-8)

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Her language illustrates that poetry confirms the possibility of touching everything including, of course, her grief over her dear one. The contrast between "the great illiteracy / of rain" and the great literacy of her writing is representative of that sort of language in which her grief is released. Therefore its words are as dolorous as the sound of a sword "slashed to stubble where the wheat was gathered"(29). Words are "unglinting" like "edges" of that sword. They are dark because they mirror her state as a mourner. But they glow as artifacts. They mirror what is amazing and what is not. They mirror "her spoken face" as a mourner, but paradoxically in "poems so keenly obscured"(34). Why does she write poems "so keenly obscured," poems that conceal more than reveal? It is because of her view of language as a "great concealer," while also being "more than generous," giving "always what it does not have (7-13). She says that her "words are candles" she blows out "the moment" she sets them down (20-24). But, does she mean that words lose their glow when set down in poetry? Or do they glow, but still unable to be up to her immense grief? Carver's death was larger than grief and her grief was larger than language. But if she was not able to describe her love at a particular sad moment in the past, now what she writes glows with grief, with love mixed with death. If the setting down of the lovers' glasses at that moment marks their unfulfilled desire, the setting down of her words marks the consummation of her poetic desire. By viewing language as a "great concealer" and revealer, she brings to mind both its inadequacy and its importance in the grieving process, a paradox that all elegists are aware of

Another paradox asserts itself in her dialogic exchange with poetry: the relationship between poetic presence and poetic absence in relation to her absent-present object of love. In their "two-minded way," the lovers' "writing life—all their night dinner of soul-making—always

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found them elbow-to-elbow, reading and writing in each other's margins" (*Soul Barnacles* 226). Because that collaboration reflected their mutual interests, she read to him to bring her "voice / sideways, to touch him more, and join / our listening or laughter or mutual derision. / To be one and none ("Embers" 19: 4-7)—in short to confirm her poetic presence. But death has disrupted that collaboration, and without his listening her poems arrive silent. "Deaf Poem" (53-54) claims that it needs not be read aloud since it will arrive mute like "a sack of wet / stones." Surprisingly, there are different sounds in words such as "sonic," "explode," "cords," "call," "sing," and "bells" in a poem that is ironically supposed to arrive deaf. In spite of these sounds that the reader can easily realize, she thinks that the poem arrives deaf since her first reader is not there to listen. Previously, because of his listening, her poems echoed loud in the world of the living, declaring her poetic presence. The contrast she makes between "Let the birds sing" and "let this poem meet / its deafness" refers to that specific audience whose absence has silenced her poems although they arrive otherwise for her reader, declaring loudly that he is still affecting her life in more than way.

Thus, she still believes in the possibility of his coming back to life so that one of them can write" the deaf poem, / a poem missing even the language / it is unwritten in (34-36). But the deaf poem will not, paradoxically, be written unless one of the two will be missing, and it will miss even the language it is unwritten in. Schweizer argues that "the unwritten is the language of the dead, whose language is missed, whose speech cannot be recovered" (179). Although this is true, yet the poem is written in the language of the living, and the unwritten means that the poem confirms "what is forever beyond speech" ("Paradise" 29: 23)—grief,

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which she, however, manages to pin down in that language. Therefore, against her intention and in spite of his physical absence, she succeeds in confirming her poetic presence in her private language.

If that language is used to lament the dead lover, it, in the meantime, brings in consolation for her as a mourner. For her "unquiet heart and brain," to quote Tennyson, there is "comfort" (20-10) in that language because it helps her out of the darkness of her mourning state. And this is why the metaphor of light⁵ dominates the whole book whose ultimate end is to diminish that darkness— Schweizer considers light as an explicit means of "recovery" for her (179) bringing to mind Sacks' characterization of it as a figure of consolation very "crucial to elegies" (33). The title poem "Moon Crossing Bridge" (59) becomes significant as it promises some sort of a bridge of light she is supposed to cross. She stands a long time by the river under a high moon, and asks the reader not to take on that long waiting in terms of "the merely aesthetic" that "saves in daylight" and which needs "distance, disinterest, and sight...." What saves at night is what was once called "worship" which is capable of "mystical transport 'across a span of brightness'" (Schweizer180). Although she is not a strong believer in what saves at night, the main focus remains on what "saves in daylight." Therefore, she will cross the bridge on a span of light to join what she "was certain of." And this crossing is undertaken by this the poem—indeed by the whole book. It is not a crossing to the other side of life or the dark place where Carver lies, but it is a crossing over to her life with him, reflecting "glimpses" of it in terms of the "merely aesthetic." Against her intention, her attention remains focused on "the merely aesthetic" whose main rhetorical device (the metaphor of light) serves to diminish darkness associated with the lost object.

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To diminish that darkness and progress toward final recovery, she decides to get back to her normal life as a woman and as a poet as "I Stop Writing the Poem" (64) illustrates. The poem reflects her determination to go beyond loss which has silenced her poetically for some time. Therefore, she intends to bypass the tenderness which the folding of his shirt incurs in her. She is keen on resuming her normal life again, which the experience of death has disrupted: she will get back to "the poem" and to her being a woman who always has "plenty to do." Writing the poem and returning to a woman's daily chores are two activities that can help her get over the pain of loss. So she defines herself first as a woman and second as a poet. She was a woman before his death, and she will remain a woman after his death—and so being a poet, of course. So at the moment she crosses over from her former life with him to her life without him, she crosses over to her former poetic self, bringing it into life in a poem ironically about stopping writing the poem.

Her move from her initial numbness to her decision to resume her life as a human being and as a poet shows that her elegies express the various stages of her grief though not in a definitely ordered sequence (only occupying herself literally with his body and her visit to his grave may seem to follow a logical sequence). To emerge from her grief, Gallagher works through complicated feelings of attachment, loss, and bereavement until she becomes "free and uninhibited again." She is driven to bear her sorrow alone, and her experience of grief comes to be sometimes bizarre, oftentimes pathetic, but strongly painful. She repeatedly confronts loss, anger and denial, recapitulates her relationship with Carver, creates an internal satisfactory image of him, and finally giving him up to the larger forces

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of nature. She shows elements essential to mourning such as becoming aware of the reality of loss, confronting anger, recollecting and then severing attachment to her dead lover, reckoning with substitutive signs of him. And, to quote Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, her responses may not appear to be occurring "in coherent stages, but co-exist in emotional confusion" (qtd. in Brown 343-344). She is a bit little like Hardy who stays behind in a pastoral scene (though hers is an urban one) to mediate mourning. Both resist the obliteration of their loved ones amid the speed and pressure of modern life. Like him—and indeed like Stevens, Owen, and Plath—she provides a special space for mourning in her poetry, but she differs from them as she does not mock or ironize her object of loss although also she does not idealizes him as traditional elegists do. The achievement of her consolation is done through revision rather than rejection of the constraints of her melancholia. To pass from melancholia to mourning, her loss is clearly defined and gradually confronted. Although she employs some elements of the traditional elegy such as temporary "grieving and search for consolation, and the language's inadequacy to render the work of mourning (Ramazani xi, Sacks 1-2), she tends to focus as a griever on her "isolated self," uses a "more nakedly expressive style," seeks consolation in aesthetically acceptable terms (Poetry becomes the territory in which she battles with loss, assimilating her emotional processes in its very texture), and fights for her own survival—characteristics which Sacks believes distinguish American elegists from their English counterparts (313).

Notes

1 – This crossing is hinted at in poems such as "Corpse Cradle" (6), where she prepares at dawn" to drift into his "last resting, "Reading the Waterfall" (7), where he "lets her dress hurriedly for the journey," journey toward

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death, "Black Pudding" (10) as they retell "their love between gusts of weeping" because their life was ending, and "Paradise" (49), where that destination is envisioned by her to be their final resting place.

2 – Although the poems addressed to a new lover at the end book show an "impatience for recovery" according to Schweizer (179), my focus is only on the poems of mourning, which represent the major portion of the book, trying to detect in them her progression from her initial melancholia to her final acceptance of loss.

3 - However, these are not limited to modern elegy as some of them can be detected in traditional elegy: Wordsworth's "A Slumber did my spirit seal," for example, displays preoccupation with the actual body of the dead person and "acquiescence in the inevitable which produces consolation not stoicism" (Twiddy10).

4 - At the end of "Black Budding" she speaks about her lover as a horse: "Don't ask me now why I am walking my horse" (10-11: 33). In absence of bells to proclaim her lover's death, she in "Legend with Sea Breeze" (13-14) decides to lead her "black horse onto" a grove of "hemlock" and against the conventional responses to death she declares: "I just want my black horse, / to see where he goes" (59-60).

5 – To cite but few examples, "Yes" (3) describes the two lovers appearing like a "flat cone of sand / in the garden of the Silver Pavilion in Kyôto / designed to appear only in moonlight" (1-3); "Trace, in Union" (9) speaks about "Muslin half-light" (8); "Souvenir" (15) refers to the lover's "moon-life" that "had lifted everything from reach" (4); "Embers" (19) designates the lover as "suffering from much light" (1).

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