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A Lesson in Mourning: The Evolution of the English Anti-Elegy

K. Matthew Bennett
East Tennessee State University

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K. Matthew Bennett

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Dr. D Michael Jones, Chair

Dr. Daniel Westover

Dr. Matthew Holtmeier

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the evolution of the anti-elegy originating with Thomas Hardy's elegiac sequence in memory of his wife Emma; *Poems of 1912-1913*. Using French post-structuralist Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share* as a theoretical lens, Hardy's anti-elegies are analyzed and rhetorically connected to English war poet Siegfried Sassoon's anti-elegies. Hardy's anti-sentimentality, fatalistic outlook on death, and rejection of the Christian afterlife seeps into the language of Sassoon's war poems which serve as a protest to the dehumanizing effects of late capitalism witnessed during the First World War. Hardy and Sassoon's anti-elegies, with their hyper-focus on the elegized body, are corrupted by capitalism to diminish the human body into a interchangeable, unhuman cog; fully understood as Bataille's "thing." The anti-elegy, distorted by capitalism, creates the possibilities necessary for Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" which protests humanity's objectification under capitalism while creating the ultimate anti-elegy for the anti-elegy.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The elegy is a timeless poetic form written to mourn and come to terms with the loss of a beloved human being. John Milton's "Lycidas" and Alfred Lord Tennyson's *In Memoriam* became two of the most influential elegies written in the English language after the form's development throughout the classical and Renaissance periods. These definitive poems contain Christian notions regarding death which are later mocked by the anti-elegiac verse of Victorian novelist turned proto-Modernist poet Thomas Hardy. Hardy plays with motifs of elegiac tradition in his *Poems of 1912-1913* where he mourns Emma, his wife of over thirty years, using anti-elegiac rhetoric. While the traditional elegy is bent on consoling the bereaved, the anti-elegy serves as an incessant vigil for the deceased via the written word. Specifically, the anti-elegy dismisses the Christian idea of the soul to focus on mourning the loss of the individual via poetry centered around the corporeal body.

Hardy's anti-elegiac influence is traceable to the British war poet Siegfried Sassoon in that his cynical dismissal of the Christian afterlife reappears in Sassoon's anti-elegies based on his experiences in the trenches of the First World War. His famous war poems help shape humanity's collective understanding of modern warfare as a hellish machine operated by humans yet horrifically designed to grind soldiers into oblivion. By exposing the brutality of warfare, Sassoon's anti-elegies protest the dehumanization of bodies witnessed during the massive, imperial, capital fueled conflict which was the First World War. Though the anti-elegiac poses itself as a means for ethical mourning, the "humans as thing" rhetoric found in French post-structuralist Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share* provides a fascinating critical lens for an enhanced study of Hardy and Sassoon's poetry. Bataille's text demonstrates how capitalism cannot allow for the human body to be sacred, spurring the economic system's assimilation of

anti-elegiac rhetoric to solidify humanity's status as commodity; fully understood as Bataille's "thing." The "thingification" of the human body spurs the evolution of the anti-elegy, developing throughout Hardy and Sassoon's poems, and concludes its transformation with Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turrett Gunner". Using a Bataille-enhanced reading of Jarrell's poem as anti-elegy, we can see the form grieve its initial promise of ethical mourning due to the commodification of the human body in our global capitalistic society. At the same time, Jarrell's poem resists the body's diminishment by giving voice to the ruined corpse as means to protest its reduction into thingness, thus creating the anti-elegy for the anti-elegy.

CHAPTER 2. ANTI-ELEGY AND "THINGIFICATION"

R. Clifton Spargo in his work *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* dedicates a chapter to examining the ethical rhetoric of the anti-elegy. In said chapter, Spargo clearly defines the ostensible mission of the anti-elegiac form when he states, "[The] anti-elegiac turns against the history of consolation and the strategies of commemoration implicit in the very conventions of elegy—they make an ethical demand on us." (128). For Spargo, the anti-elegy is more than just a rejection of the classical motifs. He poses the anti-elegy as a refusal to consolation and instead opts for incessant mourning over the elegized body to protect the dead from a fate worse than death—being forgotten (Spargo 145). While Spargo provides a working definition of the anti-elegy, Georges Bataille in his *The Accursed Share* explains capitalism's "thingification" of the human body which leads to the corruption of the anti-elegy.

Bataille's *The Accursed Share* critiques the rise of global capitalism and mass industrialization in the late twentieth century. Bataille argues the mass human sacrifices in the First and Second World War mimic the ritual sacrifices of the Aztecs, and he uses this analogy throughout his text to critique the human sacrificial nature of a capitalist society. *The Accursed Share* is haunted by the repeated mass experiences of industrialized death. The mechanization of death in the 20th century leads Bataille to conceptualize human beings in a capitalist society as objects to be consumed, making traditional elegies impossible, florid, and sentimental—in short not real nor functional anymore.

Bataille argues that humanity is doomed to complete this vicious cycle, or rather ritual, of consuming the bodies and identities of individuals to maintain the status quo. He proposes, "The general movement of exudation (of waste) of living matter impels [man], and he cannot stop it . .

. it destines him, in a privileged way, to that glorious operation, to useless consumption" (23). Bataille contends that due to the vast framework of capitalism in the modern world, humanity is fated to consume every object, including the identities and bodies of their own species. This point is intriguing because it helps form the capitalism-corrupted reading of the anti-elegy. Despite its intended purpose, the bodily language becomes a form of dissection and consumption. The slow movement of the poems from images of the face, voice, and limbs suggests the textual digestion of the elegized body only a useless object meant for consumption.

The problematic consumption of others makes better sense considering Bataille's understanding of capitalism. He explains, "in general a capitalist society reduces what is human to the condition of a thing (of a commodity)" (129). The human body's diminishment into a commodity is not inconceivable considering the anti-elegy. Its rejection of Christian romanticism inadvertently aids in capitalism's reduction of the innately human to Bataille's thing. With capitalism's exploitation of the form in mind, let us briefly turn to the first poem in Thomas Hardy's sequence titled "The Going" to better exemplify what the anti-elegy is supposed to be.

The first few lines in the first stanza of "The Going" capture humanity's lack of understanding concerning death. Hardy asks:

> Why did you give no hint that night
>
> That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
>
> And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
>
> You would close your term here, up and be gone
>
> Where I could not follow (1-5).

While the speaker's emotions regarding the loss of his beloved are valid, logically speaking the death of another fundamentally has no meaning. Though death's uncertainty creates the necessity and attraction of religious faith for some, other secular individuals find the enigmatic status of death as nonsensical. Certainly, every human's body eventually stops functioning, hence the phrase "died of natural causes," but to try to apply meaning to another's death is strictly for the living to work towards closure. The emotional work of the living to comprehend death explains why Hardy is trying to make sense of his beloved's death in the quotation above. To use the language of said quote: though tomorrow's sunrise is almost certain to come, the elegized will still be gone where he cannot follow. The lack of description for where she went references Hardy's own suspicions concerning what comes after life. Regardless of what language the elegist gives the elegized, the dead need not and cannot explain their own death, therefore justifying Hardy's somewhat bitter reference to her indifferent attitude of going, as if she could have predicted her own death. At the end of the day, she is still gone, hence the title of Hardy's "The Going."

The speaker acknowledges the definitive yet illogical nature of death by paradoxically speaking directly to the person being elegized throughout the entire poem. The use of a "term here" in the fourth line suggests another state of being elsewhere, likely to be the state of decay in the grave. This makes sense as the speaker later notes how the blankness of nonexistence sickens him (21). His acknowledgement of nothingness in death spurs the speaker not to articulate the dead in some beautiful afterlife, but to honor them by simply remembering the deceased as they lived: this is the mission of the anti-elegy. This becomes clearer when Hardy observes, "You were she who abode / By those red-veined rocks far West" (22-3). These lines mean to do the greatest justice to the elegized, acknowledging the existence of the elegized

individual, with those first three words: “You were she.” These lines precede a continuing humble acknowledgement of her existence as someone who loved to travel and ride horses (24). In this sense, “The Going” is an effective anti-elegy because it modestly yet intimately reminisces on the departed without the Christian romanticism regarding the afterlife.

Hardy’s refusal to let go of the past connects to a point Andrew J. Ball makes in his article on redemptive mourning. Ball remarks, “By remaining open to a past that is never fully past, never wholly absent, the counter-elegist’s vigilant remembrance continues to responsibly bear witness to the other, to refuse the unethical closure of consolation.” (30). Likewise, Hardy’s “The Going” mourns the dead through vigilant remembrance of the lost individual rather than envisioning the dead in heaven or throughout romantic visions of nature in traditional elegies. Now that we have a sense of how the anti-elegy functions, let us briefly explore the traditional elegy to show what the anti-elegy is against using minor close readings of two of the most famous elegies in the English language: Milton’s “Lycidas” and Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*.

CHAPTER 3. "LYCIDAS" AND *IN MEMORIAM* AS TRADITIONAL ELEGIES

Though the elegy's roots date back to ancient Grecian rituals, this discussion uses a contemporary understanding of the elegy to carry the conversation forward. Robert Hass quotes Peter Sacks' *The English Elegy* to explain the purpose of the form: "The elegy, as a poem of mourning and consolation, has its roots in a dense matrix of rites and ceremonies, in the light of which many elegiac conventions should be recognized as being not only aesthetically interesting forms but also the literary versions of specific social and psychological practices" (295). The elegy as we know it today emerged from a complex web of customs to create a poetic form designed to bring comfort to the bereaved while venerating the life of the deceased. The elegy's inclination to honor the deceased subject connects the form to the ode, though the forms are inherently different. Whereas an ode praises the qualities of someone, the elegy mourns the loss of those qualities due to the loss of the person. Moreover, the ode is meant to be heard by the person being honored while the elegy is intended as a means of mourning and consolation for the grieving or, more clearly, the speaker of the poem. This movement from mourning to consolation mentioned by Sacks defines the traditional elegy and is in both John Milton's "Lycidas," one of the greatest English elegies of the seventeenth century, and Lord Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, a thorough demonstration of Victorian romanticism in elegiac form.

Classic elegies such as "Lycidas" boldly defend the possibility of the everlasting soul whereas the anti-elegy refuses this idea. At a basic level, the anti-elegy critiques the Christian doctrine found throughout traditional elegies no longer possible because, in Bataille's view, humans under modernity have been reduced to status of a commodity. To resist "thingification" and the sentimentality of traditional elegies, the anti-elegy requires the reader to witness the loss of the other by reading the poem as means to share in the speaker's mourning. However, as we

shall see the consolatory return of the dead is a common theme in traditional elegies such as "Lycidas" and *In Memoriam*. A close reading of Milton and Tennyson's elegies to show what, precisely Thomas Hardy and Siegfried Sassoon are writing counter in their anti-elegies from the early twentieth century.

John Milton's "Lycidas" is a pastoral elegy written in memory of Milton's college classmate Edward King who died at sea. "Lycidas" is a definitive example of an elegy because it carefully captures the traditional movement from mourning to consolation observed above by Peter Sacks. The poem's popularity resides in its elegant nearly two hundred lines filled with profound images of sorrow, nature, and faith which push the poem from grieving towards solace. The first two lines of the poem reflect the seasonal return of plants. Milton writes, "Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more / Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere" (1-2). The lines also remark on the ceaseless need for elegy as everyone must die at some point, like the passing of seasons. The speaker beckons these symbolic organisms for poetic strength to reflect on the death of his fellow shepherd, Lycidas. The grieving shepherd remarks, "For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, / Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer" (8-9). The loss of Lycidas at such a young age severely hurts the shepherd as implied by the repetition of "dead," heightened by the observation that Lycidas' death leaves no equal party to fill the void of his absence. The latter half of the line suggests Lycidas' uniqueness is lost from the world and will never be experienced again thus highlighting the forsaken individuality of the deceased, a key motif of many traditional elegies. In fact, Lycidas was such a great individual that the speaker asks, "Who would not sing for Lycidas?" (10). In other words, the speaker asks who would not mourn Lycidas considering his lost corpse and that he perished so young. The idea of a person killed before their life has begun creates dramatic tension while invoking further pity from the reader.

To help elicit pity from the reader, the speaker then recalls his dearest memories with Lycidas. He reflects, "For we were nursed upon the selfsame hill, / Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill" (23-4). This remark relates how the speaker and Lycidas had been together since their births, essentially making them brothers. The speaker's recollection justifies and forecasts the depths of grief he will explore in later lines of the elegy. The poem's probing of the speaker's sorrowful memory serves as a poetic alternative to the impossible task of retrieving Lycidas' physical body from the depths of the sea. Equally, the establishment of memories with the elegized other is yet another key move in conventional elegiac form as it provides the ultimate purpose of elegy: to remember those who have passed away. This idea of the human self as sacred, via the infinite glory of God, is what Hardy and Sassoon later attack in their anti-elegies as their poems explore the temporal fragility of human flesh.

The speaker's recollection of the earliest memories with Lycidas relates to twentieth century philosopher Pierre Klossowski's idea of the phantasm. Klossowski explains, "Every living being interprets according to a code of signs […] Whence come images: representations of what has taken place or what could have taken place – thus a phantasm" (47). The speaker creates a phantasm of Lycidas based on his own bittersweet memories of his beloved friend. As the poem progresses, the reader witnesses the development of Lycidas' phantasm through the speaker's specific memories. In this way, the phantasms which emerge from traditional elegies are subjective conceptions of the elegized individual created by the speakers of their respective elegies. As seen here with Milton's "Lycidas," the speaker is acting alone in his mourning, and it is only his experiences of Lycidas which are being shared, therefore creating the phantasm. Returning to R. Clifton Spargo's *The Ethics of Mourning*, he writes about Milton's poem: "the mourner turns to idealization—as is the case with Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637)—to avert the crisis

in reciprocity precipitated by the other's death" (130-1). Due to this reasoning the traditional elegy is considered unethical by Spargo because individuals are too complex to be only defined and mourned only by one other person. The grief expressed by the speaker for the dead is valid, but the phantasm he has created of his friend is an idealized, and inaccurate, representation of dead.

Despite the speaker's reminisces, he cannot sense Lycidas' spirit near him. He weeps, "But O the heavy change, no thou art gone, / Now thou art gone, and never must return!" (37-8). The loss of Lycidas weighs heavily on the speaker as the repetition of "gone" mimics the recurrence of "dead" in line eight. The change from "dead" to "gone" foreshadows the poem's larger movement toward consolation found by the last few stanzas. In fact, the usage of "gone" and "return" in place of "dead" suggests the departed has went on a journey or an adventure rather than perishing. The hope for the return of the dead is another idea which Hardy and Sassoon also satirically critique in their anti-elegies. Hardy ironically puppets a ghostly caricature of his wife in his anti-elegies and rotten corpses of soldiers reappear from the ground in Sassoon's poems, a parody of the idealized resurrection in traditional elegies. Certainly, Lycidas can never physically return but the speaker's insistence that he cannot return at all is a false negative proved by the ending lines which reveal Lycidas' spirit guards the shore (183). The gesturing of hopelessness regarding the death of the elegized is another device used in traditional elegies to create the illusion of friction and keep the reader invested until the poem's resolutory turn toward closure.

Noticeably, the call upon the earth in the beginning of the poem precedes an invocation of the nine Greek muses (15) as the speaker proceeds to mourn the loss of his friend from birth. Rather than beginning the poem with an invocation of the muses, common in poetry at the time,

the elegy commences with a call on the natural environment to give the poet strength to grieve. This detail concerning the natural world is significant as Lycidas' corpse is revealed to be lost at sea (50-1) yet by the poem's end his soul returns to be the guardian spirit of the shore. The poem puts the power of nature above the faculty of the nine muses thereby suggesting that nature is more powerful than the ancient muses. The poem implies that the environment is strong enough to carry Lycidas's spirit, like the natural environment that houses his corpse.

John Milton's "Lycidas" is meticulously composed of proto-romantic environmental images balanced with allusions to the Greek, Roman, and Christian faiths. Likewise, Lycidas' rest in and return from nature invokes a well-known verse from Genesis. The line in the King James Version reads, "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3.19.). This famous Christian burial sacrament supports the poem's movement as the speaker himself moves through the different stages of grief. Embodying the stage of anger, the speaker throws harsh accusations against Apollo and St. Peter before quickly moving to acceptance in a delicate closing of the matter with newfound faith that Lycidas' spirit lives on in the Christian afterlife. The speaker's movement into closure is witnessed by another voice which appears in the final lines of the poem. The voice observes the shepherd moving on, remarking, "Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new" (193). The final line of the poem remarks on the infinite beauty and possibility of rebirth in the environment which is captured throughout Milton's "Lycidas." This poem largely begins the elegiac tradition of turning to the natural world to try to make sense of the unjustified deaths of young men. While the romantic closure of Milton's elegy is a wholesome means of overcoming the death of a single loved one, the practice becomes problematic in the hands of imperialistic capitalists using said elegiac ideal to justify the deaths of hundreds of thousands caught in nationalistic conflict. This point will be discussed in detail

later with an exploration of the anti-elegies of Siegfried Sassoon. Regardless, “Lycidas” reflects on the natural world as a space of death, but also as place of rebirth or immortality which Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* ruminates beyond.

Two centuries after the publication of Milton’s “Lycidas” comes Lord Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H* published in 1850. Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* is the definitive English elegy for the nineteenth century based on its sincere personal contemplations of the return of the dead against the ever-encroaching atheism of modern science. Tennyson wrote this elegy for his close friend Arthur Hallam who unexpectedly passed away at age twenty-two from a stroke. However, a deeper reading of this elegy reveals a devout attempt to resurrect the Christian faith from the ever-growing skepticism of the mid-nineteenth century. The poem, which consists of over one hundred sections, written over seventeen years, contains the traditional elegiac movement from mourning to consolation, but with a Victorian variation consisting of a movement from skepticism to devout Christian faith, creating an impactful and relevant poem for Tennyson’s fellow skeptical Victorians. Using *In Memoriam*, Tennyson creates a phantasm of Hallam, as Milton does in “Lycidas,” using memories of his beloved colleague. Like Lycidas, Hallam returns through the power of God and nature, but also as an artificial vision created by Tennyson through the very written words which tell of his return. *In Memoriam* resists the commodification of Hallam’s body using vivid recollections which suggests the poem is an anti-elegy. However, the poem’s movement from mourning to closure, enhanced by Christian doctrine, identifies it as a traditional elegy.

The first line of the prologue to *In Memoriam* calls upon the son of God, Jesus Christ before diving into proclamation and defense of faith (Tennyson 1). The line firmly establishes the poem in the theology of the Christian faith, vehemently opposed to the rising skepticism of

the mid-Victorian age. The faith versus science binary underlines the proceeding segments of the elegy as it pushes towards closure using descriptions of a soul-encapsulating, yet boundless cosmos created by God. Unlike "Lycidas," *In Memoriam* is unique because it was written during a time of rapidly advancing science and technology. By the late 1850s, discoveries in geology along with Darwin's groundbreaking *On the Origin of the Species* had disproven the cosmic timeline of the Old Testament (Altick 225). Although these discoveries would not be made until nearly ten years after the publication of *In Memoriam*, distrust of the sacred still haunts the speaker, but the rising skepticism only makes him stronger in his faith. He asserts:

> Our little systems have their day;
>
> They have their day and cease to be;
>
> They are but broken lights of thee,
>
> And thou, O Lord, art more than they. (17-20)

The speaker claims that the major breakthroughs and inventions of the nineteenth century are only small phases. In contrast, God is infinite and all-enveloping, and by proxy, so is the human soul. Though these scientific advancements may have been created by God as hinted by the usage of "thee," they are only diffusers of darkness clouding the truth of the Lord. Therefore, *In Memoriam* serves not only to save Hallam's memory from oblivion but also to save the concept of the soul from being devoured by the secular void of science. Likewise, the poem's prologue, filled with praises to the Lord, foresees the elegy's inevitable salvation-filled conclusion.

To sanctify Hallam's phantasm and combat secularism, *In Memoriam*'s speaker strategically trains his praises to Jesus Christ, the son of God and creator of life under the Christian faith. The speaker tells Jesus, "[Man] thinks he was not made to die; / And thou hast

made him: thou art just" (Tennyson 11-2). Like God's creation of the universe, Tennyson views his creation of Hallam's phantasm as justified in his hundred some lyrics dedicated to the memory of his friend. At the same time, Tennyson's romantic pondering on the infinitude of Hallam's phantasm is built on Christian orthodoxic ideas of the resurrection and the infinite human soul against secular industrial capitalism's diminishment of the individual into simply flesh and bone.

The speaker recognizes that Christ, the man himself who died and rose again, has not left humanity in the dust (9). Instead, he believes that Christianity offers immortality through faith in God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, opening the gates of heaven for all those who believe. The speaker supposes that through his Christian faith, he and his departed friend can live together, forever. His hopes to meet his friend again in heaven is supported by the following line from the second to last stanza of the prologue. Tennyson acknowledges, "I trust he lives in thee, and there / I find him worthier to be loved." (39-40). With these lines Tennyson definitively plants his phantasm of Hallam within the Christian faith. More specifically, Hallam's phantasm is validated and augmented by Christian romanticism. R. Clifton Spargo confirms the idea of Hallam's phantasm when he writes, "Tennyson does not doubt that Hallam continues to speak to him; it is only that the poet has trouble hearing him" (189-90). The idealization of reciprocation fuels the over one hundred sections which defend the Christian faith from the secularism of the mid-nineteenth century and offer ample textual space to produce Hallam's phantasm.

Both Milton's "Lycidas" and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* blithely end with intense belief that the soul as phantasm of the elegized dead carry on through nature as God. As mentioned previously, the anti-elegy considers the traditional elegy's romantic notions of the afterlife an unethical dismissal regarding the loss of the individual and instead focuses on mourning the

decaying human body, the previous vessel of the individual, rather than believing in a residual spirit. As was the issue in Milton's "Lycidas," the specific spirit or rather phantasm that emerges from *In Memoriam* is strictly tied to the speaker's perception of Hallam and therefore does not portray a full picture of the individual. Now with a better understanding of what anti-elegy is working against, let us finish our reading of Thomas Hardy's "The Going."

Hardy's "The Going," ends with exclamations from the speaker. He says, "Well, well! All's past amend, / Unchangeable. It must go" (36-7). While these lines appear to bitterly dismiss his memories of her from the fourth stanza or the broken dreams of the previous stanza (34-5), reading this poem as an anti-elegy discloses these lines as a stern declaration of continuous mourning after reflecting on the irreversible death of the elegized other. Her death is in the end unalterable, as there is no reference to the afterlife in this poem, so his mourning of her must go on. Indeed, anti-elegies refuse the closure of believing in the everlasting soul and instead incessantly mourn the dead body. Whereas Tennyson's *In Memoriam* tries to maintain the Christian idea of the soul, Thomas Hardy forwards the elegiac-conversation by challenging long-held beliefs with his evolution of the form: the anti-elegy.

CHAPTER 4. THE ANTI-ELEGIAC BODY OF EMMA HARDY

Thomas Hardy used his successful career as a novelist to establish himself as an eminent Victorian. His famous works *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure* all aided Hardy's vocation, cementing his status as an English man of letters. While his novels are indeed remarkable, Hardy is a substantial figure for this discussion due to his transformation into a proto-Modernist poet during his elder years. His marriage to Emma Gifford in the late nineteenth century created the dire yet necessary experiences for Hardy to craft some of the most haunting English elegies of all-time: *Poems of 1912-1913.*

Following Hardy's "The Going" in his sequence comes "Your Last Drive," a modest reflection on Emma's last return from visiting the town before her death. Hardy recalls:

> Here by the moorway you returned,
>
> And saw the borough lights ahead
>
> That lit your face—all undiscerned
>
> To be in a week the face of the dead, (1-4).

Hardy recalling the individual's face while she was alive suggests there is an inherent reduction into Bataille's "thingness" after death. This is best expressed when Hardy remarks on, "the face of the dead" (4). The phrase reflects on how all corpses seem to share the same, solemn expression of a deep sleep, implying the bodies of the dead are interchangeable. Hardy notices this sameness in death rather than suggest her uniqueness lingers in the infinite as seen in traditional elegies. There is no clear nor romanticized phantasm which emerges from Hardy's anti-elegies. The anti-elegy rejects the idea of the phantasm because the latter is a biased construct of the elegized by the bereaved poet. R. Clifton Spargo confirms, "the other has been

made familiar, objective, and knowable by being put in relation to a history of others like him or to the mourner's historical memory of her, […] Anti-elegy opposes itself to this, the ordinary progress of our grief" (136). With Bataille's theory in mind, the phantasm is a commodified idealization of the lost other, built by nostalgia this unreciprocated desire. Therefore, the anti-elegy recognizes the phantasm as a selfish, unethical concept for the bereaved to move more quickly towards closure.

The speaker's sadness regarding the loss of his dead beloved's individuality is highlighted again when he recalls her remarks on the town's streetlights. Hardy writes, "And you told of the charm of that haloed view / That never again would beam on you" (5-6). The beginning of the fifth line implies the speaker misses the voice of his love by remembering how she told him about the angelic streetlamps. At the same time, the articulation of the streetlamps as angel's halos is ironic considering the secularism of the poem.

The speaker's disbelief in the soul is replaced with concentration on mourning the physical body. He remarks, "And on your left you passed the spot / Where eight days later you were to lie" (Hardy 7-8). Here Hardy's skepticism of the afterlife appears in the form of harsh irony by regarding on the spot where soon the mourned would be buried. The poem's focus on the burial mound makes sense as the grave houses the decaying body of the speaker's love. Therefore, the burial mound of the elegized in "Your Last Drive" is truly her final resting place, justifying the speaker's detailed attention to her grave. His rejection of belief in the soul and his acceptance of death's definiteness is best captured in the last line of the second stanza. Hardy confirms, "You soon would halt everlastingly" (12). On one level, this brief line addresses Emma's frequent movement away from her husband during the last years of their marriage and the subsequent ceasing of her travels when she became too ill. The obvious reference of course is

to her halting forever in death. There is no evidence or suggestion of the afterlife in this anti-elegy, explaining the title "Your Last Drive." The individual dies with the body, anticipating Hardy's pessimistic outlook on life and cynicism regarding the hereafter.

Hardy's pessimism continues into stanza three when the speaker recalls his last look at her face when she was still alive. He recalls what her face said to him, "You may miss me then. But I shall not know / How many times you visit me there" (19-20). The speaker eerily ventriloquizes the dead to berate himself for not loving her more. He does this because he knows a corpse cannot truly appreciate how many times it is visited. These lines speak to the logic of anti-elegy as the soul and the body are one, leaving only the decaying corpse to mourn. She will never know how much he misses her as there is no everlasting soul present in this poem, only the speaker's bitter articulation of her voice used to mock his little hope. This clarifies the speaker's final dismissal of her ghost or rather phantasm because he recognizes it is an artifice of his creation, "You are past love, praise, indifference, blame" (30). For the speaker of this poem, his beloved is simply dead with no afterlife thus he must move past these feelings for her.

"Your Last Drive" succeeds as an anti-elegy because the poem concentrates on the finitude of the human body to reveal the precious value of a human life. Like Milton and Tennyson, Hardy has a moral vision with these poems by recognizing the value of human life. Unlike those traditional elegists, however, Hardy appreciates the value of human life in a secular way. For Hardy, the value of human life is in the intricate precious moments that make up an individual's life, such as his wife's last drive or her love of riding horses, because he recognizes her death as a finality. His recognition on the conclusiveness of death explains his focus on mourning her body. The corpse is accurately depicted as the tragic lifeless body of another, not

the former vessel of a soul. The poem bitter-sweetly recalls the last ride of the dead other while acknowledging her ceased existence.

Like “The Going,” there are no selfish depictions of her soul fleeing her body to join the infinity of God, only grief over losing her. The dutiful grief of “Your Last Drive” makes sense considering the anti-elegy aims to ethically mourn someone by never forgetting them. The form tends to recall precious memories of the deceased other to acknowledge their finitude in the body: which “Your Last Drive” executes perfectly by focusing on Emma’s last trip home. The next selection, “Rain on A Grave,” also emphasizes the body as a place of mourning, but now with full attention to her burial mound. Unlike Milton and Tennyson’s elegies which mourn male figures, Hardy’s poems mourn a female not connected to some grand Christian meta-narrative and therefore they are a more modest as poems of mourning.

“Rain on A Grave” begins with a quip that firmly bonds the dead beloved’s identity to her buried body. Hardy writes, “Clouds spout upon her” (1). This line, though brief, establishes the anti-elegiac tone of the poem by saying her dead body is her, whereas in traditional elegies the speaker articulates the dead other’s soul in the afterlife. For example, Lycidas’ body rests in the sea while his soul is noted to haunt the shore in Milton’s “Lycidas”. Similarly in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, Arthur Hallam’s corpse is carried over the ocean to be buried in England, but the speaker claims to know that Hallam’s soul is one with Jesus Christ. Here in Hardy’s poem the identity of the individual is inherently bound to her physical form: the buried body is the “her” being rained upon, with no presence of the spirit nor soul.

Following the establishment of the body and individual as one, Hardy inserts some bitterly ironic lines regarding her corpse laying underground as the rain pours down from above. He recalls she was, “Her who but lately / Had shivered with pain” (4-5). These lines again affirm

the connection between the body and her identity as the speaker recalls how she used to shiver with pain when the rain hit her body. Now she shudders no more because she is dead and lays in the grave. This spurs the speaker to romantically proclaim, “Would that I lay there / And she were housed here!” (19-20). With this, the speaker reinforces the definitiveness of her death while acknowledging the finitude of his own body before turning to another proposition. He continues, “Or better, together” suggesting they are better off dead together where they are, “Exposed to one weather” (21-3). The speaker proposes he and his beloved are better off to bear the rain together in death where they can feel nothing, in contrast to being alive together and shivering. Likewise, the speaker implies he would rather they be together in the nonexistence of death than separated by from each other with one alive and the other dead. Like the previous anti-elegies discussed, there is no mention of the afterlife here, only the finality of death. All that is for certain is the totality yet tenuousness of their physical forms, hence his focus on her grave and his wishes to be with her.

The final stanza is a realistic yet eerily wholesome view of the decomposition of the body via a reflection on how much she (Emma) loved daises and in turn how much the speaker loved her beyond measure adding, “[Loved w]ith a child’s pleasure / All her life’s round” (35-6). This final remark is ironic because her body now feeds the daises she loved so much, so the speaker says, “Till she form part of them” which includes a possible play on words with the usage of “till” as in tilling the ground for growing crops (32). Specifically, her decomposition provides what the speaker calls “the sweet heart of them” (33). Indeed, her corpse pumps the bodily fluids into the ground providing hearty nutrients for the roots of the daisies and the grass above her. In “Rain on A Grave” there is no glorious turn to consolation, only the harsh reality of the individual’s death and reduction into a thing meant for consumption. Hardy’s poem “Lament” is

worth exploring for this discussion as it is a four-stanza poem that acknowledges the corpses home in a coffin.

The last lines of "Lament's" first stanza suggest the woman of the poem is imprisoned as the speaker writes, "In the jailing shell / Of her tiny cell" (10-1). While being confined to a small space is certainly uncomfortable, Hardy reveals a morbid truth regarding her imprisonment when he reveals, "She is shut under grass," (19). Like the rhetoric of "Rain on a Grave," the usage of "She" implies the beloved other's body and identity are inherently bound to the now buried body. However, Hardy uses the first stanza regarding a missed party and the misdirection of imprisonment to build dramatic tension before revealing she has died, a direct parody of the turn towards consolation in traditional elegies.

Because she is dead and buried, the speaker asserts "[She is] Powerless to know / That it might be so" (21-2). She is powerless because her body contains no energy to function nor think about the things above her. There is no way for her to know that parties and dinners go on without her because she is dead and buried, affirming there is no afterlife. Hence why the speaker says this about her. He proclaims, "Wholly possessed / By an infinite rest!" (32-3). Upon first reading, this exclamation woefully recognizes the finitude of her body rotting in the ground with no visions of the afterlife. At the same time, the line mocks Christian belief in the infinity of individual identity via the soul and God. With no belief in the soul nor any presence of a phantasm here in the poem, the mourned other is inherently tied to the decaying body in the ground. Though she is dead, she is still deserving of lamentations hence the simple title of the poem. Likewise, the speaker closes his lament and affirms the definitiveness of her death by saying, "To all done and said / In her yew-arched bed" (43-4). She has died and been reduced to

thingness. Her body is now an object like the coffin she is placed in, and so the speaker has nothing left to say.

In "Lament," the speaker acknowledges that his dead beloved is never coming back nor does her soul live with God. Therefore, his lamentations or rather his mourning must continue to grieve over losing her as an individual. This anti-elegy is simple in structure, yet it achieves the profound mission of mourning the other via acknowledgement of the body and individual identity as one. With every reading of the poem the speaker's mourning recommences and the life and death of the individual is mourned. Hardy's anti-elegies hyper-focus on the fragile mortality of the human form while combatting the "thingification" of Emma Hardy by incessantly mourning her body.

Unlike elegies of the past, Thomas Hardy's sequence of poems cannot find solace in believing Emma lives forever through God or the beauty of nature. His lack of faith is spurred by the publicized horrors of modernity: imperial violence, extreme poverty, and grotesque working conditions under capitalism which comes back later to haunt Sassoon, Bataille, and Jarrell in their respective works. For Hardy and other writers like him, if God were real these terrifying conditions would not exist, so an afterlife cannot exist, and therefore Emma dies and rots with her physical form. Jahan Ramazani's text *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*, comments on Hardy's anxieties related to modernity. Ramazani remarks, "Hardy may well be the first English poet to display fully the psychological burdens, anxieties, and contradictions that attend secular mourning and the act of writing about it" (49). Hardy's *Poems of 1912-1913* help spur the evolution of understanding death as something sacred, noble, and admirable to tragic, meaningless, and therefore much more worthy of mourning. His anti-elegies expose death as the grand finale for the living, hence his never-ending mourning over Emma's

body. Ramazani also studies Hardy's elegies in his article "Hardy's Elegies for an Era: 'By the Century's Deathbed'." Ramazani explains, "[Hardy] surveys such organic recycling with blank indifference. Death does not move him; it is a mere redistribution of living matter" (132). Likewise, Sassoon, Bataille, and Jarrell understand death as an ultimate reduction of the human organism into nothingness. Hardy's anti-elegies for Emma, with their fatalist overtones and mode of eternal mourning, impact the anti-elegiac rhetoric of Siegfried Sassoon. This is made clear as Sassoon kept a copy of Hardy's selected poems in his pocket while serving in the trenches of the First World War and later dedicated his second book, *The Old Huntsman*, to Hardy (Ghosh 133). Through his poetry, Hardy influences Sassoon to carry on and evolve the anti-elegiac form with his war poems containing the conventional emphasis on the body.

Although Hardy's *Poems of 1912-1913* do not look like Sassoon's war poems, they share a deep structural relationship with them via the anti-elegy. Both Hardy's elegies to his wife and Sassoon's war poetry deny the idea of the soul and focus on the fragility of humanity. For example, the preceeding moment from Sassoon's "The Redeemer" contains the body-centric language which defined Hardy's anti elegies. Sassoon remarks:

> [The flare] lit the face of what had been a form
>
> Floundering in mirk. He stood before me there;
>
> I say that He was Christ; stiff in the glare (12-4).

These lines capture the speaker witnesses the helpless flailing of a fellow soldier who has fallen in the mud. Curiously, he says the face "had been a form," implying the dehumanizing conditions of the war have tortured this soldier's body past the point of recognition as human. Thus, the speaker connects the soldier to Christ as both are sentenced to die for the sins of

humans. Whereas Christ sacrifices his body for the sins of all Christians, this soldier, standing in for all soldiers, gives his body to be slaughtered for the glory of the English nation. Furthermore, Sassoon's usage of "He" glues the soldier's identity to his broken body which is what Hardy does with his usage of "She" in his anti-elegies above. The earth's consumption of the soldier's body is a bizarre mockery of the Catholic tradition of consuming Christ's body through bread and wine. Although the lamented subject is not dead, the gruesome war setting destines the soldier to be sacrificed for England, hence the speaker always already mourning his body by connecting him to Christ. In the logic of this anti-elegy there is no afterlife nor some foreign field that can forever be England, only sorrow over the deteriorating body of the soldier as Christ. Unlike the story of Christ in the Bible, here there is no chance of an afterlife nor resurrection, only the decay of the body and the total loss of the individual who could have been the savior of the world. In the end, Sassoon's "The Redeemer" laments the slow death of a Christ like soldier in the mud, a fate undeserving of any human let alone the son of God.

As we can see the form of Sassoon's war poem structurally resonates with Hardy's anti-elegies, but there is a more immediate influence. In many ways, Sassoon's war poetry is a commentary and expansion of the anti-war, anti-elegy par excellence, Hardy's "Drummer Hodge." Hardy's poem anticipates the deeper anti-elegies of his *Poems of 1912-1913* and gives another anti-elegiac model for Sassoon and the other English war poets to follow.

Hardy's "Drummer Hodge" opens with, "They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest" (1). As seen in "Your Last Drive" and "Rain on a Grave," Hodge's body and identity are inherently tied in the eyes of the speaker. The dead body of Drummer Hodge is simply one of the many casualties of war hence his body being "thrown" into the ground "Uncoffined" (2). Hodge's body is simply a lifeless object, another colonialist warfare casualty statistic. The violent

throwing of the body into the ground is ironic considering the previous line's usage and placement of "rest." While the usage of the word "rest" harkens back to the Christian ideals of death, the poem acknowledges the truth: individual identity and the body are one rendering Hodge utterly dead. His body is now an object for the earth to slowly reclaim, so "They" simply throw him into the ground as if his body were rubbish.

Hodge's identity being tied to his corpse is further conveyed by the poem's acknowledgment of "his mound" (6 emphasis mine). The line better ties Hodge's identity to his body and even the earth, invoking the classic verse from Genesis once again. Yet, in this poem there is no spiritually driven turn to consolation, only cynical humor regarding the loss of Drummer Hodge and the brutal treatment of his body. Hodge's youth is noted in the second section of the poem, where the speaker notes with pity, "Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—" (7). He then proceeds to list things the youth never got to experience because his life was cut short (9-10). All these things are potential objects of precious memory that will never be noted by Hodge as he was killed in the name of imperial expansion on the veldt of South Africa.

As noted above in the discussion of Hardy's anti-elegies to his wife, the typical turn to consolation is replaced with a turn to harsh pessimism. He remarks, "Yet portion of that unknown plain / Will Hodge for ever be" (13-4). Indeed, Hodge will remain in the ground for some time before his bones disintegrate and no trace of him remains. Though the speaker states otherwise, Hodge's corpse will not last forever as he was not embalmed, nor even given the pleasure of a coffin before he was chucked into the ground. At the very least, Hodge's decaying "breast and brain" will provide nourishment to the soil, finalizing his de-evolution into a consumable object. Possibly Hodge will provide some nourishment, "to some Southern Tree," (16). This is the second time in one of Hardy's anti-elegies that there is noticeable growth from

the burial mound with the first being discussed above with “Rain on A Grave.” Certainly, the attention of detail to the grave makes sense considering the anti-elegy’s plight for remembrance of the departed, recognizing the finality of the body, and therefore detailed recollection of the resting place.

The comprehensive description of Hodge’s grave mimics real directions a person could give to someone’s grave, as if the reader too could physically travel there to mourn over Hodge’s grave. The convincing directions are fitting for the anti-elegiac form considering its mission of incessant mourning. Still, the commodification of the young soldier’s corpse is told as the anti-elegy unfolds. Hardy’s later anti-elegies contained in *Poems of 1912-1913* are certainly informed by the earlier anti-elegiac rhetoric of “Drummer Hodge” which explains why his later anti-elegies, though they have little to do with war, are so transferable to the anti-elegies of Sassoon and other English war poets. For example, Hardy expands on the themes of hyper-focus on the corpse and its housing in the earth in “Rain On a Grave.”

Noticeably, each stanza of “Drummer Hodge” mentions “foreign” or “strange” star arrangements. These references to constellations are akin to the following lines from “Rain on A Grave” when Hardy writes, “And daises be showing / Like stars on the ground,” (30-1). Regarding both instances in “Drummer Hodge” and “Rain on A Grave,” consider the fact that a buried corpse will not see the real stars of the atmosphere, or anything anymore for that matter, but only the star-like, sprouting seedlings above their faces giving vegetation to earth above them. Regardless, Drummer Hodge is eternally no more.

Following this close reading of “Drummer Hodge” we can trace Hardy’s anti-elegiac rhetoric to the war poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. Moved by Hardy’s emphasis on the identity tied to physical body, Sassoon crafts his anti-elegies to expose the brutal destruction and continuing

commodification of individual's corpses by the technological advancements in warfare. Sassoon's poems reject the nationalistic ideals of a glorious death found in patriotic poems like Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier." Sassoon is crucial for this conversation based on a direct transfer of anti-elegiac knowledge from Hardy to Sassoon regarding the body, identity, and death.

CHAPTER 5. ANTI-ELEGIES BY A FOX-HUNTING MAN

Siegfried Sassoon criticizes the nationalistic sentimentality of poets such as Rupert Brooke using his brutally ironic anti-elegies. For poets like Brooke, death is a sacred transcendent experience to become one with the English nation and God. Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" best highlights this rhetoric of death as a patriotic, romantic transformation of the soul in an elegy he wrote for himself at the start of the First World War. Brooke remarks, "That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England […]" (2-3). These lines depict death as a transcendent state of being. The poem positions the individual's corpse as an everlasting monument to not only the individual who gave his life, but to the English empire as well. These are the lines that fuel the nationalistic war machine which churns out an entire generation of inspired young men, willing to sacrifice their bodies for the glory of the nation.

For Siegfried Sassoon, the human body is a sacred and finite thing as inspired by his readings of Hardy, hence their poems detailing the tragic brutalized corpses of fallen soldiers. Unlike Brooke, Sassoon's anti-elegies reveal how modern industrial warfare destroys the individual body through apocalyptic firepower. Because of this, Sassoon and his fellow soldiers witness the obliteration of human bodies beyond recognition, which strengthens Sassoon's secular feeling picked up from his readings of Hardy. Sassoon's anti-elegies show a loss in the belief in death as a glorious transcendent state after seeing their comrades exploded across French fields and only pieces of their bodies remaining. In this way, their anti-elegies intentionally show the ugliness of death and how modern warfare has de-sanctified the body, all the while grieving the loss of their comrades via mourning the destroyed bodies of nameless soldiers.

For instance, Sassoon's poem "A Night Attack" takes the reader through a trench landscape filled with soldiers' corpses. The poem is anti-elegiac in its way of taking the reader slowly through a hellish trench system to show the atrocious living environments and obliterated bodies of fallen soldiers. In this way, the poem aims to clearly illustrates how modern warfare reduces individual human bodies to interchangeable cogs in a capitalist war machine as the poem opens with a gruesome scene for the senses. Sassoon writes, "The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still, / And I remember things I'd best forget" (1-2). In contrast to Sassoon's "The Redeemer," the speaker of "A Night Attack" cannot apply a face nor a name to the dead because all he can identify them by is the dreadful odor of their decomposing corpses. This vile opening image mocks the flowery, environmental language at the beginning of "Lycidas" where Milton writes, "Yet once more, O ye laurels and once more / Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere" (1-2). Whereas Milton repeatedly calls upon the laurels, myrtles, and ivy with benevolence, Sassoon satirically evokes the appalling environment he is forced to suffer through during the First World War. The corpses in Sassoon's "A Night Attack," resurface like the seasonal plants of Milton's "Lycidas," only to be stomped back into muddy earth to be forgotten. The stark contrasting image from the traditional elegy aids in the identification of Sassoon's poem as an anti-elegy. Sassoon's play with scent could also be a parody of the industrial smells and sights which covered the urban skies of England in the late nineteenth century, though in the fighting fields of the Great War the main industrial product was corpses.

The continuous churning of the war machine produces more wounded, dying, and dead. The speaker vividly recalls, "The spouting shells dig pits in fields of death, / And wounded men are moaning in the woods" (11-2). This first line hints at the fact how constant shellfire into No Man's Land churned up buried corpses to the surface in a grotesque parody of the Christian

resurrection. Meanwhile, wounded men hiding in the woods to avoid further devastation of their bodies seem to celebrate, though truly lament, the surreal uprooting of their dead brothers in arms. Though the corpses return to the surface, they are eventually tramped back deep into the mud by running feet. The speaker remembers one mistreated body in particular, "Heedless of toiling feet that trod him down. / He was a Prussian with a decent face" (30-1). Despite the appalling neglect of his corpse, the Prussian soldier appears to retain his recognizable face as metaphor for his individual humanity. However, the Prussian's face is incessantly trampled on, sending the individual's corpse deeper into the mud to be wholly consumed by the earth.

Indeed, death tends to come quickly to all those fighting in the First World War. The speaker notices, "Men stooped and shovelled; someone gave a grunt, / And moaned and died with agony in the sludge" (39-40). The dead are not even given a decent burial despite the company of fellow men, unlike the poetry previously explored. Their corpses are forgotten to sink ever deeper into the mud, awaiting to be uncovered by a shell, or the remains are pushed into sandbags and used to support the ever-collapsing trench walls. The sacredness and individuality of the human body, previously seen in traditional elegies, is lost with all the dead in the mud of World War One. In this way, the poem tries to mourn all corpses, no matter their nationality.

Sassoon ends his poem remarking on a fellow British soldier shot by a sniper. Sassoon writes:

I found him there

In the gray morning when the place was held.

His face was in the mud; one arm flung out

As when he crumpled up; his sturdy legs

Were bent beneath his trunk; heels to the sky. (Sassoon 53-7)

Sassoon focuses on a corpse mawkishly portrayed to be ascending in reverse, not unlike the faux resurrection of the carcasses thrown upwards by shellfire earlier in the poem. The emphasized usage of "him" and "his" implies yet again the fundamental connection of the individual to his body with no language of the soul nor afterlife present. The reverse ascension of the corpse reinforces the fact there is no hereafter nor piece of a foreign field that will forever hold this soldier. Especially with the incessant shellfire bringing up corpses and destroying them even more.

Using the sickening landscape of "A Night Attack," Sassoon acknowledges the brutalization of every soldier's body. The infinite number of nameless, faceless, dead are mourned in totality in this anti-elegy for all fallen combatants of the First World War. At the same time, the absolute obliteration of the human body by capital fueled war machines annihilates the identity of the individual soldier. Thus, there are no idyllic spirits nor phantasms that emanate from this poem, only the tortured bodies the speaker smells, sees, and hears from the dead and dying men surrounding him. The purpose of this anti-elegy to mourn the devastating loss of countless young men while revealing the reality of death created by unhinged capitalistic warfare. The massive amounts of colonial capital created the advanced technology specifically designed for killing efficiently therefore creating the horrific circumstances forcibly witnessed by Sassoon and shared in his war poetry. Interestingly, "A Night Attack" is a bit reminiscent of Hardy's "Your Last Drive" with Hardy opening the poem by remarking, "Here by the moorway you returned, / And saw the borough lights ahead" (1-2). Hardy establishes the poem as a recollection which connects it to the beginning lines of Sassoon's "A Night Attack"

and how he remembers things he'd best forget (2). Whereas Hardy recalls a scene from memory as a means for him to bracket his grief, Sassoon uses his poem to bracket his disbelief and shock at the horrors he has seen.

Sassoon tries to use his anti-elegies as an attempt to save the truly human from the inhumanity that Bataille sees as inevitable in modern industrial capitalism. Sassoon's war poems, with their deep attention to the details of the elegized corpse, try to show how the human is sacred, but at the same time he shows how they have been turned into things. Sassoon tries to show the soldiers' lives as invaluable and meaningful. He uses his war poetry to rage against his fellow humans' devolving into things. Sassoon's anti-elegiac war poetry fights for the sacred space of the human, but in the same breath it tells of humanity's ultimate reduction to the state of things. Which is what Bataille warns us of in his The Accursed Share, following the things he witnessed as he came of age during the First World War and after surviving the inconceivable atrocities of World War Two. Sassoon's poem "The Rear Guard," for example, is an intense study of a discovered corpse with an intense focus on the deterioration of its flesh: its reduction into thingness.

"The Rear Guard" opens with a solider making his way through the trenches at night. He writes, "Groping along the tunnel, step by step," (1). The unguided movement forward satirizes the light at the end of a tunnel a person supposedly sees and moves toward during the moment of their death. Yet, there is little light here besides the torch he carries so all the fumbling soldier notices is waste on the ground. He comments, "Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know" (4). The lack of certain identity regarding these pieces of trash imitates the inability of soldiers to identify the ruined corpses of their comrades. In the view of Bataille, the corpses of the fallen

soldiers have become things, objects, like the rubbish the quoted line makes note of. People, reduced to commodities, are used until they too become shapes too vague to recognize.

The lost soldier proceeds through the blinding darkness and confusing trench system until he inadvertently finds a familiar figure. The speaker recalls, "Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw someone lie / Humped at his feet, half-hidden by a rug" (8-9). It was not uncommon for soldiers to sleep upright or laying down in the trenches, at the risk of tripping one of their comrades or dying in the night from a haphazard shell. The lost soldier asks the sleeping man for guidance, but he gets no reply causing him to angrily react. Sassoon relates the scene:

> Savage, he kicked a soft, unanswering heap,
>
> And flashed his beam across the livid face
>
> Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore
>
> Agony dying hard ten days before.
>
> And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound. (14-8)

The ghastly revelation about the supposed sleeping soldier mimics the generation of Englishmen who had a similar horrifying reality exposed to them regarding the evolved nature of warfare in the early twentieth century. The technological advancement of weaponry in the First World War created heaps of corpses, like masses of garbage, like the one witnessed here. The poem builds incredible tension as the lines move from emphasizing the face, eyes, and fists before settling on the fatal wound that ended this man's life ten days prior. The lacking individual characteristics of these bodily features suggests the corpse is purposefully anonymous to stand in for all the disregarded corpses found in the trenches of the First World War. The lack of individuality of the

corpse speaks to the corpse's reduction to the status of thing initiated by the first reference to the body as a "heap." The slow movement towards the killing wound means to highlight the ghastliness of war, and the fourth stanza focuses on these aspects of the dead to mourn the unknown soldier and all the others like him. The mention that he died ten days before implies his body was tragically forgotten and discarded like the trash found in the second stanza. The neglect of his corpse and solidification of his status as thing is emphasized by him being covered with a rug, another discarded object like the corpse itself, rather than being given a proper burial. Those who threw the rug on him likely knew the impossibility of proper burial in the trenches, so his comrades threw anything they could find over him: concluding his de-evolution into Bataille's thing.

The subsequent alienation felt by soldiers who saw the dreadful mistreatment of their comrades' corpses yet could not speak of their fears is reflected in the first line of the final stanza. Sassoon observes, "Alone he staggered on until he found" (19). The lost soldier remains isolated even when he finds a dugout full of friendly soldiers or when he returns home. The abrupt ending of the line with no punctuation suggests there is little to no hope to be found like the lack of respect for corpses on the battlefield. The proceeding lines reveal even the bodies of the living are equally as ruined as those of the dead. Sassoon writes, "Dawn's ghost that filtered down a shafted stair / To the dazed, muttering creatures underground" (20-1). The lost soldier finally finds some light, some hope, only to meet the deteriorated bodies and minds of soldiers in a dugout. The usage of "muttering" reflects how veterans of the First World War were unable to communicate the terrible things they saw in combat when they returned home to their families. Like the dead soldier of the previous stanza, the living too must bear the physical and mental trauma of modern combat and industrial capitalism. The last line of the poem reads, "Unloading

hell behind him step by step." (25). Henceforth they carry the traumatic weight of seeing their bodies reduced to rubbish, yet they carry onward as witnesses in mourning against the religious nationalism which initially spurred to enlist, as seen in Brooke's "The Soldier."

Following the unrelenting reality check of Sassoon's "The Rear Guard," perhaps the most Hardy-esque anti-elegy of Sassoon's war poems is "Glory of Women." The poem speaks directly to the women on the English home front. On the surface, the speaker seems to be noting the contributions of the women, but the abrupt turn to brutal irony in the last half of the poem characterizes this poem as anti-elegy. The irony begins when he chides, "You make us shells. You listen with delight, / By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled." (5-6). Indeed, the women are back in England working in the factories making artillery shells for the men to use in battle. However, those very same shells they make are creating corpses or shells out of the men's bodies which are then lost to the treacherous mud. The speaker accuses the women of loving to hear about these purportedly courageous, but truly horrid stories from the front. In the language of Bataille, the women on the home front are part of the problematic system that reduces human bodies to things, or more specifically shells. The play with the usage of "shells" matched with the ripping satire of cheerful wartime propaganda supplements the merciless mission of this anti-elegy.

The poem then turns back to the battlefield to a retreat of British soldiers that the women praise so much. Sassoon chides, "When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run, / Tramping the terrible corpses—blind with blood" (10-1). The hellscape of the frontlines breaks the minds and bodies of the living, as highlighted in "The Rear Guard," only for them to trample the broken bodies of the fallen in this brutal twist of irony. The retreating soldiers' disregard of the corpses they trample makes sense considering their reduction into thingness. The usage of "blind with

blood" mocks how these young men were initially blinded mentally by their forebears' jingoistic rhetoric and sent to war, only to be physically blinded by the blood of their bodies as they are torn to shreds by machine gun bullets and artillery shells. In another grotesque situation of brutal irony, the soldiers are killed by objects created by their fellow humans which are meant to reduce their bodies into insignificant things. The brilliant slant rhyme of run and blood mocks the basic rhymes of patriotic poetry from the time while mimicking the slant rhymes of Hardy in his anti-elegies. The anti-elegies distinctive focus on the human body continues with the final image of the poem:

> O German mother dreaming by the fire
>
> While you are knitting socks to send your son
>
> His face is trodden deeper in the mud. (13-5)

Sassoon opens with a wholesome image of a German mother by the fire only to turn to the broken body of her son in mockery of the turn towards consolation in traditional elegies. The usage of "face" rather than "body" implies that the majority of the German's corpse has been obliterated. The identity of the body as German highlights how the catastrophe of capitalistic warfare is not solely a British issue, but a horror forced upon all men of all nations. A deeper irony is his face being the only true identifier of his individual body, yet it sinks deeper into the mud never to be found. The poem is a larger anti-elegy in scope in aiming to mourn all the destroyed and lost bodies of the First World War. Sassoon speaks to not only the camaraderie shared in the trenches, but the shared fragility of life in all humans. He silently rages against modern capitalism's reduction of the human body to thingness via focus on the German's lack of a visible face, the main identifier of his status as an individual. Despite the face being

acknowledged as a German's it is still doomed to be consumed by the earth. All shared the capitalist-funded nightmare of the First World War, but there were millions who did not survive the war. The diminishment into Bataille's thing haunted not only the soldiers on the battlefield, but the civilians on the homefront as well. Bataille argues that the commodification of the human body is a cultural, now a global, phenomenon.

The Great War lasted only four years, but its memory still haunts us. Soldiers charged through hellish landscapes filled with the desecrated corpses of their comrades. Death became another form of industry in battlefields of the First World War. The grueling month-long battles between trenches traumatized a generation who was raised on nostalgic tales of Napoleonic warfare. Siegfried Sassoon and other Englishmen who managed to survive the First World War, raised on Victorian ideals regarding death, could not fathom the mass desecration of corpses. Fallen soldiers were abandoned in No Man's Land, used as supports in trench walls, or simply forgotten in the sinking mud in the battlefields such as Passchendaele. Claire Buck reflects on mourning in First World War English Elegies. She informs, "Who we mourn and how we mourn are part of the production and reproduction of structures of gender, class, sexuality, and nationalism" (Buck 431). The obliteration of human bodies by shells terrified Christians who feared for their loved ones' souls while structuring the Lost Generation's understanding of death. The Victorian aesthetics and Christian romanticism surrounding death as an ideal was demolished by the combat experience of the First World War.

Though a Victorian himself, the anti-elegies of Thomas Hardy contain the pessimistic outlook on death, carried forward to a new generation by Siegfried Sassoon's war poetry. Sassoon certainly has no ideal Emma in his poetry, yet Hardy's anti-sentimentality, fatalistic outlook on death and rejection of the Christian afterlife seeps into the language of the war poet's

anti-elegies to show and protest the dehumanizing effects of late capitalistic warfare, highlighted above with Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share*. While for Hardy the anti-elegy is a means to forever mourn the ideal memory of his wife, Sassoon's poems are meant to protest the neglection of the human body during industrial wartime. However, Sassoon's anti-elegies eventually become a part of the ethical problem. The rejection of the soul and the lack of individual identity for the mourned corpses in Sassoon's anti-elegies render the elegized bodies as consumed objects. The lifeless corpse can no longer fulfill a purpose in a capitalist system and therefore is a devoured entity.

Although the anti-elegy began as a refusal of closure to protect the memory of the dead, the form devolves into a vile, diminishing appraisal of humanity under the ever-seeing eye of global capitalism. Bataille confirms this when he writes, "The multitude has surrendered to the somnolence of production, living the mechanical existence—half-ludicrous, half-revolting—of things" (134). Beneath the critical lens of global capitalism, all humans are reduced to the status of thing. They are no longer the infinite beings created by God nor do they live forever in the immeasurable beauty of nature. Humans are now simply flesh and bone, doomed to their fate as commodities and must enact said consumption upon themselves: that is what Bataille considers the accursed share. For Bataille, capitalism cannot allow for the human body to become sacred or else humanity will recognize its self-oppression and the system will be overthrown. Capitalism must always adapt whatever opposes it into another means of subjugation, including the anti-elegiac form, which gives birth to Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner."

CHAPTER 6. THE ANTI-ANTI-ELEGY?

Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" delivers a highly post-modernist anti-elegy using just five intense lines. The title of the poem itself already has reduced the mourned individual to be remembered only by occupation. This point connects to Bataille's The Accursed Share because in a capitalist society humans are considered valuable only when they are producing another object. This observation is ironic because the product a ball-turret gunner produces is flaming scrap metal and human corpses. The ball-turret gunner defends his plane from attacking fighters in a plexiglass sphere armed with dual machine guns in the bottom of the plane. The gunner hunches upside down in his turret and revolves around with it, like a fetus in a womb (Ferguson 1553). The poem's publishing date of 1945 historically contextualizes the piece at the end of the Second World War. Troops were moved and death was dealt with unfathomably speeds by further technological developments created by capital. Veterans of the war saw incomprehensible forms of aerial combat in contrast to the World War One dogfights in small, fabric winged fighters. World War Two bore massive metal flying machines which brought mass destruction to the enemies in the sky and on land below. Our collective consciousness is still haunted by the massive loss of life in the bombings of Dresden, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima. A small acknowledgment of that inconceivable violence brings us to our final anti-elegy. Jarrell writes:

> From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
>
> And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
>
> Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
>
> I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

The first line of the poem reflects how from the moment people are born; the indoctrination of the state begins. Specifically, in Bataille's view, the programming of the capitalist state to view other humans as consumable commodities begins with birth, just as this line begins the poem.

The anthropomorphizing of the bomber with the use of "belly" in the second line uses language that invokes cybernetics: the study of relationships between humanity and technology. The wording implies that though we as humans have reduced ourselves to commodities, we still give machines humanistic properties to regain some of our own lost subjectivity using the systems we create. The line also puts forth an image of the organic ball-turret gunner in a metallic womb further cementing the inherent connection between man and machine in the poem. However, the usage of "fur" suggests the gunner still retains animalistic properties. As Bataille warned in his *The Accursed Share*, humans like the gunner are destined to consume or be consumed, kill or be killed, like animals in the wild living to Darwin's principles. Thus, we must continue reading the poem to determine the fate of the gunner.

The stated distance from the ground in the third line mimics the burial mound imagery from Thomas Hardy's anti-elegies. Whereas his poems focused on the corpse six feet beneath the ground, Jarrell's poem focuses on the soon-to-be corpse of the gunner six miles above the ground. The latter half of the line regarding the dream of life inversely acknowledges the death filled reality of warfare which is embodied by the following line detailing anti-aircraft fire and incoming fighter pilots committed to destroy the bomber and the gunner with it. Though the former remains, the latter is no more with so little of his physical form remaining in the plexiglass sphere, they have no choice but to wash him out with a hose. The corpse which was necessary for mourning in the anti-elegies of Hardy and Sassoon is totally obliterated and

consumed by the end of Jarrell's poem. Still, in the last line, the voice of Bataille's thing appears as the sacredly human fights to retain status as individual as thing. The last line gives subjectivity to the status of thingness with a voice that is aware of its own annihilation. The short length of poem as speaks to the diminishing value of the human body under capitalism while revealing the powerful means of destruction created by capital.

There is nothing physically left to mourn by the end of "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," so there is nothing left to say. This abrupt ending to the poem is unlike the prolonged romantic grief of Milton and the seemingly epic length verse of Tennyson, even the sense of witnessing the remains of what formerly was a person in Hardy and Sassoon is no longer here. Instead, the dead speak for themselves in Jarrell's poem to dispute their deterioration into thingness. The consistent "I" throughout the poem implies that there is a trace of individual subjectivity that remains after "thingification." To protect itself from being totally consumed by capitalism, the anti-elegy evolves into an anti-anti-elegy: a poem spoken by the dead for mourning the dead.

Ultimately, the anti-elegy morbidly forecasts death as a deterioration into thingness though it initially proclaimed to ethically mourn the loss of another human being. Likewise, Thomas Hardy and Siegfried Sassoon's anti-elegies inadvertently aid in industrial capitalism's objectification of the human body despite their initial moral aims with their poems. Capitalism's assimilation of the anti-elegiac rhetoric of Hardy and Sassoon confirms humanity's diminishment into commodity, which is fully understood as Georges Bataille's "thing" in The Accursed Share. Using Bataille's text as theoretical lens, we can understand Randall Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" as the apogeic form of the anti-elegy. Through Jarrell's poem, the anti-elegy mourns its initial promise of ethical mourning over the commodification of

the human body in our global capitalistic society. Jarrell's anti-elegy mourns the reduction of human beings to nothingness. Despite objectification of the elegized other, Jarrell's poem gives subjectivity back to the ruined corpse using speech as means to protest its reduction into thingness, thus creating the anti-elegy for the anti-elegy.

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VITA

K. MATTHEW BENNETT

Education:
M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, May 2022
B.S. History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, May 2020
A.S. History, Northeast State Community College, Blountville, Tennessee, May 2018

Professional Experience:
Composition Instructor, East Tennessee State University
Fall 2021-Present
Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University
Fall 2020-Spring 2022
Writing Tutor, Center for Academic Achievement, East Tennessee State University
Fall 2020-Spring 2021
Archival Intern, Birthplace of Country Music Museum
Summer 2017

Publications:
Bennett, Matthew. "The Roadmap: Exploring T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land with World War One Literature." Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University.

Honors and Awards:
Outstanding Student Honor, History, Northeast State Community College, Spring 2018