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Forging Intertextual Encounters with Death: Medbh McGuckian's *The High Caul Cap*

When constructing each of her poems, the contemporary Northern Irish poet Medbh McGuckian selects, modifies, and juxtaposes extracts from other (often unacknowledged) texts. “I like to find a word living in a context,” she has stated, “and then pull it out of its context. It’s like they are growing in a garden and I pull them out of the garden and put them into *my* garden, and yet I hope they take with them some of their original soil, wherever I got them.”¹ In a sense, this is a much a matter of “graft” as of “craft”: what is taken from the quoted text takes root and grows in the quoting text. Her appropriative methodology allows her not only to inscribe within her own poems the psychodramas of female literary authorship, and thus learn from the experiences of her foremothers on how to circumvent patriarchal power, but also to write from an enabling distance about the conflict in Northern Ireland.²

However, in her 2012 collection, *The High Caul Cap*, she adapts texts and engages in ekphrastic rewritings in order to come to terms with the loss of her mother, Margaret McCaughan.³ Although the sources themselves compensate for the silencing propensities of grief, their collage-like arrangement within her poems results in a nonstandard collocation of phrases that mimics the symptoms of pathological grief, thereby intimating to the reader its disordering and dislocating nature. Her elegies are not just significant for the ways in which they seek to overcome both the traumatic nature of her grief and the limitations of the poetic medium in the face of death; her elegies also constitute self-reflexive meditations on her own poetic practices. In her work, McGuckian adopts, co-opts, and appropriates sources in order to engage in a *paragone* with precursors. She seeks to exorcise the anxiety of influence and exercise the creative reformulation

1. “I Am Listening in Blank and White to What Speaks to me in Blue: Medbh McGuckian Interviewed by Helen Blakeman,” *Irish Studies Review* 11, 1 (April, 2003), 67.

2. For a full dissection of these claims, see Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Medbh McGuckian: The Poetics of Exemplarity* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 2012).

3. Medbh McGuckian, *The High Caul Cap* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2012); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (HCC).

of enabling poetic credos, manifestos, metaphors, and other poetic formulations. Death, as an experience that is ultimately unknowable, has long been a thematic concern for McGuckian. In a 2003 interview, she observed that

Death is always a crux around which I write. It's the only thing you can be sure about, but it also brings you up so short against everything. Death is what poets are supposed to define, not deal with death or even understand or to cope with it, and not give answers but just meditate, not on death but on life as curtailed by death, or broken by death and whether it is just broken or whether it is broken completely.⁴

Clearly, McGuckian considers it intrinsic to her vocation as a poet to consider issues of loss, grief, and the concomitant consolations of religious belief; time and again she has explored the functions and limitations of conventional rites and obsequies. But her own mother's demise resulted in a period of intense mourning and disabling sorrow for the poet, during which "she experienced a sudden flurry of nightmares":

It can be very frightening when someone has died and then you begin to dream about them, or think about them in your subconscious. . . . When someone dies, you naturally fear for them. You've got their body in a grave somewhere, and that helps you to locate them physically. But then you ask yourself: are they in heaven or are they in hell?⁵

Two core components of the syndrome known as "traumatic grief"—"separation distress" and "traumatic distress"—can be discerned here: first, the poet's intense preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased and second, her irrational searching for the lost object of her affection.⁶ Yet both are displaced into the realm of dreams because the death has not been psychologically processed; it has not been "experienced," as such. As Susan Lieberman states, "the traumatic response blocks the integration of the experience and the comfort of placing it, psychically, in the past"; instead of retaining a coherent and stable memory of the event, "the individual is left to perpetually relive the event as an unresolved present."⁷ At this stage, McGuckian can only address the death oneirically because, as Roger Luckhurst outlines, the traumatic event, by definition, "cannot be organized on a linguistic level and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level,

4. McGuckian, "I Am Listening in Black and White," 63.

5. McGuckian in J. P. O'Malley, "Bringing a Female Poet's Touch to the Memories of Her Mother," *Irish Examiner*, 9 March 2013, available at <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsfilmstv/books/bringing-a-female-poets-touch-to-the-memories-of-her-mother-224921.html>.

6. A. Pilokonis, et al., "Consensus Criteria for Traumatic Grief," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 174 (January, 1999) 67.

7. Jessica Catherine Lieberman, "Traumatic Images," *Photographies* 1, 1 (March, 2008), 88.

as somatic sensations, behavioral re-enactments, nightmares and flashbacks.”⁸ With the passage of time, the trauma has been managed and its effects have become dissipated, yet in poems such as “Ascent to Perception Temple” (HCC 60), she strives to convey the nature of the trauma experience:

Black pourings from the heavenly blackboards,
lukewarm sun darkening so quickly, a trembling
radiant maroon. There is a welcome at the door
to which no one comes, a clumsy body holding back
an airy spirit, withered by the intense gleam. (HCC 60)

Although the opening sentence's atmospheric and eerily hallucinatory imagery conveys a nightmare world, the sentence itself is made up of disparate fragments and lacks grammatical sense. The poet is mimicking the form and symptoms of trauma: within such a trauma text, what Gabriele Schwab calls “the buried ghosts of the past” emerge “to haunt language from within, always threatening to destroy its communicative and expressive function.”⁹ Death, of course, is a “limit experience,” but so, too, is the resulting traumatic grief. For Van Alphen, trauma is symptomatic of “the impossibility of experiencing, and subsequently memorizing, an event”; it is, fundamentally, a “failed experience.”¹⁰

To write about and convey the nature of traumatic grief poses a fundamental problem for the poet. As Sandra Gilbert states, to write about trauma is “a hopeless effort at a performative act that can never, in fact, be truly performed.”¹¹ The trauma narrative must be as “unsettling as the event itself.”¹² As such, it needs to “go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study,” and needs to “internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within [its] underlying sensibilities and structures.”¹³ Thus, semantic confusion and grammatical instability are not proof here of a failed poetic sensibility; the “mistakes” are functional. Although authors cannot represent trauma *per se*, they can, through narrative distortions, “mark it in its very impossibility.”¹⁴

8. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), 148.

9. Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 49.

10. E. Van Alphen, “Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory and Trauma,” in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Johnathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 26.

11. Sandra Gilbert, “Writing Wrong,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 14, 1 (1999), 109.

12. Sien Uytterschout, “Visualised Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 56, 1 (2008), 64.

13. Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3.

14. Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

Though we have, in this opening stanza, a haunting “airy spirit,” the language itself is haunted from within: the unrepresentable trauma is to be found in the distortions, gaps, and fragmentations of the language, with the use of the present continuous tense intimating trauma’s unresolved state. McGuckian’s poem does much more than this. It presents her search for her mother; it reaffirms her belief in the afterlife; and it forges an alliance with artists who find inspiration from their encounters with death.

The title comes from a poem of the same name cited in full within Richard Serrano’s *Neither a Borrower: Forging Traditions in French, Chinese and Arabic Cultures* (2002), a study that looks at “texts that self-consciously forge new traditions by introducing disparate elements from alien traditions in the hopes of creating a tradition entirely new.”¹⁵ The poem in question is by the eighth-century Chinese poet, Wang Wei, and consists of four couplets, which, like McGuckian’s opening stanza, are devoid of human subjects and temporal demarcation. The first three are marked by a strict parallelism whereby each of the Chinese characters of the couplets’ first line corresponds with, and reflects, the characters in the succeeding line, forcing the reader to look backward to confirm this reflection; the pattern is broken in the fourth. The reader is thus said to move “from dwelling emptily to contemplating to receiving non-rebirth without the obligatory backward glance.”¹⁶ The poem’s innovatory adaptation lies in the way that it shows how a Chinese poem—and by extension its reader—can achieve *wu sheng* (or non-rebirth) without recourse to Buddhist doctrine.¹⁷ McGuckian, for her part, adapts Wang Wei’s poem by transposing it into a Judeo-Christian setting.

For her encounter with death, McGuckian seeks solace and authority from twentieth-century precursors. The source text is Edward Hirsch’s *The Demon and the Angel*, a book that views art as having “a dream power that radiates from the night mind.”¹⁸ Art, he argues, is born from the struggle with “the vital spirits of the imagination,” figures known as angels or demons, who only appear “when the self is imperiled and pushes against its limits, when death is possible” (*DA* xii–xiii). Hirsch invokes the *duende*, Lorca’s “term for the obscure power and penetrating inspiration of art” (*DA* 10) to explain the “risky and deathward leaning” propensity of key twentieth-century writers and artists. McGuckian’s poem endorses this attitude toward art. The collage of quotations in the opening stanza enacts a tension between three disparate positions and dispositions:

15. Richard Serrano, *Neither a Borrower: Forging Traditions in French, Chinese and Arabic Poetry* (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2002), 4.

16. Serrano, 106.

17. Serrano, 107–08.

18. Edward Hirsch, *The Demon and the Angel: Searching for the Source of Artistic Inspiration* (New York: Harcourt, 2002), ix; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*DA* ix).

a lasting, though troubled faith in divine immanence; grief and despair at the apparent "death of God"; the consolatory affirmation of the imaginative powers of the poet. This notion of struggle and self-doubt is introduced by the poet's citing of the example of Jackson Pollock's monochromatic "black pourings" from 1951 to 1953, which are said to constitute "confrontations with darkness . . . the darkness of introspection [and] self-encounter" (*DA* 177); they are struggles "with one's medium and oneself" (*DA* 177).

Other lines outline the nature of the struggle. For example, it was as "an inhabitant of darkness" that the Spanish poet Rafael Alberti states that he wrote "The Angel of Numbers," which is cited by McGuckian in the opening line, "spurred on by a trembling"; in the text, he writes of "a cold lifeless universe" in which the heavens exist in a "cloudy, metaphorically uncertain" state (*DA* 129): the "heavenly blackboards" have been erased. Similarly, Paul Klee's "Miss-Engel," referred to in the stanza's closing lines, is a "solitary, half-transformed loner"; neither fully angel nor fully human, Miss-Engel is a figure caught in a liminal state and distant from the divine realm. In such modernist texts, Hirsh contends, "the angels have become signs of the human distance from that promise, guardians of a gate that never opens, and never will open" (*DA* 136). By contrast, the "radiant maroon canvases" of the nondenominational Rothko Chapel in Houston, mentioned in line three, are said "to have the aura of the sacred, the immanence of a revelation" (*DA*, 179). Finally, although for Wallace Stevens such immanence is not possible, in his poem "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," he begins by having one of the *paysans* suggest that the supernatural world exists in a line cited by McGuckian: "There is / A welcome at the door to which no one comes?" The remainder of the poem, voiced by an earth-bound "Angel of Reality," hints that, while the heavens are now vacant, the world needs the Angel "to see the world anew." As Stevens states, "The point of the poem is that there must be in the world about us things that solace us quite as fully as any heavenly visitation could" (*DA* 154).

"Ascent to Perception Temple" is in and about crisis, specifically that turning-point that is decisive of recovery or death: the consolatory vision of an afterlife is in doubt, and the imaginative powers of the artist are questioned. The poet has found her mother, but the opening lines of the second stanza presents the deceased as an earth-bound, solipsized figure, marked by a forbidding and unapproachable interiority. She remains poised on the threshold between the earth and the spiritual world: "she seems to be shuddering / herself to pieces in the mid-reaches of eternity." The continuous present tense of "shuddering" and the lack of an end-stopped line here both reinforce the sense of a terrifying, unresolved hiatus. Yet if the lines' depiction of a prolonged and violent liminality appears disturbing, the conjoined sources nonetheless suggest a counter-reading, one which presents the substitutive, sublimatory satisfactions of art.

Invoking Rilke's angels, who inhabit "the mid-reaches of eternity," McGuckian reminds the reader that although the other world is ultimately unknowable for humankind, nevertheless the artist is "at home in the infinite realms" (DA 133). Indeed, Hirsch cites Rilke's description of the angel as "that being who guarantees the recognition of a higher level of reality in the invisible" (DA 134), a realm of art and not religion.

This vision of the artist is confirmed by the opening part of McGuckian's line as it seeks to counteract the denigratory view of another art form—that of dance—as a "floor-bound, inward-looking" (DA 194) activity. The line refers to an almost dionysian climactic solo in *Deaths and Entrances*, a ballet choreographed by Martha Graham and inspired by the lives and works of the Brontë sisters, in which Graham appeared "to be shuddering herself to pieces." It is a moment of triumph in which the performer connects with the *duende*. To emphasize her point, McGuckian invokes three further exemplars, this time from the realm of music: Pastora Pavón, Charlie Parker, and Robert Johnston. If "scorched throat" and "Nightingale without eyes" may at first seem to connote artistic failings, the fragility of the artist or the punishing, injurious nature of art, the works of each performer are, in fact, celebrated in Hirsch's work as the sublime, solitary, and strange (if not estranging) encounters with the *duende*. McGuckian, then, constructs an encounter with the dead mother to alleviate her anxiety at being unable to "locate" her. The mother, for her part, is imaginatively transformed into a composite of three angels by Paul Klee: *Angel Dubiosus*, *Angel*, *Still Female*, and the angel from *Late Still Life*. These angels inhabit an intermediary realm; they are held in transition and are unable either to reach back to the comfort of the earthly world, or achieve solace in the divine.

The problem for McGuckian, however, is not just that she does not know whether her mother is in heaven or in hell. Rather, her attempt to move from loss to consolation through art—through the encounter with the *duende*—has resulted not in healthy mourning, but in melancholia. As in traditional elegies, the "consoling sign" of the artefact carries "in itself the reminder of the loss on which it has been founded."¹⁹ The repeated word "still" in the titles "*Still Female*" and "*Late Still Life*" carry both a temporal and a spatial meaning that suggests duration, tranquility, and perhaps petrification. Mourning is, according to one critic, "that process by which the subject relinquishes a loved object by draining or displacing the object-cathexis."²⁰ What the poem displays, by contrast, is a

19. Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 5.

20. Sharon Willis, "Le Vice-consul and L'Amour: A Word in Default," in *Critical Essays on Marguerite Duras*, ed. Bettina L. Knapp (New York: G.K. Hall, 1998), 128.

poet who is unable to let go or to acknowledge the loss of her mother. Instead, she initiates a fixation on the lost love object, a prolonged, melancholic attachment to an ungrievable loss, which holds the mother in stasis. Such a process can be seen in many of the poems from *The High Caul Cap*.

In "The Ocean River," for example, McGuckian self-reflexively uses one of the earliest known instances of intermediality in Western literature, Homer's long passage in book eighteen of *The Iliad* depicting the shield made by Hephaestus for Achilles, in order to assuage feelings of loss by granting the mother the solidity and timelessness of a work of art (with the poem thus functioning both literally and figuratively as a "shield"):

The tireless sun has already been made to sink,
shrouding itself in fiery bronze beside the moving field
of a reed bed. The earth has darkened to look like earth
that has been ploughed, although it is gold.

A double stillness which occurs nowhere else
surrounds the metal field ditch, its poles
of silver, fence of tin, a pasturing place
by a river sounding echoes of her personal angel. (HCC 67)

The lines cited here present a tension between nature and art: the vitality and generative aspects of the former ("tireless sun"; "earth / that has been ploughed") are in danger of being supplanted by the powerful forces of the latter. While artifice appears to match the elemental nature of the sun ("fiery bronze"), it is marked by a form of timelessness connotative of death-in-life ("shrouding"; "stillness"). As in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," wherein the natural body is transmuted into "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make," the apparent attractions of eternal life are figured here as delusory.²¹ But reading the poem alongside its sources produces a different reading. The lines and images come from John A. W. Heffernan's *Museum of Words*, a critical examination of ekphrastic practice, which argues that ekphrastic poetry is "paragonal" in nature because it (implicitly or explicitly) enacts "a struggle for dominance between the image and the word."²²

In writing a poem about a work from one of the sister arts (painting, sculpture, etc.), poets attempt to appropriate the "visual other" and "transform and master the image by inscribing it" within their text.²³ As such, the ekphrastic

21. W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), 302.

22. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashberry* (1993; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (MW 1).

23. Grant F. Scott, "The Rhetoric of Dilatation: Ekphrasis and Ideology," *Word & Image* 7, 4 (1991), 302.

poem constitutes an effort “to reproduce the supposed advantage of the rival art in its own medium, which is of course to deny or steal that avowed capacity.”²⁴ In “The Ocean River,” the poet follows Homer’s example by embarking upon a form of “notional ekphrasis” (the representation of an imaginary work of art) to escape the time-bound world of language. Heffernan notes that Homer’s account of the shield “precludes any formulation that would equate sculpted stasis with a timeless, transcendent peace securely distanced from all the shocks of contingency” (MW 18). Indeed, the opening lines of McGuckian’s poem cite the key example used by Heffernan to support his argument: “When Hephaestus begins his work by putting “the tireless sun” (*eelion t’ akamanta*) on the shield along with the earth, the sky, the sea, the full moon, and all the constellations, he seems to place his work beyond time and change”; however, “the tireless sun has already been made to ‘sink in the depth of the Ocean’” (MW 18). McGuckian’s text, like Homer’s account, is replete with moments of what Heffernan terms “representational friction”—those instances that occur “whenever the dynamic pressure of verbal narrative meets the fixed forms of visual representation and acknowledges them as such” (MW 19).

The second line cites an instance from Homer in which we see the convergence (or blurring) between the representational medium and the referent: “the soldiers from the city ‘sat down in place shrouding themselves in the fiery bronze (*aithopi kalko*)’.” As Heffernan states, this description of a detail from the shield may “refer to represented shields, to the metal used to represent them on *this* shield, or to both” (MW 20). Such friction is also said to occur “when the poet’s language registers the difference between the medium of visual representation and its referent” (MW 19), and McGuckian cites from one such instance: “In the ploughing sequence, we are told that ‘the earth darkened behind [the ploughmen] and looked like earth that has been ploughed / *though it was gold*’” (MW 19). Although McGuckian’s poem, like Homer’s, admits the differences between the verbal form and the shield, and notes the effort that goes in to make them seem equivalent—thereby exposing the artifice (and perhaps the failure) of the ekphrastic enterprise—it nevertheless goes on to cite from the “only manifestation of what might be called perfectly sculptural stasis” in the Homeric description of Achilles’ shield, which “comes in the reaping passage, where the figure of the king stands happily in silence holding his staff—a double stillness that occurs nowhere else” (MW 21). Coupled with the use of the present continuous tense (“shrouding,” “moving,” “pasturing,” “sounding”), the invocation of such a “stillness” may well attempt to accord her poem the timelessness of the metallic shield. But

24. Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 1.

the text McGuckian uses to construct her poem exposes the “representational friction.” Like her mother, Homer’s poem is time-bound. The self-reflexivity does not, however, lead the poet to refrain from constructing other ekphrastic elegies, as the desire for prolonged attachment and the denial of death’s hand are too great.

In “The Meaning of Margaret’s Hands” (*HCC* 38–39), for example, she frames the mother as the object of her artistic gaze, presenting her as a spectacle and granting her the permanence and immobility of a painted object. The poem provides an extraordinary portrait of the mother figure. At once objectifying and objectified, the mother allows her breasts to be “searched for” and treats them as if they were divorced from her bodily self. Considering the lost love object—or the about-to-be-lost object—as an artefact may well suggest both denial on the author’s part and a compensatory aesthetic whereby the mother becomes immortalized and not subject to change. Nevertheless, in this instance of ekphrasis also involves a tension between empowerment and disempowerment.²⁵ An ekphrastic text is not always simply an exercise in imitation or aesthetic comparison; rather, when “the self is understood to be an active, speaking, seeing subject, while the ‘other’ is projected as a passive, seen, and (usually) silent object” (*MW* 3), ekphrasis plays out a scenario of cultural domination. “The Meaning of Margaret’s Hands” complicates this, as it takes as one of its sources Stephen Kern’s *The Culture of Love*, a study of the changing ways in which gender has been encoded and read in the nineteenth and twentieth century.²⁶

[Schiele’s nude] is twisted forward and down
 into herself (*CL*102);
 The weight of her torso is supported like a
 wheelbarrow (*CL* 102);
 “letting itself be searched for” (*CL* 80); women’s
 breasts
 shift (*CL* 81); In the enormous dress, with all its
 ruches, puffs,
 bell-skirts (*CL* 80); one carries them like a
 purse (*CL* 85);
 the outline of his ribs (*CL* 73); scarlet letter
 which screens any
 gaze on it (*CL* 81); rests them on a pillow (*CL* 85);
 peach (*CL* 85); with a dilapidated pillow (*CL* 94);

She is twisted forward down into herself,
 the weight of her torso supported like a
 wheelbarrow.
 Her breasts, that let themselves be searched for,
 shift and swing in the enormous dress
 with its puffs and bell-skirts.
 She carries them like a purse in which
 the outline of her ribs screens any gaze
 upon them, she rests them through the peach
 of her heart on a dilapidated pillow. (*HCC*, 38)

25. As W. T. J. Mitchell argues, “the treatment of the ekphrastic image as female and other is commonplace.” W. T. J. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 168.

26. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*CL*).

McGuckian's borrowings enable us to view the mother-figure sympathetically, as one who has been delimited and circumscribed by societal conventions and restrictions. The artworks referenced shift between moments of self-realization, self-denial, and self-displacement, showing the poet's awareness that the body—particularly the female body—has been the source and site of spectacle and suppression. The opening lines of the stanza quoted above describe Egon Schiele's *Kneeling Model with Deeply Bowed Head* (1915), a painting that depicts a self-absorbed, self-pleasuring woman. In it, female sexual desire is neither circumscribed nor marked as shameful; the painted figure connotes self-determination and empowerment. Yet, although Kern notes that "the desire of Schiele's woman is manifestly observable, fully centred in and for the woman herself" (CL 103), it is still presented by a man and subject to societal gaze. The following three lines cite from Robert Musil's epic *The Man Without Qualities* in which the female body (and its clothing) is the locus of male scrutiny and subject to patriarchal control: the woman's clothing is an "almost impenetrable chalice loaded with an erotic charge and concealing at its core the slim white animal that made itself fearfully desirable, letting itself be searched for" (CL 80). Thus, the female figure is forced to be both chaste and on display.

The third artwork referenced, Picasso's *An Anatomy* (1933), presents an alternative view: with its "lexicon of sexual-anatomical transpositions that seems to have been created by some sex-crazed gadgeteer" (CL 85), it rejoices in surrealist pansexuality and freedom. This position is quickly countered by the fourth work referred to, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the breast "is held firmly in place and in turn galvanizes the moral framework of Hester Prynne's entire social world" (CL 81). Such puritanical and governed sexuality is then contrasted by Salvador Dalí's *The Spectre of Sex Appeal* (1932), referred to in the stanza's final lines, which reject idealized beauty in favor of a Freudian pre-genital sexuality. Yet, despite the empowering alternatives offered for female sexuality, McGuckian's ekphrastic text frames and contains the mother and it is the poet who ultimately depicts her as fixed and without agency: "her hands are taken from her, handed over" (HCC 39).

The same desire to forestall death and immortalize the mother through the processes of art exhibited in "The Ocean's River" and "The Meaning of Margaret's Hands" is manifest in "Seated Woman" (HCC 40), but the degree and quality of attachment to the lost love object is significantly different. Here, the source text is the art critic Robert Hughes's *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists* (1991).²⁷ The mother is pictured as cold, forbidding and distant:

27. Robert Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists* (1991; London: Vintage, 2004); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (NC).

"cheek, [...] the clenched hand, and the soft
quatrefoil that rests
on boots like a leather butterfly" (NC 42);
"remains hard to
love" (NC 48); "heartless sometimes" (NC 101);
"painted fruit on
the coffee cups" (NC 77); "sullen red" (NC 112);
"mallows [. . .]
seem fossilized" (NC 95); "gold couch" (NC 95).

Her cheek clenched like a leather butterfly,
she remains hard to love, heartless sometimes
as fruit sullen red on coffee cups, as mallows
fossilized in silver wire against the gold couch.

If portraiture is a drama of self-presentation, then the self being constructed and exhibited in this text is almost devoid of life. The mother is silent ("All but speechless") and immobile; she, like the natural elements listed, such as the butterfly and the fruit, has been transformed through art into an inanimate, yet enduring, artefact. However, the urge to preserve the mother is countered by the equally powerful necessity to break free of this attachment because, although the "seated woman" in this collection represents an author-figure, she is framed by and perpetuates an outdated restrictive gender ideology. The figure recurs in "On Cutting One's Finger While Reaching for Jasmine" (HCC 32) where she is pictured "Ramrod straight in her harp-backed / horse-grey chair." The inter-text McGuckian uses in this poem—Dena Goodman's *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*—presents a tension between two competing visions of female authorship.²⁸ The figure seated "ramrod straight" in her chair is the sitter for Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's *Portrait of a Woman* (1787), who is pictured writing a letter to her children. Goodman reads this as not only restoring "to her the agency of the pen" but as placing "writing itself at the centre of the modern vision of womanhood" (BWL 19). Yet if the writing of the letter "is emblematic of her as a (modern) woman and mother" (BWL 47), what she is actually shown writing in the poem reflects Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of little girls' supposed "natural repugnance" to writing (BWL 113):

"she incessantly made O's large and small, O's
of all sizes,
O's inside one another, and always drawn
backwards" (BWL 113);
"Her beckoning finger" (BWL 41);
"on fine paper (gilded and musked, if one
wishes)" (BWL 26)

She incessantly made Os, Os of all sizes,
Os inside one another, always drawn backwards
in lilac ink by her beckoning finger,
on fine paper, gilded and musked.

In *Émile*, Rousseau recounts the story of a girl whose favorite letter was "O" and who would make "O's of large and small, O's of all sizes" until, "happening one day to see herself in a mirror while engaged in this activity, and finding

28. Dena Goodman, *On Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (BWL).

that this constrained posture was not graceful for her,' she threw down her pen and refused to write any more, until the necessity of marking her laundry forced her to do with a needle what she could not do with a pen" (*BWL* 113). The quotations do not suggest empowerment; rather, the mother is infantilized and the letters themselves suggest her nullified existence. Indeed, the mother is not an active subject: she rejects writing as an activity and is depicted as a static object, "gilded and musked."

A subsequent poem, "The Spirit of the Mother" (*HCC* 42–44), presents a further ekphrastic depiction of the mother figure, but it also does so with a key difference that intimates an important shift in McGuckian's conception of the mother. The source text for these lines—Leo Steinberg's "Resisting Cézanne: Picasso's *Three Women*"—provides the key for reading the specific gestures adopted by the mother figure.²⁹

how "too far" (*CP* 18); as early as late (*CP* 20)
a notch of blue sky (*CP* 14); blue shadows on
breast (*CP* 18); blouse pinned by a ruby (*CP* 47);
"proud and pleatless dress" (*CP* 66); the low
table bearing
common fruit (*CP* 18);
no round body is thinkable (*CP* 76); this side
of the
silhouette (*CP* 75); hunched, sightless figures
(*CP* 80);
bedded down (*CP* 78); full-blown brooder
(*CP* 80);

lifted elbows (*CP* 80); the peaked elbow (*CP* 75);
soaring elbow (*CP* 80); hoisted elbow (*CP* 80);
swathes the head (*CP* 80); Discharged from
a difficult crouch (*CP* 80);

How too far, as early as late,
the notch of blue sky shadows her breasts with
blue,
her blouse pinned by a ruby, her proud and
pleatless
dress, the low table bearing common fruit.

No round of body is thinkable
this side of the silhouette,
hunched, sightless figure,
bedded-down, full-blown brooder.

Her elbows are lifted, peaked elbow,
soaring elbow, till her hoisted elbows
swathe her head, discharged
from a difficult crouch.

The phrase "full-blown brooder" intimates something beyond a mere copyist or objectified automaton; reminiscent of Rodin's "The Thinker," the image suggests that the mother enjoys a rich interior life. In a collection populated, as Borbála Faragó notes, "by images of loss, blindness, illness, and other types of atrophy," the positive description of the mother with a 'soaring' elbow, countering her depiction as an entrapped, "bedded-down" figure, comes as a surprise.³⁰ It is part of a reassessment (and renegotiation) of her relationship with her mother:

29. Leo Steinberg, "Resisting Cézanne: Picasso's *Three Women*," in *Cubist Picasso*, ed. Anne Baldassari (Paris: Flammarion, 2007); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*CP*).

30. Borbála Farragó, *Medbh McGuckian* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2014), 154.

My mother was a very proud and difficult woman. Growing up, I found I could not talk to her about anything that was going on with me emotionally. But in these poems I am able to do that. I address her as if she was very open, and could relate to me in the way that I would have wanted her to.³¹

The “peaked” and “hoisted” elbows are Cézannesque leitmotifs associated with “pathos and female sexual aggression”; the pose in his paintings are struck “as a provocation that tempers bland nakedness into a weapon” (*CP* 80). Steinberg’s essay, which provides a painstaking genetic study of Picasso’s 1908 painting, *Three Women*, demonstrates how the Spanish artist sought to overcome the influence of his precursor (and contemporary), and argues that “Picasso’s problem in 1907–08 was not merely to assimilate what Cézanne had to teach, but not resist him” (*CP* 75). Picasso transforms Cézanne’s gesture to allow the three painted figures to become “a psychogram of ‘the shaping of human life’” (*CP* 79). The painting becomes an allegory concerning empowerment and the emergence of sexual identity: as Steinberg states, in *Three Women* “the expressive charge of the pose is transformed by being assigned to hunched, sightless figures”; thus, discharged “from a difficult crouch, the gesture becomes one of yearning, of protesting an inhibiting grip” (*CP* 80). Picasso borrows from Cézanne in order to assuage an anxiety of influence and create something new, whereas McGuckian’s intermedial text takes from Picasso (by way of Steinberg) in order to deal with her own paragonal struggle—her relationship with the mother. Death has allowed a period of reflection on the mother’s legacy and on the mother-daughter relationship, and in “The Spirit of Mother,” the poet acknowledges her mother’s independent, vital spirit. Yet, while the ekphrastic method enables her to overcome the representational difficulty of how to approach death in her writing (“No round of body is thinkable / this side of the silhouette”), the elegy still frames the mother within the stasis and unchanging quality of a painting and seeks to forestall the inexorable encroachment of time, leaving the mother’s departure unacknowledged.

However, melancholia is finally transmuted to healthy mourning in a later poem, “Notebook of Sleeps” (*HCC* 69), which borrows from Eamon Duffy’s *Marking the Hours* and Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift*:³²

31. McGuckian, quoted in an anonymous review of *The High Caul Cap*, <http://www.culture-northernireland.org/features/literature/medbh-mcguckian-high-caul-cap>.

32. Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240–1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*MH*). Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*G*).

Happily still quick (*MH xi*);
"My mother departed to God" (*MH 44*);
'scented herbage of my breast" (*G 185*);
"the faint red roofs" of the mouths of the
dead (*G 182*);
Grave with its "leafy lips" (*G 181*);

Happily, still quick,
my mother departed to God,
her last sleep scented
by the herbage of her breast,
the faint red roof of her mouth
and her grave with its leafy lips.

The stark admission that "my mother departed to God" comes from an entry in a fifteenth-century Book of Hours. Such an inscription, as Duffy tells us, was not "a simple matter of mnemonics"; rather, it served as "a call to prayer, a reminder of the obligation to intercede for the repose of the soul of the person commemorated" (*MH 44–45*). Thus, the acceptance of her death comes with a call to action, and the second source is used to articulate what this entails. In the chapter of *The Gift* from which McGuckian quotes, Hyde argues that Walt Whitman finds his voice when he comes to accept "the decay of the body, the impermanence of identity, and the permeability of the self" (*G 182*). The image of "grass," which McGuckian borrows, is identified with the artistic medium, poetry: "scented herbage of my breast / Leaves from you I glean, I write" (*G 185*). For Whitman, the "grass over graves" and the "leafy lips" (*G 181*) connote the creative self: the grass does not simply sprout from the grave, it also speaks; "it is 'so many uttering tongues' emerging from 'the faint red roofs' of the mouths of the dead" (*G 182*). Here, finally, the mother's death is no longer associated with silence, representational crisis and denial. This poetry records and sings of the mother's death.

And yet, the recognition of her mother's death at first seems to bring little relief. In "The Blood Trolley" (*HCC 75–76*), for example, the poet continues to see her mother as if she were alive:

I recognized my mother, selling pickles,
sewing padded armbands, walking through
the Ghetto in a light-coloured coat,
wearing thin shoes with straps, with apples
and pears displayed in a window, waiting
for a coin – she hid her pot in fear when she saw me:
was she fetching milk, was there still milk?

Where was the rickshaw intending to bring
the child with typhoid? Only the better
sort of dead had boxes. The corpse-bearers
wore strange rubber gloves that seemed made
of wood. She was still wearing a blouse . . . (*HCC 75–76*)

Unlike many of the previous poems, this one has a marked narrative clarity: the speaker sees and follows the mother, and asks questions about her actions and motivations. However, the poem also has a nightmarish quality. The location

in “the Ghetto” and the presence of “corpse-bearers” with their strange regalia suggest a threatened existence. Clinical researchers have shown that “searching’ behaviors—including hallucinations, dreams in which the deceased is still alive, ‘seeing’ the deceased person in the street, and other illusions and misconceptions—are frequently reported during this phase [of bereavement].”³³ Not only does the poem’s speaker see the mother everywhere, both seem displaced to a time and location that neither had actually experienced, the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941. Hence, the nightmarish vision recorded above appears to replay the earlier crisis of “Ascent to Perception Temple.” McGuckian states in interview that “The Blood Trolley” uses “imagery from the Holocaust, putting my mother in this kind of hell,” and that while eventually “I have my mother in heaven . . . I have her going through hell first.”³⁴ The repeated scenes of hallucination and misrecognition mark out the poet’s state of mind as traumatized.

Remarkably, not only does she place her mother in this “hell,” but she, too, is located there. However, “I recognized” does not necessarily mean that the poet is in the Ghetto: she is, in fact, reading Günther Schwarberg’s *In the Ghetto of Warsaw: Henrich Jöst’s Photographs* (2001) and with each subsequent photograph she imagines that she sees her mother.³⁵ Heinrich Jöst was a sergeant in the Wehrmacht, stationed in the Warsaw suburb of Praga, and on September 19, 1941, he entered the Jewish Ghetto and documented what he saw behind the Ghetto walls by taking photographs with his Rolleiflex camera. The poem follows the photographic record chronologically and borrows from Jöst’s annotations of each photographic text: we move, with horrific inevitability, from the streets to the Jewish Cemetery.

It may seem highly problematic for a non-Jewish author to employ the Holocaust in this way. Like Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy,” McGuckian’s text could arguably be seen as co-opting circumstances of public genocide as an analogue for private grief; such texts have been criticized “for appropriating historical suffering for the sake of titillation and personal aggrandisement.”³⁶ McGuckian’s poem, though, is not using “historical suffering” as an analogue for the mother’s situation: the “recognition” of her mother and the supposed connections between public and private suffering are spurious—after all, the poem’s context is one of

33. Committee for the Study of Health Consequences of the Stress of Bereavement, *Bereavement: Reactions, Consequences, and Care*, ed. Marian Osterweis et al. (Washington: National Academy Press, 1984), 49.

34. McGuckian review of *The High Caul Cap*, <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/literature/medbh-mcguckian-high-caul-cap>.

35. Günther Schwarberg, *In the Ghetto of Warsaw: Henrich Jöst’s Photographs* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2001); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (GW).

36. Anthony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 28.

traumatic grief, one in which the speaker is not in full control. The poem also does not deploy Holocaust imagery for shock value, but rather, it is there to foreground the experience of shock." The choice of ekphrastic medium here is crucial: photography is perfectly suited to the depiction of loss and the resultant trauma. As Jessica Catherine Lieberman notes, there is a clear analogy between the structure of meaning in both trauma and photography: "Just as the trauma originates in an absence or non-experience, so too does a photograph." A photograph's meaning is to be found "not in the original event but in its subsequent reception and perpetual reinterpretation." Thus, she argues, there is "in effect, no original event or experience in the relevant sense. . . . the representational product delivers an experience that may never have registered in a subject's own psyche. The mechanical record cannot attest to an existentially incorporated real."³⁷

In comparing the latent elements of trauma and photography, Lieberman is building on Eduardo Cadava's contention that an image effectively effaces what it inscribes and that, as such, it both "bears witness to the impossibility of testimony" and "remains as a testament to loss."³⁸ A photograph, by definition, is a haunted text that resists closure. Thus, if the image's structure "is defined as what remains inaccessible to visualization," then this "withholding and withdrawing" structure "prevents us from experiencing the image in its entirety, or, to be more precise, encourages us to recognize that the image, bearing as it always does several memories at once, is never closed."³⁹ Each subsequent image of the mother, then, lacks closure. One of McGuckian's source texts is Shirley Mangini's *Marula Mallo and the Spanish Avant-Garde* (2010), which contextualizes and appraises the contributions of a lesser-known visual artist to the so-called "Generation of 1927" (the celebrated grouping of Spanish avant-garde artists of the early twentieth-century).⁴⁰ These lines mark a distinct breakthrough for the speaker and distinguish the poem from McGuckian's previous texts:

"I was led by Maruja through those
subterranean galleries
so many times" (*MM*101); her haunting world
(*MM* 101);

"Already the angels had started to slam their
wings" (*MM* 98);

she seems to be driving a vehicle with a large
skull in
front (*MM* 104); marshy riches (*MM* 105);

I was led by her through those subterranean
galleries many times, to her haunting world,
where already the angels had started
to slam their wings.

Now she seems to be driving
a vehicle with a large skull in front,
or walking a skull on a leash
through marshy riches. (*HCC* 76)

37. Lieberman, 89.

38. Eduardo Cadava, "Lapsus Imaginis: The Image in Ruins," *October* 96 (Spring, 2001), 49.

39. Cadava, 41.

40. Shirley Mangini, *Marula Mallo and the Spanish Avant-Garde* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*MM*).

The specific extracts cited refer to the (at times) stormy relationship between Rafael Alberti, a poet from Cadiz, and Maruja Mallo, the Galician surrealist painter, from 1925 to 1930. In particular, the quotations refer to the former's anxieties of influence and his attempts to stop enabling "guidance" shading into debilitating "control." Mallo's "haunting world" was oppressive for Alberti: 'Already the angels had started to slam their wings against my soul. But my angels were not the ones from heaven. They manifested themselves on land or in the most profound underworld of the earth'" (*MM* 98–99). The acknowledgement of the death of a relationship (and the death of a pernicious influence) serves as a corollary for the poet's realization that she must let go of the mother's influence. More important, the mother is not figured as an artwork, with its unchanging stasis; rather, she is an artist who, in the end, must go her own way. The *paragone* between the artists, and between mother and daughter, has concluded: Alberti maintains his independence and, with the apocalyptic "sewers" series of artworks (and all their "marshy riches"), Mallo becomes an independent artist who "belongs to no 'school' of painting" (*MM* 107).

In the poem that follows, "Receiving Non-rebirth" (*HCC* 77–78), the penultimate text of the collection, we return to one of the sources used for "Ascent to Perception Temple," Richard Serrano's *Neither a Borrower* (cited below as *NB*) and the poet is finally able to accept her loss:

it takes twenty years of journeying to match
seen traces with imagined (*NB* 27);

"blackened traces of the encampment on the
hard-packed
ground" (*NB* 27); "her abode at the two stony
meadows" (*NB* 27); "I stopped there, after
twenty years
away" (*NB* 27); a few black marks two decades
old (*NB* 27);

the silent traces offer no guidance (*NB* 27);
evidence of people, but no people (*NB* 110);
"The vestige of the abode [...] was hid from
you" (*NB* 28);
"firmly fixed" (*NB* 28); "until it spoke as if deaf
and
babbling like a foreigner" (*NB* 28)

It takes twenty years
of journeying to match seen traces with
imagined.

Blackened traces of abandoned encampments,
their abode on the hard-packed ground
at the two stony meadows: I stopped there
after twenty years away, at a few black marks
two decades old. The silent traces offered
no guidance to their location, evidence
of people but no people. The vestige of the
abode
was hidden from you, though firmly fixed,
until it spoke as if deaf, babbling like a
foreigner. (*HCC* 77)

The key tropes are borrowed from a text by the medieval Arab poet Buhurī (821–97) cited by Serrano. The lines are from a *qaṣīda*, which traditionally begins with the evocation of an abandoned encampment. The traveler in such a poem "recognizes the abandoned encampments as a sign of the loss of his beloved, a woman of another clan" (*NB* 26), and the speaker is left in uncertainty

as “the silent traces offer no guidance” (NB 27). The crisis is not simply emotional, arising from the loss of the loved one, but also representational (the failure of poetry): “he realizes that the traces do not speak to him in words, the raw materials of the poet, but speak as if unhearing, their language as difficult to comprehend as the babbling foreigner” (NB 28). The linguistic sign is merely a trace (“seen traces,” “Blackened traces”), in the Derridean sense, of that which it wishes to represent: “since the trace is not a presence but a simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site, erasure belongs to its structure.”⁴¹

Thematically there seems little difference here from the “Ascent to Perception Temple,” but the lines are neither fragmented nor distorted. They do not mark trauma; rather, suggest a coherent, ongoing journey. The text moves from Arab culture to Chinese culture in its depiction of absence and cites in full the following lines from Victor Segalen's *Stèles* (1912):

I will no longer possess
its hidden virtue and secret, but you will be
luminous, solid memory, petrified moment,
tall guardian of this—but what is it?
Already quarried and reduced to dust.
Already absorbed, already it ferments.
(HCC 78; NB 164)

Segalen's lines are his own attempt at intertextual reworking: *Stèles* constitutes the French poet's attempt “to remake Chinese stone monuments into a new genre of French poetry” (NB 146). His poems are not translations of the inscriptions found on ancient Chinese *stelae*: where *stelae* are “monuments, tombstones over past events,” Segalen's “*stèles*” are “markers of an ongoing process, of “l'instant perpétuel” (NB 164). Segalen's poems erase all specifics of time and place and move, by means of a series of negations (listing what will not be told), he comes to realize that “in committing the poem to writing he will lose the moment,” the “perpetual moment” which he wishes to preserve. That impulse to freeze time, to capture experience within a text, is precisely how McGuckian had been trying to deal with her loss. She sought, ekphrastically, to enshrine the mother within her text. But both poets admit defeat here. The “it” is left undefined and undescribed. Such a conclusion may seem to be despairing, but it points to the loved one's departure, the writer's acceptance of this, and an end to traumatic grief.

To fully understand the journey that McGuckian has traveled in *The High*

41. Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 24.

Caul Cap, one must note the dynamics behind a passage from her Forward Prize-winning poem, "She Is in the Past, She Has This Grace":

Who will be there,
at that moment, beside her,
when time becomes sacred,
and her voice becomes an opera,
and the solitude is removed
from her body, as if my hand
had been held in some invisible place?⁴²

The text is a proleptic elegy, a form of a "consolatory writing produced in anticipation of sorrow."⁴³ The speaker is concerned that the mother will have no one beside her at the moment of death and expresses this concern using the connective image of "hands": she needs to believe that she will be there, hand-in-hand, with the mother when the latter dies. She tries to maintain this connection after death in *The High Caul Cap*: in "Ascent to Perception Temple" the mother "retains her hands." But this assertion constrains the mother within a liminal position: she is neither angel nor human, belonging in neither this world nor the heavenly realm. In trying to immortalize the mother and fix her presence in "The Meaning of Margaret's Hands," we are told that "her hands are taken from her, handed over": the mother becomes objectified in the poet's denial of grief. In "The Spirit of the Mother," the mother-figure is granted far more agency as well as a full inner life—symbolized by the key gesture of empowerment: "Her elbows are lifted"—but she remains fixed within the ekphrastic text.

In her pursuit of the lost love object in "Receiving Non-rebirth," McGuckian has recourse to Buhturi's ekphrastic representation, amidst the ruins of a city, of a wall painting depicting "the Persians in full glory":

The eye describes them
as greatly alive, signalling with their hands,
silent. My uncertainty of them grows until
my two hands pursue and touch them
(HCC 77; NB 38)

Though she is still trying to "pursue and touch" the mother's hands, she adds the admission that "then they do not recognize my touch," thereby acknowledging a final distance between mother and daughter.

Throughout *The High Caul Cap*, McGuckian touches upon different types

42. McGuckian, "She Is in the Past, She Has This Grace," *The Face of the Earth* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2002), 81–82.

43. Patricia Rae, "Double Sorrow: Proleptic Elegy and the End of Arcadianism in the 1930s," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, 2 (Summer, 2003), 247.

and scenarios of *paragone*: Picasso's attempt to wrest free from Cézanne's influence; Rafael Alberti's desire to remove himself from Mallo's "haunting world"; Segalan's efforts at transforming *stelae* into *stèles*; the poet's own ekphrastic attempts at garnering the solidity and permanence of the sister arts for poetry. Each is put in service to a more fundamental *paragone*—the power relations inherent in the haunting relationship between mother and daughter—and within each poem, she co-opts and appropriates sources from her precursors in order to transmute her traumatic grief.

As Dominick LaCapra argues, the writing of trauma "involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and 'giving voice' to the past."⁴⁴ What we have seen is that McGuckian's mode of artistic production helps her to convey the nature of traumatic grief. Her use of quotations is radically disruptive and serves to mimic the symptoms of traumatic recall. Like trauma, intertextuality has, by definition, "a ghost effect": it is a form of haunting since the very presence of a quotation constitutes (and marks) the irruption of the past into the present.⁴⁵ That return of the past, in turn, initiates a fractured reading experience: the reader is forced to pause and read across texts, from the quoting to the quoted. In the process, the author can disrupt linearity, mimicking one of the prominent effects of trauma. Yet there is a clear progression in *The High Caul Cap*: we move from poems that adhere to Jahan Ramazani's concept of the "anti-elegy"—whereby the poet appropriates and resists "the traditional psychology, structure, and imagery of the genre" and produces "not so much solace as fractured speech, not so much answers as memorable puzzlings"—to poems that successfully translate grief into consolation.⁴⁶

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44. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 186.

45. Jay Clayton, "The Alphabet of Suffering: Effie Deans, Tess Durbeyfield, Martha Ray, and Hetty Sorrel," in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, ed. Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 54.

46. Jahan Ramazani. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1, 3.