'Stop All The Clocks': Elegy and Uncanny Technology

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Abstract

I examine subjective representations of time and space in elegy from the 17th century to the 21st century, focusing on how ordinary objects affect the elegiac environment. I argue that the defamiliarising of technological devices by the elegist creates uncanny sites of contact with the world of the dead. Using elegies by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath and Anne Carson, among others, I demonstrate a persistent motif of technological devices and scientific imagination in the genre. Stopping a clock interrupts the passage of time. Photographs create a static space where the past is present. The telephone allows connection to the dead. Studying the effects of these devices allows the interrogation of a critical narrative of shift from nature to science in the elegiac tradition, and the associated shift from healing to hopelessness, and emphasises the uncanny element of elegy and its impact on the space and time of mourning.

Key words: elegy, uncanny, technology, space, time, mechanism

Measures of uncanny space

The elegy can be read as a map that delineates the space of the living and the dead, and navigates the shifting and flexible space between past and present, memory and forgetting, consolation and grief. The speaker's emotion and memory shapes and inscribes the spaces of the elegy; in melancholic sites, the natural environment becomes destructive, and man-made structures are crumbling and shadowed. As a corollary to these spatial distortions, the passage of time in elegy can be stretched and hastened, made cyclical in accordance with the seasons, or circular through repetition; a moment can be preserved forever and notions of eternity in memory or afterlife can be challenged. These attempts to exert control over space and time are evident in the unearthly perfection of the pastoral tradition, for example, where the dead are located in a space governed by the muses and 'vegetation deities' (Sacks 1985: 19) of the classical world, and the dead body and the living are left behind in a world shadowed and torn apart by grief. After the 'pathetic fallacy of nature's lament' (Sacks 21) has run its devastating course, the spirit faces an eternity of light and the world of the living is restored by springtime and sunshine. Locating, navigating, and orienting the relative positions of the dead and the living are not limited to the pastoral elegy; these functions are central to the elegiac concern, and persist within the Western tradition from the classical origins of the genre to the multiple elegiac modes and preoccupations of the present.

For centuries, technology has frequently been crucial to measuring, marking and defining the subjective spatial and temporal borders of death and grief in elegy. The environment of the pastoral elegy is a sympathetic, reactive surface; similarly, mechanisms and objects can be melancholy markers of a world become unfamiliar and warped by absence. Everyday devices and practices are charged with emotion, taking on uncanny significance through their contact with spaces of death and memory. Sigmund Freud's discussion of the uncanny not only suggests an obvious association with elegy—the 'acme of the uncanny [which] is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts' (Freud 1919: 148) but also the idea that the 'uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to something once well-known and [which] had long been familiar' (124). Connecting a familiar object or space to death produces uncanny defamiliarisation, often with sinister and melancholic effect, but orientation is also involved. Freud's starting point for his study is Otto Jentsch's definition of the uncanny as 'intellectual uncertainty': 'One would suppose, then,

that the uncanny would always be an area in which a person was unsure of his way around: the better oriented he was in the world around him, the less likely he would be to find the objects and occurrences in it uncanny' (125). The destabilising effect of death and absence, and the new and unfamiliar world of the bereaved (and the dead, in some elegies), leads to friction between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and results in uncanny technology and distorted spaces. In the elegies examined here, covering the period from 'An Exequy to His Matchless, Never-To-Be-Forgotten Friend' by Henry King (1664) to Anne Carson's *Nox* (2009)—we see clocks, cameras and telephones, recurring objects and processes that normally measure, define, shrink or freeze time and space, functioning as points of interaction between the experience of grief and the representation of elegy, as well as between the world of the living and the dead.

The power of technology to absorb and reflect the emotions of the elegist echoes the role of nature in the pastoral elegy. Jahan Ramazani observes what might be called the pathetic fallacy of technology's lament in W.H. Auden's 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' (1939): 'The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day. / What instruments we have agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day' (I.4-6). As Ramazani remarks, the poet 'recovers and modernizes the central trope of pastoral elegy: the pathetic fallacy […] even scientific measurement projects human terms onto the nonhuman world' (1995: 185). Ramazani associates this elegiac engagement with science and technology with the twentieth-century, post-World War I poem. Nevertheless, technology as a medium of imposing the 'human' on the 'non-human' is a form of navigating, ordering, and expressing grief visible throughout the tradition, as are the uncanny inflections of the objects and processes used for this purpose. Mechanisms and scientific terms and processes recur throughout the history of the genre; clocks and astronomy appear alongside more 'natural' ways of marking the passage of time through the seasons and the government of space through the mythological beings of the heavens, for instance. The spatial and temporal collisions created by uncanny, defamiliarised devices—the clock, the camera and the telephone, all significantly recurring objects in the Western elegiac canon—cause distorted, enclosed and isolated sites of encountering death, communicating with the dead, and tampering with nature and the natural order of things. Clocks remind of the passage of time and thereby mortality, creating spaces of loss—and stopping a clock interrupts the passage of time and the natural order of things. Photographs recall the past and a time when the absent one was present, but also create a frozen moment, a static space where the past is present; burning or mutilating a photograph can be an exorcism.

The telephone collapses distance, connecting the living to the deceased—to cut off the telephone is to end this melancholic communication.

Critics of elegy tend to focus on psychology and historical context, separating the pastoral from the modern, the healing from the melancholic, and by extension the natural from the scientific and mechanical. Modern elegy, it has been argued, breaks with the pastoral tradition and its figures (Gilbert: 2006, 295-490). The First World War is seen to mark a shift from 'normative' mourning and consolatory elegy informed by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, to 'melancholic' mourning which is an 'open wound' (Ramazani 4), inviting bitter, fragmentary elegy that challenges commemoration and comfort as well as the conventions of the genre itself. The popular critical perception thus emphasises a break between the recovery implied by the Arcadian landscapes of the pastoral elegy (with its deep emphasis on nature and natural processes) to the bloody chaos of industrialised warfare and the grim scientific and depersonalised hospitals and hospices of the twentieth century (Gilbert 366-398).[1] Continuity within the genre, however, is evident in the persistent focus on orientation, navigation, and manipulation of the space and time of mourning, and the uncanny technologies that can accompany this manipulation. Clocks, telephones and cameras are devices that position the elegist in relation to the dead and their own grief, poised between the attempt to exert control over the environment by mapping the unfamiliar world of grief, and succumbing to the distortions of loss.

The tension between consolation and melancholia is visible in most elegies, often figured as a struggle between the expression of grief and the form and convention of the genre; this conflict, in turn, can be informed by discourses of technology. In an attempt to regulate grief, to negotiate the distance between the stillness of the grave and the continuing of everyday life, elegists themselves can take on the characteristics of clockwork or machinery. In 'In Memoriam A.H.H.' (completed 1849), Tennyson writes

> But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
>
> A use in measured language lies;
>
> The sad mechanic exercise,
>
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

(V. 5-12)

As Rhian Williams remarks, referring to this stanza, 'For some the act of writing—its systematic filling up of time—can provide succour, especially as the formal demands of elegy can establish order at a time of confusion and upset (2009: 49). Williams observes a correlation between 'system' and form; it is also clear that technology mediates between the elegist's grief and its expression in the elegy. The 'measured language' of elegy represents the elegist's attempt to locate and order their thoughts, but also to navigate what Freud called the 'intellectual uncertainty' and disorientation of the uncanny state caused by contact with death. This ordering is evident in both the rhyme and rhythm of poetic form and typographic form— words and lines can be disrupted by blank spaces. Elegy itself, the 'sad mechanic exercise', can become a technology of grief, the elegist an uncanny automaton attempting to master the temporal and spatial distortions that accompany loss.

'Stop All the Clocks'

The pastoral elegist adjusts time according to nature's seasonal transformations; as Ellen Zetzel Lambert remarks in her discussion of Milton's 'Lycidas', 'The pastoral elegist always disturbs nature's due season with a lament for one who has died out of season. He always sets nature's cyclical course, from year to mellowing year, against the uncertain and irreversible course of his own life' (1976: 155). Milton marks the seasonal cycle 'from myrtles brown, with ivy never sere' (2) to 'willows and the hazel copses green' (42). His near-contemporary Bishop Henry King, however, explicitly comments on the distortive effect of grief upon his sense of temporality. In 'An Exequy to His Matchless, Never-To-Be-Forgotten Friend' (1664), markers of time that echo the 'star that rose at ev'ning bright' (30) and the sun 'dropp'd into the western bay' in 'Lycidas' (191) are accompanied by more precise and mechanically calculated measurements.

How lazily time creeps about

To one that mourns: this, onely this

My exercise and bus'ness is:

So I compute the weary houres

> With sighs dissolved into showres. (16-20)

'Sighs dissolved into showres' here invokes the pathetic fallacy that links tears with rainfall, but rather than controlling his environment, the elegist is at the mercy of the slow passage of time, the disoriented world of the bereaved—the eerie personification of 'time creeps about' emphasises the uncanny unfamiliarity of this new state. Williams suggests that, 'over the course of the poem King actually speeds up time's progress (propelled by the poem's energetic rhyming tetrameter)' (51), but there are further implications to this flexible temporality. Anticipating the clockwork of Tennyson's 'sad mechanic exercise', King becomes a scientific device himself as he 'computes' the hours, forecasting his own death by breaking seasons and days down into their primary components: 'Each minute is a short degree, / And ev'ry houre a step towards thee' (95-96). King orients himself on a cosmic scale; the 'earth' is placed between King's desire to be reunited with his lost wife and its fulfilment: 'Which such a strange eclipse doth make / As ne're was read in Almanake' (37-38). King's metaphor for the immovable and uncontrollable shadow between the living and the dead is based on the science of astronomy rather than invocation of idealised nature, and his sorrow transcends scientific measurement.

In later elegies, the preoccupation with computing the 'weary hours' of grief is reified into the uncanny clock. Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' uses this technological metaphor to underline the limited lifespan of humans:

> Old Yew, which graspest at the stones
>
> That name the under-lying dead,
>
> Thy fibres net the dreamless head,
>
> Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.
>
>
> The seasons bring the flower again,
>
> And bring the firstling to the flock;
>
> And in the dusk of thee, the clock

Beats out the little lives of men. (II.1-8)

The Gothic imagery of the yew roots in the graveyard is uneasily blended with the pastoral return to springtime; as Sacks observes, the yew tree here is a symbol of 'melancholy fixation and millennial constancy' (172).[2] The *memento mori* of the gravestones and bones beneath them is reinforced by the clock in the shadow of the tree. The mechanism of the clock counters the natural turning of the seasons; while the cycle of death and renewal is continued, the linear countdown of the clock is towards death. The verb 'beat' not only recalls poetic rhythm, suggesting the 'sad mechanic exercise' of elegy, and an uncanny counterfeit of a heartbeat, but also implicates the clock in the ending of life—perhaps without its inexorable measurement, life would be renewed with the flowers and lambs of spring.

The clock counting down a life is a recurring image in the elegiac tradition, and serves as uncanny technology for measurement and definition; by marking and recording the passage of time, the clock shapes its environment, transforming homes into the *unheimlich*. The sound of the clock in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's elegy 'My Sister's Sleep' (1847) defines a space and time of death, for instance; those keeping vigil by the deathbed sit 'from chime to chime' until they hear:

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years,

Heard in each hour, crept off; and then

The ruffled silence spread again,

Like water that a pebble stirs. (25-28)

Here the clock is a point of contact with the moment of death. Again the verb 'creep' is used in connection with time, suggesting silent and concealed movement. Nature—the water and the pebble—meets the mechanical to create an uncanny hybrid image of a world disrupted by death and loss. Tony Harrison's 'Timer' (1984) measures immortal and mortal time. Although his father had requested that his mother's wedding the ring be burnt because of the 'eternity inscribed with both their names' (7), the ring does not melt in the crematorium incinerator. 'Timer' concludes with an image all the more poignant for its ordinariness: 'I feel your ashes, head, arms, breasts, womb, legs, / sift through its circle slowly, like that thing / you used to let me watch to time the eggs' (14-16). As in Rossetti's poem, the domestic space is invaded by

inevitable mortality. The silence that follows Rossetti's chimes, and the contrast between the 'eternity' inscribed within the ring and the 'timer'—probably an hourglass—of no more than a few minutes, provides a clue as to why elegists through the centuries have been so obsessed with time and the mechanisms that measure and determine it—and why some elegists wish to stop all the clocks, leaving only silence.

W.H. Auden's 'Funeral Blues' (1938), first published in a satirical play co-written with Christopher Isherwood, has become one of the most famous elegies of the twentieth century. The opening line of 'Funeral Blues'—'Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone'—exemplifies the mourner's impulse to control their environment by manipulating technology. The grandiose commands to halt the measurement of time and sever lines of communication create a static, silent and isolated space for the funeral, as if insulation from the progression of the everyday world—and by extension the passage of time—was necessary for this ritual to occur. The imperative strain of the poem continues: 'Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead / Scribbling on the sky the message "He is Dead"' (5-6), invoking the pathetic fallacy of technology's lament rather than nature's lament. If nature rains and rots to accompany the mourning of the pastoral elegist, if flowers wither and willow trees and echoes weep for Milton's Lycidas, why not have aeroplanes moan (perhaps a combination of mourn and drone)? Auden's word-choice and syntax in 'Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead' echo 'In Memoriam'. Tennyson compares his restless mind to a dove bearing a sad message—his mind escapes his body in an attempt to find the end of his grief, only to 'circle moaning in the air' (16). The movement that Michael Tomko describes as Tennyson's 'feckless revolving' (2004:124) and 'cyclical obsession with the corpse' (126), or melancholic mourning without progression towards healing, also repeats the shape of the clock-face and the movement of its hands, and represents the traditional symbol of eternity, as seen in Harrison's 'Timer'.

 In Auden's elegy for Yeats, nature and science are concomitant: 'The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted' (2), the absence of aeroplanes reinforcing the stillness that permeates the poem. In 'Funeral Blues' the circling of the planes echoes the cessation of linear progression that accompanies the stopping of the clocks. C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed* (1961) connects planes and circling to bereavement: 'Grief is like a bomber circling round and dropping its bombs each time the circle brings it overhead; physical pain is like the steady barrage on a trench in World War One, hours of it with no let up for an instant. Thought is never static, pain often is' (53). The endless circling of Auden's and Lewis's planes, as well

as the ceaseless ticking of the clocks, recalls Freud's association of repetition with the uncanny; to notice patterns and to observe repeated occurrences, as well as the 'compulsion to repeat' in the unconscious mind, he writes, is not only related to turning coincidence into superstition, but can be 'perceived as uncanny' (145). The recurring images of circles and slowed or stopped time haunt the elegiac tradition; stopping the clocks and repeating the circles mean that if time and progress cease, the dead remain close.

The rituals and accoutrements of mourning in 'Funeral Blues' inscribe the space of mourning and restore order. The procession and its aeroplanes stop all the movement *around* the death, altering the cityscape to align with the new mood of mourning; if the poet cannot orient himself according to his loved one, then the changed world must rearrange itself. This attempt to become familiar with a new time and changed space is evident in King's and Tennyson's computations, and also in Emily Dickinson's 'After great pain, a formal feeling comes' (1862), where time stops altogether in response to great pain, possibly grief:

> The Feet,
>
> mechanical, go round—
>
> A Wooden way
>
> Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
>
> Regardless grown, A Quartz contentment, like a stone—
>
> This is the Hour of Lead— (5-9)

Here the petrifying effect Auden commands to temporality and landscape affects the body itself; the body becomes part uncanny automaton, treading in the customary steps of the funeral procession. The world itself becomes eerily wooden, as if encased in a coffin. Again the circle, as the feet 'go round', echoes the motion of the clock, but also suggests an inability to move past the 'Hour of Lead'. As Cate L. Mahoney observes, Dickinson referred to her dead father as a 'Pause of Space' (2015: 52), which means that 'No longer is the loved one lost to time and space; here, Dickinson has found a way to recognize him in temporal and spatial terms' (53). For Tennyson, Auden, Dickinson, and Lewis, then, the circle evokes a melancholic attachment both to grief and the deceased. Julia Kristeva writes in *Black Sun*

(1981) that melancholics live within a 'skewed time sense' (60): '[A] moment blocks the horizon of depressive temporality or rather removes any horizon, any perspective. Riveted to the past [melancholy people] seem to say, but I am faithful to those bygone days, I am nailed down to them, no revolution is possible, there is no future' (60). The obsession with temporality in elegy confirms that the mourning as well as the melancholic share this 'skewed time sense'—the recurring imagery of hours and clocks seeks to negotiate the progression of separation from the deceased by slowing or stopping time.

To stop the clocks can be an attempt to evoke the static silence of the 'timeless grave' as A.E. Housman calls it in 'XLVI' (1896: 1). Thomas Hardy's 'Bereft' (1901) shifts even more explicitly towards the grave

> When the supper crock's steaming,
>
> And the time is the time of his tread,
>
> I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
>
> In a silence as of the dead
>
> Leave the door unbarred,
>
> The clock unwound. Make my lone bed hard—
>
> Would 'twere underground! (17-24)

In an effort to reorient himself in this strange new space of slowed temporality and sense of absence, Hardy does not orient himself towards the progressive movement of the world beyond the sphere of grief but the silent world of eternity.[3] This positioning indicates the melancholic mourning described by Ramazani (echoing Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia': 1917), in which the elegist clings to the dead. The wish to stop the clocks or leave them unwound not only dismantles temporal momentum but produces a space of silence as chimes or ticking stop. This ambivalent function echoes the still silence of the grave but also serves as a traditional mark of respect towards the dead.

'Looking Past the Camera'

As a science of chemicals and light that gives the illusion of capturing, recording and replicating images of moments, the technology of photography is also informed by a sense of temporality. As Roland Barthes writes, 'I recall that at first photographic implements were related to techniques of cabinetmaking and the machinery of precision: cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing' ([1980], 1993: 15). The photograph creates a space where the momentum of everyday life is paused, thereby disrupting the borders of presence and absence; Barthes observes the eerie, almost supernatural quality of this power as follows:

> In the Photograph, Time's immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged (whence the relation with the *Tableau Vivant*, whose mythic prototype is the princess falling asleep in Sleeping Beauty). That the Photograph is 'modern', mingled with our noisiest everyday life, does not keep it from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an arrest. (91)

Barthes links photography and death via this temporality, noting that 'This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: that is dead and that is going to die' (96). Susan Sontag remarks that

> 'Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. … All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt. (1982: 15)

To view a photograph, then, is not only to encounter stasis and mortality, but also to participate in both. Elegy itself as a genre serves a similar function—by definition, its subject has passed away, and only a trace, and a trace mediated through another's imagination, remains. Even as the presence of an observer is necessary for the haunting effect of the photograph to be fulfilled, the reader is necessary for the elegiac functions of remembering the dead and remembering the fact of death.

It is not surprising that the tension between absence and presence and interrupted temporality means that photography is often considered an uncanny technology. Gilbert discusses photographic images of the dead as a 'celluloid afterlife' (216), citing both Barthes and

Sontag; photographs, for Gilbert, also connote immortality, and the uncanny potential to haunt.

> Surfacing, disappearing, and resurfacing in our lives and thoughts, these paper surrogates of the (once but now no longer) living represent simultaneous certifications and annihilations of mortality, just as ghosts would. Like ghosts, the subjects of these elegiac photographs once lived as flesh and blood. (234)

Gilbert notes that this haunting is both feared and desired by elegists: 'But if some poets long for a loved body whose contours photography so uncannily yet deceptively embalms, others are tormented by exactly the persistence of the image that keeps a dreaded original alive' (239). She gives Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy' (1962) as an example, referring to the picture of Plath's father standing at the blackboard: 'A cleft in your chin instead of your foot / But no less a devil for that' (53-54). As Gilbert points out, this image resurfaces 'with grotesque persistence' (239) in Ted Hughes's poem 'A Picture of Otto' (1998) from his *Birthday Letters* elegies for Plath: 'You stand there at the blackboard: Lutheran/ Minister manqué' (1-2). Gilbert's observation regarding the uncanny, even demonic, force of the image of Otto implies that the moment captured in the photograph struggles against attempts to 'freeze' it. I would further point out that in Hughes's poem, the photograph, with the grotesque power it possesses in both poems, has the power to replicate itself. His image of Otto is not only a double of the picture in 'Daddy', but passed on further: 'Your portrait, here, could be my son's portrait' (16). The photograph, then, creates a space where the present, the natural progression of time, is interrupted, where past meets future, and hindsight meets foreshadowing.

A photograph described in an elegy is often saturated with a sense of absence that conflicts with the presence it records, and, as Barthes and Sontag both suggest, the viewer/elegist is implicated in the subject's mortality. Sontag notes that all photographs, even of the living, have potentially uncanny properties: 'Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives' (9)—this 'ghostliness' is reinforced in photographs of the dead. 'Marquee Moon' (2004) by Jeff Fallis, an elegy for his friend Peter Smith, begins with nostalgic description of 'halcyon days', as the elegist mourns his own youth. It is implied that Peter Smith died young of an overdose; an image of his youth is frozen in photograph, a surviving reminder of mortality:

A photograph I saw

        Months later:

you in your corduroy jacket,

        hair blond

    as an old coin, lifting

      two fingers

  into something like a great beyond. (28-35)

'Months later' taps into the 'defeat of Time' observed by Barthes in the photograph. The 'old coin' here further relegates Peter Smith into the past, even as the photograph survives as a relic. The photograph not only forces the elegist to confront the passage of time since his shared youth with his friend, and thereby his own mortality, but serves as a focal point for connection with the 'great beyond'—the elegist is able to orient himself, using typographic strategies of indenting his line, by arranging the 'great beyond' and the past into the frame of the photograph and his own narrative outside it.

Joy Harjo's 'Death is a Woman' (1990) also connects with death via a photograph, creating an uncanny space where tenses and worlds overlap in an image of her father and mother:

And my mother on the same side as your heart

looking past the camera, into her imagined future without you,

fiercely into the brutal eyes of the woman who seduced you

and won.

You are dancing with Death now, you were dancing with her then. (35-38)

Harjo here reads the absence inscribed within the photographed gaze of her mother, but also beyond the borders of the photograph where Death is seducing her father. The conflation of death 'now' and death 'then' reinforces the 'elegiac art' of the photograph, but it is not that

simple; the hindsight of the viewer/elegist informs the significance of the photograph. Harjo's poem concludes by predicting that the photograph will eventually be destroyed, but the music of the dance survives. The people in the photographs of Fallis's and Harjo's elegies are haunting presences, reminders of the elegist's own mortality, but also promising immortality in some form via the survival of the photograph and the memory of the elegist—as Barthes writes, the photograph is 'an image which produces Death while trying to preserve life' (92).

Anne Carson's *Nox* is an elegiac work that uses actual photographs instead of merely descriptions to organise and map an uncanny space of presence and absence. *Nox* is an elegy for Carson's nomadic brother Michael, who she barely knew as an adult. The work begins with Catullus's poem 101 in Latin.[4] Each word of the Latin poem has its own page of connotations and usage examples, and is surrounded by numbered fragments of meditations, scrawls, and scraps of photographs, stamps and letters—there are no page numbers, so the Latin word is the only way of navigating the text, which is printed on a long strip of paper and folded accordion-style into a box. The word 'advenio' is the ninth word in the Catullus poem, and it is on a spread facing a photograph of a woman and a boy in swimming costumes sitting on a dock by a lake, captioned 'I make a guess, I make a guess'. Sontag writes, 'As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure' (9). Carson's photographs represent the 'epistemological anxiety' (2012: 72) that Neil Corcoran observes in *Nox*, but also reflect the disorientation that Freud associates with the uncanny; Carson guesses rather than records the significance of the 'advenio' photograph. The anchoring effect of positioning the poem within Catullus 101 is reinforced by the photographs; they place the dead within the past. Nevertheless, the haunting effect of photographs, and way that Carson treats the photographs, opens further questions, negating the landmarks they create in the terrain of grief and Freud's 'intellectual uncertainty'.

The photographs in *Nox* are black and white, bordered with blankness and sometimes interspersed with other cuttings and texts. Some have captions, some are so shadowed as to be indecipherable, and others are sliced into unrecognizability. 'Fragment 3.2', which is related to the translation of 'has', the tenth word of the Catullus poem, describes a visit to Copenhagen to visit the brother's widow. The text is surrounded by the jagged corners of a photograph of an interior space with pictures on a wall and a chair in a corner. The centre of the photograph has been ripped out, so whoever or whatever else was in the room is missing.

While the images in *Nox* locate and map memory, the negative space, the space without image or inscription, acquires increasing significance of its own as the work progresses; absence is the force that shapes the texts and images even as they border and attempt to cover it. As Amanda Lim notes, Carson's method involves

> [D]efamiliarizing the methods of photography and description. Many of the pieces are "orphan" photos or captions, seemingly misplaced, isolated, decontextualized, dehistoricized. […] Carson's arrangement of these items appears to suggest that a coherent narrative is, in fact, impossible to achieve and that it is in the moments of rupture that the most is revealed' (2011: 10).

Lim's observation of 'defamiliarisation' resonates with my discussion of the uncanny; the fluid and uncanny properties of photography are emphasised by Carson's attack on their memorial function and coherence. Carson said in an interview that she 'Became more interested in the overall effect of the designed page than the specific content of the photograph. [I] realized that most photographs are better when cut. The more you cut, the more story they gather' (*Kenyon Review*: 2012). The emptiness around the ripped or cut edges of these photographs means as much as their presence and position, making material the idea of death and mortality enclosed within the frames of Fallis's and Harjo's elegies.

This materialised meta-narrative of absence can be read as an attempt to resist or undermine the haunting control the photograph exerts over the elegist's psyche. A similar effect is evident in Thomas Hardy's 'The Photograph' (1917), in which the speaker burns a picture of a woman: '"Thank God, she is out of it now!" I said at last, / In a great relief of heart when the thing was done" (11-12). The relief, however, is juxtaposed with concern about the uncanny connection between the image and its original, as well as about the final death inherent in forgetting: 'But I felt as if I had put her to death that night!' (20). Carson avoids such extreme exorcism; the shadows and jagged edges of the photographs in *Nox* deliberately remind of both loss and the unreliability of historical and commemorative narratives rather than erasing the dead altogether. Barthes suggests that modern society has replaced the 'Monument' with the 'Photograph' (93), and that the presence of the photograph 'blocks memory, becomes a counter-memory' (91)—by distorting the photographs of Michael and placing them within the commemorative form of elegy, Carson leaves space for remembering, even as Fallis and Harjo leave space for the afterlife and death.

'Mustn't the Conversation Stop?'

While telephone conversations seem to leave more nebulous traces than the photograph, they nevertheless leave a mental inscription. The defamiliarised telephone in elegy arrests the moving on of the mourner, similarly to the images of clocks and slowed down or stopped time, and the camera that interferes with leaving behind in the past. The uncanny telephone tampers with space and time via its capacity for creating simultaneity through instant communication over long distances, allowing the intersection of the world of the living and of the dead. C.S. Lewis writes 'Time and space and body were the very things that brought us together; the telephone wires by which we communicated. Cut one off, or cut both off simultaneously. Either way, mustn't the conversation stop?' (27). This question summarises concerns with communication and dialogue in the modern era; elegies that use the telephone must negotiate ending this conversation.

In Grace Paley's 'I needed to talk to my sister' (2008), the technology of the telephone frames absence in a similar fashion to the photograph fragments in *Nox*, evoking an 'absent presence'. The speaker calls her sister, and the telephone connects to her number and rings, then:

> you can imagine my breath stopped   then
>
> there was a terrible telephonic noise
>
> a voice said   this number is no
>
> longer in use   (8-11)

The absence of death, the silence where the conversation used to be, is marked here by spaces within the lines of text. The stuttering alliteration of 'terrible telephonic' reinforces the replacement of conversation by meaningless sound. This substitution provokes a consolatory realisation, as the number of the elegist's sister has been preserved intact, and not contaminated with another presence. The disconnection caused by death is therefore accompanied by the reassurance of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the deceased, as if it is better to maintain an absence than to fill it with another person—but this also means a melancholic clinging to the dead.

The telephone in elegy can be more explicitly supernatural than a reminder of absence, however. In Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' (1962), the device serves as a conduit to the world of the dead and the haunting figure of her father, Otto Plath. Plath's representations of her father are scorched by anger, and this is particularly evident in here. Ramazani describes 'Daddy' as an exorcism ritual (279); the poem ends with angry villagers impaling the vampiric father figure with a stake and the ambiguous line 'Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through' (80). 'Daddy' is schematized as a response to communication and influence from the realm of the dead to the world of the living; the connective device of the 'black telephone' (69) also collapses the distance between past and present. The telephone receiver becomes a battleground between the seductive and deadly discourse of the deceased, and the elegist's struggle to articulate a narrative of survival. Communication, language and voice are central themes in 'Daddy', and conversely, so is their suppression; Christina Britzolakis remarks that Plath's treatment of voice frequently subverts the domestic into the *unheimlich*: '"Daddy", for example, famously links the paternal figure with linguistic mechanisms of silencing and the deprivation of speech' (2006: 108). Ramazani similarly notes that the speaker of 'Daddy' rages against the 'monolithic language of the father' (277). This tension is evident in speaker's difficulties in learning German, which she connects to Nazism, for instance in the lines

> I never could talk to you.
>
> The tongue stuck in my jaw.
>
>
> It stuck in a barb wire snare
>
> Ich, ich, ich, ich, I could hardly speak. (24-27)

As Britzolakis writes, 'a demonic reflexivity harnesses the most regressive aspects of language', including the echoes of nursery-rhyme register and repetition (114); which performs a similar function to the petrifying effect of the endlessly circling planes in Auden's poem.[5] The repetition causes the German for 'I', 'ich ich ich ich' to sound something like static over the telephone. 'Ich ich ich ich' becomes not merely 'stuttering' (Gubar 2001: 203) or even 'mad incoherence' (Axelrod 1990: 57), but rather part of the uncanny technology of the telephone, white noise; the image of the 'barb wire snare' parallels the telephone line. If this onomatopoeia is explored further, it raises the question of who is actually speaking.

Ramazani and other critics assume it is Plath,[6] in which case the speaker's attempt to contact her father dissolves into the distorted sound of white noise. However, 'ich ich ich ich' could also be the Germanic father figure speaking, using the telephone to create this snare, this aural trap, to absorb the attempts of the speaker to assert her own language.

Plath's speaker's survival is bound to vengeance, which is intertwined with the need to cut off the lines of communication: 'So daddy, I'm finally through. / The black telephone's off at the root, /The voices just can't worm through' (68-70), which anticipate the last line: 'Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through' (80). The word 'through' in both cases reflects the role of the telephone as a conduit between the speaker and her dead father. The mention of 'worm' suggests the grave and mortality, combining metaphors of technology and nature, as in the intertwining of Tennyson's yew tree roots and the clock. Again, the direction of the voices is ambiguous. When the 'black telephone' is 'off at the root', the voices cease, and when the speaker is 'finally through', it implies not only that the speaker has embraced her own death-wish, as critics interpret,[7] but also that the separation of the worlds of the living and the dead is complete so the speaker's own discourse can replace her father's.

The trope of disconnecting the telephone, the stopping of the conversation, can reflect the ritual silence of the commemorative moment, but also exorcism. The liminal space created by the telephone is an uncanny reminder of the pervasive and persistent presence of the deceased, as in 'Daddy'—and comparable to the 'celluloid afterlife' of the photograph, and the interference in temporality caused by elegiac clocks. In John Witte's 'Elegy: Noah's Crow' (1979), images evoking gaps and emptiness slice into the present tense and the presence of the world, but these are figured as thresholds and portals, connection rather than severance. The opening lines 'A crow crosses the sky opening and closing his black double doors. / People go through' (1-2) introduce this theme of crossing. Both crow and connective medium are reflected in the role of the telephone that, as in 'Daddy', links the living and the dead, as the dead person's voice survives. Here the emphasis is on distance, however: 'If the telephone rings / I think I'll hear your voice far off, / very hoarse from the cold' (16-18). These images of winter and emptiness are connected by the telephone to the world flooded in the book of Genesis; the hoarseness of the voice recalls the caw of the crow. The elegiac telephone has varying associations related to disconnection and connection that relate to the uncanny and the supernatural, but also the sorrowful, the exorcising, and the commemorative. In all of these

functions, the telephone marks distance from the deceased, but also orients the elegist around the gap between worlds that has opened up with death and grief.

The science of losing

Elizabeth Bishop's famous villanelle 'One Art' (1976) claims that 'The art of losing isn't hard to master' (1, 6 12), a sentiment repeated four times, the last with the slight variation of 'It's evident / the art of losing's not too hard to master' (17-18). There are several factors here that lead towards a conclusion on the connections between elegy, the uncanny, and technology. The first is the word 'art'; the tradition that poetry, and elegy, are dictated by the muses, the results of a creative impulse, and the fruits of the idea that if suffering can be transformed into art there is meaning in it. Milton called upon 'Sisters of the sacred well' (15) to make music and asked that a 'gentle Muse / With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn', (19-20), for instance. Elegy is supposed to be about art and song rather than science; the forms of poetry are supposed to translate pain into beauty. Bishop's repetition of her claim shifts from bravado to tentativeness; the form—or system—of the villanelle is configured to disguise the 'compulsion to repeat' (145) that Freud links to the uncanny. Nevertheless, there is a technology to elegy and this is not only the science of measuring and calculating grief, but also a cartography that re-orders the new, unfamiliar world, thereby breeding spaces and interstices for the uncanny.

Tennyson's 'sad mechanic exercise' also belies the 'art of losing'. It is not for nothing that we speak of 'coping mechanisms' with regard to bereavement; these mechanisms can take the form of uncanny technologies that recur throughout the elegiac tradition, demonstrating persistent preoccupations with distortions of time and space. These uncanny technologies are not only evident in the content of the poems discussed here but also in the blank spaces and typographic strategies used by Paley and Carson in particular to challenge linear narratives of loss. The attempt to master the science of losing, to fix the dead and the grief that accompanies their loss into position, to measure the space they left behind, to align mortality and immortality, cannot be wholly successful; hence the uncanny technologies around the edges of the elegiac cartography—the relentlessly circling planes, the creeping minutes and the hour of lead, the framed and frozen deaths and the black telephones. Clocks, cameras and telephones become defamiliarised through contact with the world of the dead; they fail to cross the bridge between the new world and the old, between the new time and the rest of the

world. Technologies for freezing moments cannot stop the passage of time, and the collapse of space and time allows all sorts of voices to get through.

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[1] Gilbert discusses 'technologies of death' in the context of the trenches of the First World War and the Nazi death camps (135-159).

[2] For more on computation and melancholic mourning in 'In Memoriam', see Irene Hsaio's 'Calculating Loss in Tennyson's "In Memoriam"' (2009: 173-196).

[3] For more on Hardy's depiction of subjective time, see 'Thomas Hardy's Timing: Poems and Clocks in Late Nineteenth-Century England' (2015: 591-618) by Jeffrey Blevin.

[4] 'Travelling through many nations and through many seas / I have come, brother, for these poor funeral rites' (trans. Guy Lee 1990: 139).

[5] Tim Kendall discusses repetition in 'Daddy' from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis, including the Oedipus complex (2001: 152-3).

[6] See, for example, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, where Jacqueline Rose writes 'Wars wipe out names, the father cannot be spoken to, and the child cannot talk, except to repeat endlessly, in a destroyed obscene language, the most basic or minimal unit of self-identity in speech: 'ich, ich, ich, ich' (the first draft has 'incestuous' for 'obscene')' (1996: 226).

[7] Heather Clark in *The Grief of Influence*, for example, writes 'Plath achieves nothing here that will allow her to escape Daddy's black shoe. Instead of retreating from "the enemy," she attacks, tangling her words and life further with the very force from which she seeks to disengage' (2011: 151).

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