

5. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT TO SAY: ELEGY

* Can be considered quite a heavy topic.

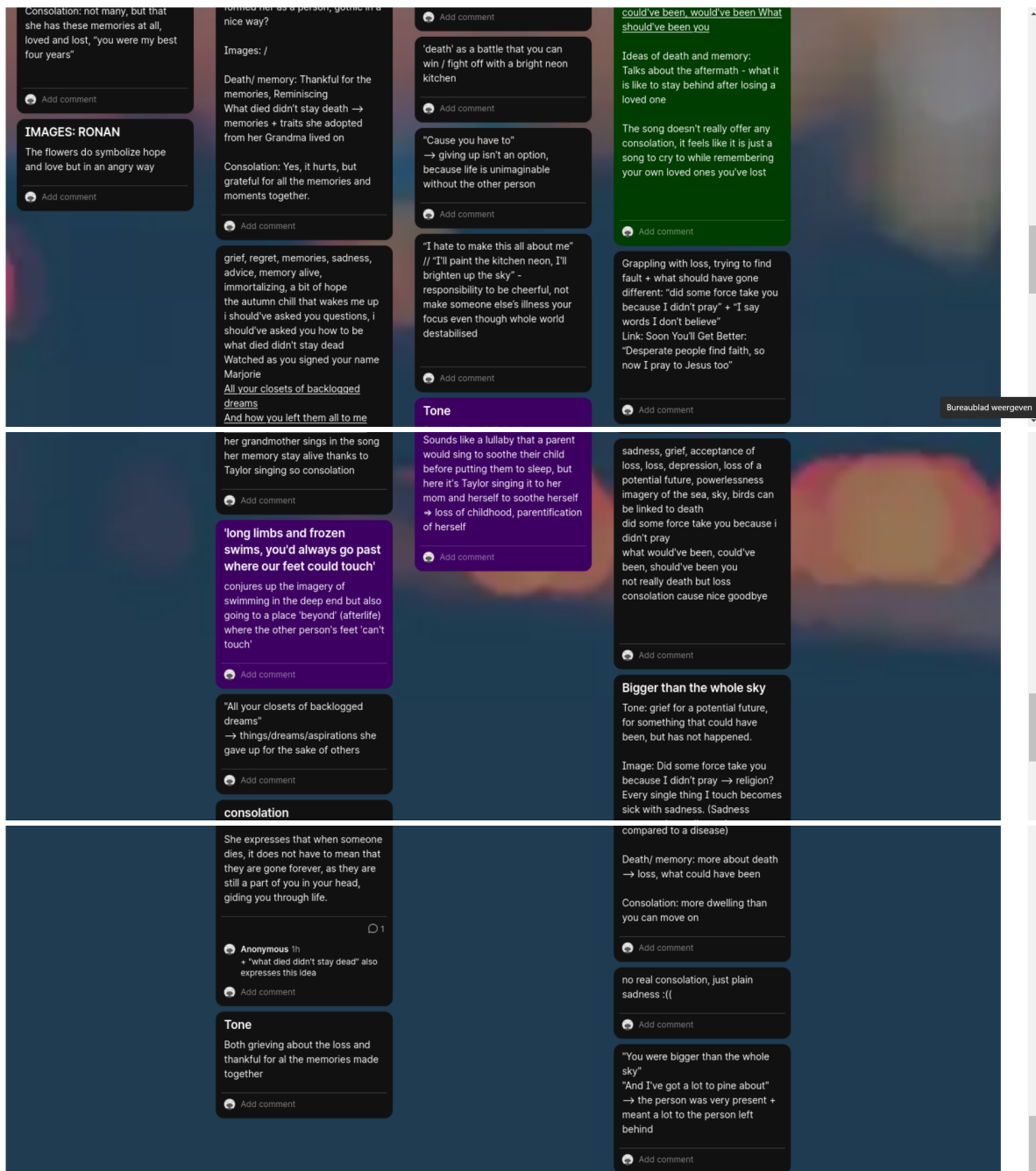
* this lecture focusses on the concept of the Elegy: we take an analytical approach.

* This lecture was given on a very rainy Monday afternoon, an illustration of the pathetic fallacy (see later).

TAYLOR SWIFT SONGS DISCUSSED IN THIS SEMINAR

The discussion board is organized into columns for five songs: Ronan, Marjorie, Soon You'll Get Better, Bigger than the Whole Sky, and You're Losing Me. Each column contains several discussion cards with titles, text, and 'Add comment' buttons.

- Ronan**
 - Melancholia**: reminiscing on the past; quite sad
 - holding on to hope and then losing it
 - "We're gonna fly away from here" → death as a journey
 - Tone**: memories, grief, reminiscing, sadness, pain
 - Flowers pile up in the worst way but no one knows what to say
 - It offers some consolation as many memories are being brought up and he lives on in those.
 - Consolation**: "what if the miracle was even getting one moment with you"; getting to love someone is worth the pain of losing them
 - Tone: reminiscing, resentment, sad
 - Images: Flowers pile up in the worst way, no one knows what to say
 - Tone**: sad nostalgia
 - Images**: "We're gonna fly away from here Out of this curtained room" "Flowers pile up in the worst way, no one knows what to say About a beautiful boy who died" Ideas of death and memory: Bringing back the memories of the little boy through the song consolation? Yes she keeps the memory of the boy alive
 - Mourning, talking to him, the power of the mundane/everyday when its gone
 - Images**: flowers piling up, halloween without a child, unused hand-me-downs
- Marjorie**
 - she wants to immortalize her grandmother in a beautiful way, according to these lyrics from her song "what died didn't stay dead, you are alive in my head"
 - Writing of someone as if they were alive**: the memories keep Marjorie alive, like she is "alive in Taylor's head"
 - tone, imagery, memory, consolation**: About her grandmother, sad (retrospective, 'should have', 'would have'), regretful, Images: complaining the whole way there → complaining about spending times with you love as a child for no real reason + 'going past where our feet could touch', going past safety, ambition, imagery of water Should have kept every receipt → wanting something tangible for memory Consolation: vocals in background, still there - following her dreams
 - striking image**: If I didn't know better I'd think you were still around → hard to cope with the fact that the person is dead. Feels like they are still there
 - regret**
 - marjorie**: tone: melancholic, nostalgic, hopeful
 - images: "what died didn't stay dead, you're alive in my head" "Watched as you signed your name Marjorie All your closets of backlogged dreams And how you left them all to me" death & memory: death is not final, my remembering her grandmother, she keeps her grandmother alive consolation: yes! she's dead but, not completely gone, she's alive in her memory
 - Memories**: Tone: thankful for time spend with each other, looking up to, how she
- Soon You'll Get Better**
 - Heavy Topic**
 - Striking Images**: Doctor's office lighting, Neon kitchen paint, Tangled hair = motherly care of brushing hair?
 - Turn to faith when in a desperate place.**
 - Find the silver lining, even when the light at the end of the tunnel seems too far to reach. When life seems unfair. "Make the best of a bad deal" (Swift, 2019)**
 - it's a song in which she expresses her most honest wish to see alive the person to whom she dedicates the lyrics.**
 - Going back to religion, In honour of mother's faith. Parallel with mother as a guide in life.**
 - Death and memory**: Jesus, praying → afterlife? Divine decisions about life and death Without you → dying Nurses, hospitals, treatments → illness Memory → first time
 - desperation, sadness, denial, hope(less) holy orange bottles each night i pray to you desperate people find faith so now i pray to jesus too doctor's office lighting what am i supposed to do when there's no you? Taylor doesn't want to accept that she might lose her mother although it is very possible there's always a bit of hope so that offers consolation
- Bigger than the Whole Sky**
 - sea imagery, parallell between salt water, sea and tears**
 - the loss of potential**: all that could've/would've/should've been will now never get to be → mourning a future that is no more
 - Sadness about lost potential (what could've been)**
 - Saying goodbye as consolation**: Being able to say goodbye can be quite relieving, or even hearing it in a song. When you are able to say 'goodbye' you can start mourning after this closure.
 - tone: guilt
 - Salt streams out my eyes and into my ears: looking at the sky
 - Did some force take you because I didn't pray?
 - butterfly effect**: What could've been, would've been What should've been you → regret, sense of loss maybe about a miscarriage: lost a life that could have been
 - regret, sadness, nostalgic**: Saying goodbye, closure More open to listeners interpretations (e.g. a miscarriage, death of a child, losing someone you love)
 - Images**: Salt streams out of my eyes and into my ears I'm never gonna meet What
- You're Losing Me**
 - hospital imagery**: heartbeat / little beeps 'machine' noises' / like doctors saying 'we're losing her' / her heart won't start anymore
 - war imagery**
 - phoenix rising from the ashes**
 - hopeless relationship**
 - end of a painful relationship**
 - no real consolation**: No true consolation is offered to the listener but maybe you can find consolation in indulging in that sadness, stare into the deep end
 - sadness, anger, self-hatred, desperation, loss of self and relationship, depression, hopeless imagery of heartbeats, hospitals phoenix rising from the ashes dealt the final blow turns nice memories on their head not really consolation



These songs are dedicated to very specific people.

➔ Different than some of her other songs where it's dangerous to fall into the trap of the intentional fallacy (Whimsatt and Beardsley)

ELEGY

It is not just about death, also about memory, emotion, making something or someone live on after death.

- Format originated in Ancient Greece
- Later version focussed on the lyrical 'I' and personal themes rather than collective ones. This makes the elegy more introspective.

DEFINITIONS

OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE ELEGY: ELEGY

'for all of its pervasiveness [...] the 'elegy' remains remarkably ill defined: sometimes used as a catch-all to denominate texts of a sombre or pessimistic tone, sometimes as a marker for textual monumentalizing, and sometimes strictly as a sign of a lament for the dead'

M.H. ABRAMS: ELEGY

'a formal and sustained lament in verse for the death of a particular person, usually ending in a consolation'

'sombre meditations on mortality'

M.H. ABRAMS: A DIRGE

'the dirge is also a versified expression of grief on the occasion of a particular person's death, but differs from the elegy in that it is short, is less formal, and is usually expressed as a text to be sung.'

ELEGY AND AFFECT

AFFECT: emotions that have a physical or semantic expression and physical effect.

Emotional impulses that elegies express.

'the affective fallacy' (Whimsatt and Beardsley): a text cannot be depressing, only the response of someone might be depressed. Must be considered when talking about elegies.

Deleuze and Guattari: 'the great writer 'invents unknown or unrecognized affects and brings them to light'.

E.g.: being able to show something that looks like love but is violent, obsessive... feeling that baffles the reader.

Emotions in literature are almost characters themselves. They have a life of their own

E.g.: Othello: jealousy as 'the green-eyed monster'. Jealousy has a life and identity of its own that is almost tangible.

Affect theory: affect in literature can be presented in three ways

1. **The representation of feelings**
2. **The way the text generates particular feelings in readers**
3. **The performance or enactment of feelings as a textual event: the text combines with the reader to generate an event or reaction.**

e.g.: catharsis, the sublime

ELEGY- DISCUSSION ON POEMS

Discussion questions

1. **What language suggests that this poem is an elegy? Pick out examples**
2. **What is it an elegy for?**
3. **What is the overriding mood/ tone?**
4. **How is memory represented/ how does it function in the poem**
5. **How does the poem represent emotions, and what emotions does it generate in you, the reader?**
6. **What are the significant differences between how this poem deals with death, and how we deal with it in society/ culture today?**

THE WANDERER

1. Generally, the language of emotions and mourning, grief...
E.g. 'long for relief', suggesting of being in pain and wanting relief → quite negative feelings: melancholy...
2. Remembering his kinsmen. They were in battle. The images that are brought up fit the medieval context of having a lord and following this lord into battle. There's a sense of remembering friends, soldiers... There's a sad aspect that they are gone but also a celebratory aspect of their lives and actions
3. Loneliness but also the notion of 'the wanderer' which suggests walking around without purpose. This creates a melancholy atmosphere.
4. There's an implication of feeling sorry for himself. He wants relief of the pain in the beginning. But as the poem or the elegy goes on, there is a sense of relief from the pain by remembering his friends. Memory allows the speaker to deal with emotions and move on.
5. Sadness is represented with a certain coldness. The winter landscape is used to present how he feels. Emotions are told in terms of nature elements.
The lines are quite long, causing a slow pace and suggesting the slow pace of the journey of mourning.
6. Significant differences: looking back on medieval context, the exterior is more important than interior. There's a focus on possession, a sense of hierarchy and a strict code to grieving. 'A wise men should...'
The idea of setting codes about how one you should act while grieving clashes with our ideas about mourning in our culture. Today we often encourage one to go through their own emotions in their own way and tempo. This is definitely not normalized in all contexts or cultures, though.
Furthermore, today, death is considered more negatively, depending on the person, of course. A funeral is not a feast or celebration, it is sad and silent (except maybe in some Celtic based societies such as Ireland).

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

1. The idea of 'parting day' and the image of tolling bells, ... in the first stanza alone. There are a lot of instances throughout the poem where language suggests that it is an elegy. The pathetic fallacy is very present in this poem. The world is left to darkness, there is 'solitary rain'...
There is a stanza about the impact of death on the family of the deceased family member.
2. It seems to be about soldiers. These died in a battle and left a legacy. The question is, however, what this legacy is worth. There is an atmosphere of commemoration of war and it's heroes and casualties. This poem is a collective elegy, not for one person but for all soldiers (whom it concerns), no matter what status.
3. There is a tone of celebration of those who died and yet also a feeling of regret and hopelessness: the solitude and pointlessness of war. This is, for example, shown in the stanza where the soldiers are compared to flowers and their death is a 'waste of sweetness'.
4. Nobody witnessed the death of the people the elegy is about. They died in battle, no memory of their final moments is preserved. The speaker, however, poses a kind of judgement on the notion of forgetting the fallen. They do live on, or at least their legacy does.
The speaker also likes to remember them and celebrate them as regular people rather than soldiers, focussing largely on their jobs as farmers. The use of farming language might also be the use of analogy but then this also says something about the language that is used to idealize the situation.
5. Emotions are suggested through the use of adjectives and descriptions. The poem has a certain grand character, yet is sombre and gloomy at the same time. The emotional fallacy is very important here. Emotions of sadness are projected on nature. The entire world seems sad.
6. 'path of glory leads but to the grave'
Death is seen as inevitable. The elegy has a tone of acceptance, visible in the legacy of honour that is suggested. Death is accepted. Today, this could be the same or different depending on the culture you are in. We might, in general, question the worth, cause, motivations... of the fallen heroes more before blindly celebrating them. We also tend to try to postpone death as much as possible.

A DIRGE

1. It is about something or someone dying. Questions about 'why' refer to the cause and results of death and mourning
2. The poem is mourning someone who died. It is, however, also linked to nature and the seasons. In nature things are born and die. In this poem the idea that someone died too early is expressed through the circle of seasonal change. They died at the wrong time, in the wrong season and haven't been able to complete a full circle.
Maybe it's not a literal death but a love story where the love died at the wrong time. The poem shows a refusal to process the emotions and accepting the end.
3. The speaker seems to be struggling with the acceptance of death. Frustration about the fact that something has passed is very present in the tone of the dirge. Questions about what could've happened but didn't also show sense of regret
4. Seasons are linked to events in the poem. Memory is visualized through natural elements and seasonal events: snow falling, apples dropping... The beginning and end are tied together and linked to the cycles of nature. It could normally be reassuring to know that death is part of the circle of life. But now it is off-putting and less reassuring because time is interrupted and things happen at the wrong moments
5. "Why were you born when the snow was falling? ..."
Questions in the poem are asked in the stages of grief. Frustrations and other heavy emotions are expressed and show that the stage of acceptance is not yet reached. The thing or person that died was obviously very dear to the narrator.

6. Today, the reaction might not be too different. What is shown in the poem is just one of the stages of grief. Writing the elegy itself is a phase that might come before the acceptance and is a part of the process of mourning.

Discussion questions

Between these three poems, there seems to be a journey.

The wanderer: broad, general, a sense of community

Elegy written in a country churchyard: A sense of community but also more personal aspects.

A dirge: A more personal conversation between speaker and person who died.

UNPACKING AND USING AN ACADEMIC ARTICLE

A deep dive into academic writing, using academic article and situating arguments into academic articles.

Want to get better at writing academic essays: read a lot of academic articles.

- Use of particular phrases
- ...
- In short: boxes you need to tick.

TO BE FOUND IN MOST OR ALL ACADEMIC ARTICLES

A guideline to improved academic writing:

Interesting anecdote at the beginning.	This can take multiple forms but is often used to be able to branch out into multiple points.
Academic article: peer reviewed	
Clearly stated argument	say something like: 'This essay will argue that...' DO NOT USE 'WE' → stylistically wrong if you're writing alone.
<u>Brief explanation</u> of article's content and structure.	Keep this short, not a whole paragraph. When using a framework, set it up, explain it briefly, but try not to do it too extensively, as you will probably go into that while linking it to your close-reading.
Show how it is related to existing scholarship. How is it building on it?	A,B,C method: A: Agree → you agree with content of article. B: Build → you agree partly but add your own input, new details, new examples... C: Challenge → most difficult but potentially the most rewarding. These three can be combined.
Basis of literary essay = close reading . Use quotations regularly, don't just paraphrase the plot.	→ you can assume that the reader has read the work you talk about, don't explain the entire plot. Link this close-reading to the argument

A signpost sentence: at beginning or end of paragraphs	An example is sentences with linking words, handholding your reader to lead them through the structure of your text.
Why does it matter? Corpus needs to be justified. Why are you writing about this?	

During this section of the seminar, we practised finding these elements of academic articles in an article that students brought with them.

THE ROLE OF ELEGY IN 21ST CENTURY CULTURE?

- Through the texts of Taylor Swift's songs, people have found ways to deal with their emotional difficulties.
- Music in general gives a way for people to find songs that they can connect with in difficult phases in their lives. Music can also just make you sad.
- For authors: it is good to write down and to try to express your feelings.
- There seems to have been a shift among most people from poetry to music when it comes to elegies. That said, poetry is also still quite popular.
- When we are grieving we start looking for meaning, purpose... and poetry or music can give that in ways that 'ordinary language' cannot.
- In the 21st Century through social media, sharing songs or poetry can create a sense of integration or community. Sharing grief can help people.
- Elegiac speeches have this same effect of creating a community of shared grief.
- Listening to other's elegies may give a sense of clarity. Emotions and affect can be articulated in a way that you hadn't thought off and help shape your feelings, helping in placing them.
- Normalization of grief and mourning.