

# The Consolatory Fold: Anne Carson's *Nox* and the Melancholic Archive

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The archive . . . is not simply a departure, a cipher for the condition of innovation; it gives a name to the way in which the new is also a return, an iteration in the true sense of that word.

— Sven Spieker 174

Repent means “the pain again.”

— Anne Carson, *Nox* 5.5

THE MATERIALIST TURN IN THE HUMANITIES asks us to consider, among other questions, which material practices undergird how we read, write, and interpret.<sup>1</sup> One way to approach this question is via poetic experiments with the habitual presuppositions that silently inform reading as praxis.<sup>2</sup> Anne Carson's elegy *Nox* challenges our notion of reading, as Carson collects, interweaves, and layers a miscellany of scraps from the past. The material construction of *Nox*, as I will argue, draws attention to the peculiar ways in which mourning and translation are intimately related processes. In its published form, *Nox* takes shape as a long pleated page, delivered to us as readers in a box. *Nox* is not simply read but also felt, seen, unfolded, and sifted through. To engage with this artifact, I suggest, is to replicate Carson's simultaneous experience of loss and re-creation.

Like much of Carson's work — such as *The Beauty of the Husband*, self-described on the front cover as “a fictional essay in 29 tangos,” or her better-known novel-in-verse *Autobiography of Red* — *Nox* is a text that does not fit within available generic categories.<sup>3</sup> Part literary text, part art object, *Nox* has been described as “a pastiche of numbered entries” (Stang), “a tactile and visual delight” (Martinuik), a “diversion from our expectations” (Bradshaw), “a therapeutic biography” (Fleming 64), and “as much an artifact as a piece of writing” (O'Rourke). Most striking about *Nox* is its experimental deployment of an accordion pleat, which disrupts the linearity of the text and intensifies our haptic orien-

tation toward the artifact.<sup>4</sup> The accordion pleat thus allows for the intersection of physical form, artistic genre, and affective resonance.

The intersection of materiality, translation, and mourning in *Nox*, unsurprisingly, has attracted considerable scholarly comment already. Tanis MacDonald, for instance, understands *Nox* as “enact[ing] its own paradox by offering itself as an epitaph for Michael Carson, but also for the idea of the book itself” (57). Similarly, for Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, “*Nox* is a book about *remediation*” (27), and Carson’s digital reproduction of material artifacts, like her translation of Catullus 101, “makes us aware of rewriting as a material, destructive act: an act of erasure that cancels out the original it seeks to convey” (31).<sup>5</sup> Both of these readings associate the “thingness” of *Nox* with its elegiac function. But *Nox* is less a material thing than a material process. In this, I agree with Tatiana Rapatzikou’s consideration of *Nox*’s materiality as an “*ongoing, repetitive experience* of physical absence and material presence” (58; emphasis added). Likewise, Liedeke Plate’s assessment of Carson’s repetition of the word *nox* speaks to a similar, repetitive process: “The insistent recursiveness of not just the name but also the very act of naming, of calling and calling again — indeed, of recalling — emphasizes process over product, doing over thing, memorializing over memorial” (100). I will demonstrate below that the process in which *Nox* encourages us to participate has a deliberately selected name: replication. Carson’s description of *Nox* on the back of its cardboard carapace reads: “When my brother died I made an epitaph for him in the form of a book. This is a replica of it, as close as we could get.” The word *replica* derives from the Latin *replicare*, meaning “to reply,” “to copy,” and, most importantly, “to refold.” Carson’s epigraph is no mere donnish pun. In the materiality of the replication, we see that the fold in *Nox* is not merely an index of loss but also, for Carson, the only possibility of consolation.

### Databasing the Narrative/Narrativizing the Database

Carson once said in an interview that she never thought of herself as a writer: “I don’t know what I do yet. I know that I have to make things. And it’s a convenient form we have in our culture, the book, in which you can make stuff, but it’s becoming less and less satisfying” (“Poetry” 56). We should not be surprised to discover that her elegy to her brother

is not published as a book but produced in a more experimental and surprising form: a box that contains (or “coffins”) a long pleated page of fragments.

*Nox* provides a rich visual and palpable experience of sifting through textual and photographic evidence of a personal past, seducing us with the remediated “tactility” of scraps of paper. Between the folds, we are situated in a space of varying tensions between the past and the present, the dead and the living, the spectral and the real. The experience of reading *Nox* is singular, no doubt, because of the accordion pleat. The multifold design forces us to encounter *Nox* not only as a literary text but also as an object. In turn, this changes the space in which we read and hold the book. Carson herself suggests unravelling it all at once: “Do you have a long staircase?’ she asks. ‘Drop it down and watch it unfold. I did’” (Sehgal). One critic adopts a more methodical approach:

Few things in this world have the power to make me clean my desk. One of them, it turns out, is Anne Carson’s new book-in-a-box, *Nox*. Before I even opened it, I felt an irresistible urge to spend twenty minutes purging my worktable of notes, napkins, magazines, forks, check stubs, unpaid bills, and fingernail clippings. The urge struck me, I think, for a couple of reasons. For one, *Nox* is unwieldy. (Anderson)

If one end of *Nox* accidentally unravels over the edge of a table, then it will pull the rest of the book down with it. The pages of *Nox* are always at risk of crumpling under their own weight or even ripping. *Nox* thus gives us a heightened awareness of reading as a spatialized and materialized activity. There is a silent asceticism that accompanies the reading, suggested not only by the white spaces in *Nox* but also by the urge to have a clean space in order to accommodate the object itself. As Sam Anderson points out, “Processing it, as a reader, seems to require several acres of clear space — mental, physical, emotional, attentional — every inch of which Carson fills, immediately, with her own special brand of clutter.”

In accordance with the book’s material form, *Nox* is a sedimented text that implicates translation, history, and grief while entangling languages, times, and memories. Carson positions — or, to borrow Anderson’s word, “clutters” — side by side a variety of cultural products: translation, palimpsest, autobiography, memoir, letter, found art,

and photography. Furthermore, she forgoes the usual paratextual cues commonly found in a book, such as page numbers, chapter headings, and a table of contents.<sup>6</sup> The box form also highlights the spatial and temporal miscellany of her fragments. It is not hard to imagine how a box of fragments might be “read” and “misread” according to the order by which each artifact is pulled out or how we piece them together. As Carson writes in *Autobiography of Red* about extant papyrus scraps of Stesichorus’s *Geryoneis*, “The fragment numbers tell you roughly how the pieces fell out of the box” (6). A box of fragments resists linearity and is rarely kept in order.

Although *Nox* is received in a box, the reproduction, or “replication,” of the published form suggests a necessary imposition of order, determined by Carson and executed by the publisher.<sup>7</sup> However, the ordering process draws attention to its own replication and questions its function. Although the fragments are “ordered” and curated by Carson, she manages to achieve the similar effect of a box of fragments: that is, the assemblage of cultural products leads to arbitrary and surprising juxtapositions.<sup>8</sup> As much as we might perceive the intersections of grief and memory among the fragments, we also make out the gaps and artful randomness that we would expect a box of fragments to contain. Carson goes on to say in *Autobiography of Red* that “You can of course keep shaking the box. . . . Here. Shake” (7). Here we are directly implicated in the process of replication. The same is true of *Nox*.

In this regard, Lev Manovich supplies a highly apposite distinction for our reading of *Nox*: “As a cultural form, a database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world” (225). Is *Nox* a narrative or a database? This question has fundamental implications for any interpretation of the text. Raptzikou’s materialist reading of *Nox*, for example, posits that the work “combines translation with typographic materiality, thus amplifying the narrative it constructs. Carson does not strive to entrust her readers with an intimate or accurate story but with a sense of intimacy, the elusive experience of deciphering, synthesizing and handling an array of verbal, visual and crafted elements” (59). Indeed, the tension between the task of constructing a possible narrative

and the work's resistance to a singular, "accurate story" is at the crux of *Nox*. If *Nox* is a narrative, then Michael's death is a culminating event that *après coup* gives meaning to the discrete events of his life. If *Nox* is a database, then Michael's death is a senseless entry that has no more or less significance than any other fragmentary event. Carson insists that "We want other people to have a centre, a history, an account that makes sense. . . . It forms a lock against oblivion" (*Nox* 3.3). She wants to make a story out of Michael's life so that she can identify exactly what has been lost and thereby grieve it. But the senseless database always threatens the meaningful narrative.<sup>9</sup> In the same passage, Carson must admit that, though Herodotus "begins history with such a lock," he expresses this desire in a passage within which "the relation of the parts of this sentence, of this project, is obscure" (*Nox* 3.3). The senseless dissolution of the database always threatens the historian's *and* the mourner's recuperative project — "always comforting to assume there is a secret behind what torments you" (after *Nox* 5.4). Her mourning is intimately tied to her search for the "centre" of Michael, which remained secretive in life and is now eternally unattainable in death. The question that drives Carson's project is how can we grieve when we never truly know what has been lost?<sup>10</sup>

### The Grieving Chorus

We can fruitfully approach the central problem of *Nox* in terms provided by Sigmund Freud's famous essay on "Mourning and Melancholia." The basic distinction between the "normal" state of mourning and the "pathological" state of melancholy is that, in the former, the lost object is known and that, in the latter, the lost object is unknown: "[M]elancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious" (245). For Carson, however, mourning and melancholia cannot be distinguished so easily. The meaningless fragments that populate the life of the deceased can always, in ways that are *impossible to know* in advance, in ways that are *structurally* unconscious, dissolve any meaningful, mournful narrative. *Contra* Freud, melancholia is not the extrinsic pathology of mourning; it is its intrinsic condition.<sup>11</sup>

Yet we should not ignore the affirmative, productive capacity of melancholia. And we can grasp this affirmative capacity by consid-

ering Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History."<sup>12</sup> What Benjamin says of historical materialism is also relevant to the melancholic force of narrative dispersion:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history — blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history. (262-63)

For Benjamin, there is only one way to save the oppressed past, only one way to save time. That way is "to blast open the continuum of history" (262) by applying the shock of stasis to the smooth arc of narrative so that its elements can be rearranged in unprecedented permutations. Benjamin's historical materialism is a melancholic posture toward history that holds out a messianic promise: the past will live again in ways that we cannot anticipate. In terms more appropriate to the physical constitution of *Nox*, we could say that historical materialism is a kind of replication. We can draw at least two relevant consequences from this theoretical configuration: (1) mourning is endless, and (2) the dead never truly die. Carson, as we will see, maintains grief and consolation in precisely this delicate suspension. Strangely, the impossibility of bringing mourning to an end is simultaneously the only possibility of consolation.

Thus, the fragments of *Nox* revolve around a question that Carson poses: "Who were you?"<sup>13</sup> The answer to this question would make sense, perhaps, of the miscellany of fragments that she has collected and produce a coherent loss. In fact, it is fitting that Carson should label *Nox* an "epitaph" on the outside of the box/container. An epitaph, as we know, is written on a tomb and, however superficially, provides an answer to the question "Who were you?" Nevertheless, as noted above, her own description of *Nox* draws attention to the fact that what we

hold, in actuality, is a replication of her private notebook.<sup>14</sup> Her use of the word *replica* on the box highlights the position of *Nox* as a “copy” that falls short. An epitaph for Carson is always a “replica.” The epigraphic “reply” to the question of Michael’s identity can only be a copy, a simulacrum, something that always gives itself to more foldings and refoldings, in accordance with the material processes that *Nox* invites. The work of mourning both falls short and is extended indefinitely.

However, the classical function of elegy is not only to mourn the dead but also to universalize the sense of loss for its audience and to provide some measure of consolation.<sup>15</sup> As Milton says of the subject of his most famous elegy, “Who would not sing for Lycidas?” (120). Thus, every time we fold and refold *Nox* we participate *materially* in the experience of Carson’s grief — in the mournful constitution of narrative and the melancholic dissolution of the same. To read *Nox* is not at all an act of voyeurism, or “peering through a keyhole” (Deutsch), spying on the intense privacy of her suffering, but literally an act of *compassion* on her behalf. As long as we replicate *Nox*, we grieve with Carson and sing for Michael. To echo Milton, “Who would not sing for Michael?”

Moreover, this replication brings to life a Michael whom even the elegist herself could not have anticipated. Although, for Milton, Lycidas continues to live “In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love” (125), for Carson, Michael continues to live in the assemblage, dispersion, and reassemblage of temporal splinters. Melancholia, the possibility of fragmenting any given narrative, is not only the intrinsic condition of mourning but also, for Carson, the *sine qua non* of the text’s consolatory efficacy.

### The Meaningful Shard: Translating Catullus

The attempt to mourn Michael coincides precisely with the attempt to translate Catullus 101, written by the ancient poet for his own brother. While translating, Carson “prowls” (*Nox* 7.1) for the right word in the same way that she “prowls” for her brother. The language of grief corresponds to the language of translation, and both pose similar difficulties. Catullus provides a paradigm of mourning and serves as the lens through which loss is comprehended. Indeed, we sense two distinct historical timelines that Carson intentionally brings into proximity: a deep history or antiquity, as suggested by the presence of Catullus, and

a more recent, familial history in Michael. She thus brings together two tasks: translating Catullus and mourning Michael.

Catullus 101, as Carson explains in passage 7.1, was written for his own brother, who died in the Troad — both brothers passed away while abroad. Carson takes the poem apart and provides denotative and connotative “definitions” of each Latin word in the poem (sixty-three words in total). The word-by-word translation at first appears to display a translator’s “fidelity to the word” (Benjamin 78). However, Carson is ironically aware of the misguided assumption that the translator’s art is merely “a task that does not occur in the realms of thought but between the pages of a dictionary” (Maier 25). All translation is an approximation of a withdrawal that can never be exhausted. As Carson herself states, “Every translator knows the point where one language cannot be rendered into another. . . . [Y]ou cannot match them item for item” (Nay 4). It is a truism that translation entails loss — inherent to the very process — and nothing can make up for it. Loss is both the enabling and the disabling condition of all translation.<sup>16</sup>

Catullus 101, elegizing his own brother, provides an allusive space of lyric grief that Carson accesses for her own mourning. Her definition of each word begins as a traditional entry that identifies its part of speech, lists off the word’s multiple meanings and uses, and defines its use in common phrases. As the entry continues, it digresses and becomes inflected by her own story. We can see this inflection in the first definition, of *multas*.

**multas**

*multus multa multum* adjective

[cf. Gk μάλα, MELIOR] numerous, many, many of, many a; many people, many, many women, the ordinary people . . . many words especially in elliptical phrases e.g. *quid multa? ne multa*: to cut a long story short; an abundance of, much, large, *multum est*: it is of value. . . .<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the entry, however, Carson introduces another voice, one noticeably personalized: “*multa dies* or *multa lux*: broad daylight, *multa nox*: late in the night, perhaps too late.” The neutral and authoritative voice associated with the dictionary is apparently overtaken by one subjectivized, humanized, and in this example uncertain. Instead of finding a “bedrock” of meaning, the definition loses itself, misses itself in

*Nox* — “perhaps too late,” as Carson puts it. Each word in Catullus 101 becomes a fulcrum on which Carson balances her own grief. Each word is pried from the poem so that it no longer participates in the larger text but is resituated in the neutral “genre” of the dictionary entry; it is then reintegrated into Carson’s narrative. The word becomes meaningful again but does so in a way touched by her loss.

Carson’s pressing question is how to define the word *brother* in his absence. In his elegy, Catullus repeats the word *frater* three times and the cognate adjective *fraterno* once. Carson defines these words as follows:

**frater**

*frater fratris* masculine noun

[cf. Skt *bhratar*, Gk *φράτηρ*] a son of the same father or mother, brother; *frater germanus*: a full brother; (plural) brother and sister; (plural, transferred) of a kindred race; (especially vocative, as an affectionate way of referring to a person of one’s own age); (as a euphemism for a partner in an irregular sexual union); (as an honourific [sic] title for allies); (referring to a member of a religious club); *cum fratre Lycisce*: with dear old Lycis (of a dog).<sup>18</sup>

**fraterno**

fraternus fraternal fraternum adjective

[FRATER+NUS] of or belonging to a brother; proper to a brother, brotherly, fraternal; honourific [sic] term applied to allies.<sup>19</sup>

Defining *brother* is a task that has long preoccupied Carson, as we can see in *Plainwater*, a collection published ten years prior to *Nox*. “The Wishing Jewel” opens with the *Roget’s Thesaurus* entry for brother: “*Brother (noun) associate, blood brother, cadet, colleague, fellow, frater, frère, friar, kinsman, sibling, soul brother, twin brother. See CLERGY, FRIEND, KINSHIP*” (*Plainwater* 245). There are some obvious overlaps between these entries, such as kinship and alliance, but there is a stark contrast between these definitions and the reality of Carson’s relationship with Michael. The rhetorical phrase that Michael uses to emphasize the incomparability of his relationship with his dead lover, Anna — “I have never known a closeness like that” (after *Nox* 3.3) — might also be applied to Carson’s relationship with him. The private intensity of their relationship exceeds the public function of the dictionary: Carson too has “never known a closeness like that.”

As does Catullus, Carson repeats the word *brother* in *Nox* and refrains from using Michael's name. Michael is referred to as "he," "my brother," "your brother," or "strange brother." But *brother* is clearly a problematic word for Carson. It is a difficult word to translate and possesses a meaning beyond her. And a good place to begin searching for meaning is in a reference text. The dictionary and thesaurus intend to provide facts. Facts are important to Carson. Like Geryon, she "[has] a respect for facts" (*Autobiography* 27). On the subject of her mother's death, Carson writes, "Death is a fact" (*Men* 166). Her mother's death precedes her brother's death, but in both cases death and facts are slippery things, both within and beyond reach for Carson. As she writes in *Nox*, "I am looking a long time into the muteness of my brother. It resists me. . . . To put this another way, there is something that facts lack. 'Overtakelessness' is a word told [to] me by a philosopher once: *das Unumgängliche* — that which cannot be got round. Cannot be avoided or seen to the back of. And about which one collects facts — it remains beyond them" (1.3).<sup>20</sup> This might be one way to understand Carson's dictionary entries. Despite her gesture toward the reference book, typically used to consult information and confirmed facts on specific matters, by attempting to define each word Carson comes up against something that "cannot be got round."<sup>21</sup> Something "remains beyond." Carson translates this "something" as "overtakelessness."<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, she translates exactly what must remain untranslatable. Inherent in language, grief, and Michael is something that cannot be overtaken. To return to the terms established above, we can reduce Michael neither to a melancholic array of facts nor to a given mournful narrative. We can reduce Catullus 101 neither to a melancholic glossary nor to a mournfully authoritative translation.

So, once more, we must not overemphasize the pathos of *Nox*, we must not dwell too long on its obsession with loss. To do so would be to ignore the affirmative and consolatory dimensions of translation for Carson. Recall that she is not only a translator of classical verse but also a teacher of classical languages. Therefore, however accurate, it is not enough to say that she is trying but "failing" to translate Catullus just as she is trying but "failing" to recapture Michael. Rather, Carson is inviting us to translate Catullus along with her just as she is inviting us to replicate Michael along with her.

According to the terms that I have been developing here, the dictionary entries that atomize Catullus 101 constitute a melancholic gesture, utterly fragmenting the coherence of the poem just as, for Manovich, the database fragments the narrative. But only melancholic fragmentation can permit the mournful process of translation, reconstituting the poem's meaning anew. Indeed, the personalized nature of the dictionary entries suggests exactly this movement from neutral shard to meaningful component of a narrative. We can participate in Carson's grief for her brother by engaging in the melancholic and mournful task of translation. Just as we attempt to "overtake" Michael in our mourning, so too we attempt to translate Catullus into a final object, the coherent elegy itself. But both, as Carson reminds us, "cannot be seen to the back of." Rather, the reader, and both the translator and the griever, remain in a state of melancholia. We translate the untranslatable; we succeed by failing; we find Michael by losing him. The material process of folding and refolding *Nox* allows us to move, continuously and countless, between the collected fragments of Michael as we simultaneously move between the definitions provided throughout the text.

Furthermore, as all language instructors know well, no two translations of an original are ever identical. And even the novice can surprise the expert with an elegant and unexpected response to the source text. Again we perceive the consolatory power, and even the generosity, of *Nox* as it urges us to participate in the dynamic of grief not by dwelling on loss but by producing something novel and perhaps even beautiful. *Nox* asks us to replicate both Michael and Catullus.

On the one hand, we can consider *Nox* as a singular art object — intricate, absorbing, and multifaceted as it is. On the other, we are invited to ruminate on its status as an artifact of a digital culture, remediating the tactility of the personal scrapbook for mass production. I have argued that we can best understand the materiality of *Nox* by considering not what it is but what it asks us to do. Complicating its status as an object for passive aesthetic reception, *Nox* gives us the resources to generate something new. Complicating its status as an artifact of *contemporary* digital culture, its mass reproduction of a private archive augments its consolatory operation, as per the *classical* requirement of the genre of elegy. The more *Nox* is replicated, the more Catullus is translated, the more we grieve with Carson, the more Michael lives.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a recent assessment of the materialist turn, see Miller.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent consideration of *Nox* in light of alternative reading practices generated by digital mediation of aesthetic categories, see Jung (13-15).

<sup>3</sup> In an interview, Craig Morgan Teicher states that “Carson doesn’t have much faith in the notion of genre, or at least she pays very little fidelity to it. . . . As far as what genre the book [*Nox*] is, Carson is mostly concerned with what it’s not: ‘I guess it’s a memoir because it’s about memory, but I kept calling it an epitaph, which seems a more dignified form to me, because memoirs tend to be mostly about the memoirist and their salvation from some calamity or suffering. I didn’t want this to be about me mainly.’”

<sup>4</sup> This format is not the first of its kind. *Nox* finds a formal predecessor in the 1913 collaboration *La prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* between poet Blaise Cendrars and painter Sonia Delauney. Like the Cendrars-Delauney book, in which both the left-hand side and the right-hand side of the fold are to be read and viewed together, *Nox* offers a similar method of reading.

<sup>5</sup> The construction of *Nox* comes at an interesting point in the history of book publishing. As Françoise Palleau-Papin states, “In its published form, [*Nox*] recapitulates the history of publishing, from the hand-made doodle, drawing or inscription, to the scroll, and to the codex.” Indeed, the reproduction of the original notebook coincides with current technological developments of “the book,” of which Carson was aware: “The book’s publication happened to coincide with Kindle, and I’m so pleased that it’s so un-Kindle-isable” (Schgal).

<sup>6</sup> Because of the lack of page numbers, I will cite *Nox* using the passage numbers that Carson provides.

<sup>7</sup> How we read *Nox* has already been decided, to a small extent, by those involved in its production. Rapatzikou’s understanding of the multiple levels and relationships in the production and reception of *Nox* includes “those who conceptualized the project; the publishers who accepted the challenge of its technological reproduction; the practitioner artists who had to resolve the material complexities during the transitional phase from the private collage journal to the public boxed book; and the readers who, through their physical interaction, are invited to personalize the experience” (63).

<sup>8</sup> Like *Nox*, Carson’s 2016 publication, *Float*, is contained in a hard case and makes this sense of “arbitrariness” explicit on the back of the box. *Float* is described as “a collection of twenty-two chapbooks whose order is unfixed and whose topics are various. Reading can be freefall.”

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Steedman observes a comparable tension in the archive between senselessness and sense. More specifically, when left alone, the archive is inert, chaotic, and senseless; when engaged with, sense has the opportunity to emerge: “The archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there. . . . And *nothing happens to this stuff, in the Archive*. It is indexed, and catalogued, and some of it is not indexed and catalogued, and some of it is lost. But as stuff, it just sits there until it is read, and used, and narrativised” (68).

<sup>10</sup> Brett Foster takes the notion of the database further in his consideration of *Nox* and the “digital afterlife”: “Carson’s encounter with her lost brother in the form of a book-epitaph may resonate particularly for some readers because its ragged, untidy efforts prompt a broader cultural reflection. Think of the data-nest that sometimes arises when someone with a strong online presence dies, in the form of tributes on a Facebook wall, or laments or commiserations in a Twitter thread.” It is clear that the relationship between Michael and Carson preceded the “digital footprint,” and Foster goes on to note that Carson faces

the opposite problem in her elegy: instead of a large quantity of digital data, she possesses “a dearth of information from one unknown.”

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida makes a related point about Freud’s death drive, which always already infects the memorializing archive with the necessary possibility of forgetfulness: “[I]f there is no archive without consignment in an *external place* which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, in the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction . . . the archive always works, and *a priori*, against itself” (11-12).

<sup>12</sup> A similar connection between Freud and Benjamin has been suggested by Ilit Ferber.

<sup>13</sup> “Who were you?” is a rubbing, printed on the same page as 2.1 in *Nox*.

<sup>14</sup> Although the replication conveys the feel of paper textures and the tone of time, it is not immediate. Carson foregrounds *mediation*, for every aspect of *Nox* invites us to consider the difference between original and copy. This “difference” is essential to her project since what she offers in the reproduction of her notebook is the lost original and, implicitly, the lost object.

<sup>15</sup> In *Economy of the Unlost*, Carson directly associates the epitaphic inscription with its consolatory function: “[A]n epitaph is a way of thinking about death and gives consolation” (95).

<sup>16</sup> As Rapatzikou also notes, “the translation practice in which Carson engages aims to enhance the sense of loss or lack emphasized by the material objects *Nox* reproduces” (59).

<sup>17</sup> Defined before passage 1.0.

<sup>18</sup> Defined before passage 3.3. Subsequent definitions of “frater” read “**frater**, see above *frater fratris*.”

<sup>19</sup> Defined before passage 9.1.

<sup>20</sup> Carson borrows the term *das Unumgängliche* from Martin Heidegger, who first used it in his discussion of modern science and its relation to being. See Heidegger.

<sup>21</sup> Carson writes something similar in a discussion of Paul Celan and Friedrich Hölderlin: “Now a private language is a kind of riddle. It raises the same problem of pure origin: you cannot get behind the back of it” (*Economy* 132). The inability to “see” or “get to the back of” something — that is, the inability to achieve complete comprehension — can be understood as the impossibility of mourning.

<sup>22</sup> This “something” might be what Carson means when she writes “*nox*” or “night.” In “Longing, a Documentary,” from her earlier collection *Decreation* (2005), she also draws an intimate link between night and overtakeness: “Night is not a fact. . . . Facts lack something, she thought. . . . ‘Overtakeness’ (what facts lack)” (244-45). Although *nox* does not appear in the poem by Catullus, Carson still encounters it in her indexical entries. It is not simply a metaphor for death, but since the word appears and reappears throughout *Nox* it points to something more difficult to grasp. *Nox* is an obstacle that counters fact and keeps facts lacking. As Carson puts it in “Longing,” “Night plucks her, she stumbles, stops” (*Decreation* 243).

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