

Eulogy Essay and Reading

Creatures die. Species go extinct. Landscapes are ruined and transformed.

“Grief,” writes Donna Haraway, “is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing.”¹ We must grieve with and for our more-than-human kin and kind—for the “roadkill” on the side of the highway, for the species shot into oblivion, for the canyon inundated with water. To grieve creatures and species and places is, in some significant sense, to acknowledge our interconnectedness and interdependency on the wider-than-human world. Indeed, we might say that our grief for such non-humans is itself a *symptom* of our deep connection to this wider-than-human world.

And yet, outside of the most intimate human and more-than-human relationships (those with our pets and other companion species), rarely do we acknowledge our grief for the more-than-human. Rarely do we outwardly, publicly, rhetorically mourn such losses. Indeed, rarely do we even register such losses *as* losses. Commonsense tells us that the deer’s corpse lying on the side of the road is collateral damage; that the species made extinct by human practices is an unfortunate side effect of progress; that the devastation of landscapes is an inevitability in developing and urbanizing nations. Yet, as Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman remark in their introduction to *Mourning Natures*, some of us do take notice of such losses; some of us are deeply affected by the destruction of the more-than-human world.²

How can we register such losses in language? How can we attend to the deaths of more-than-human beings and the degradation of places in a way that communicates to others how these losses matter? We are accustomed to registering the loss of human lives in and through a speech act called a “eulogy.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* understands “eulogy” as “speech or writing in commendation of the character and services of a person, or the qualities of a thing,” which manifests most often in a “set oration in honor of a deceased person.” The English word “eulogy” joins the Greek prefix “eu,” meaning good or well, with the Greek word “logos,” meaning “speech.” Etymologically, then, eulogy means to “speak well” of another.

For your final writing assignment, you will prepare a eulogy for a creature (*not* a pet), species, or place that either has already been lost or that is threatened or otherwise at stake. In keeping with the form of the eulogy, your essay should “commend” the object of your lamentation. You may accomplish this task in any number of ways, though narrative is perhaps the most common form that such texts take. You should also reflect more abstractly on the questions of death, extinction, loss, and transformation raised by the particular entity you have elected to eulogize. In this respect, your essay should develop an argument about the loss of more-than-human beings and places: why does it matter? of what value is registering such losses? how do such losses shape our sense of who we are? how do we account for our own culpability in such losses? etc.

Your essay should be five to six double-spaced pages (approximately 2,000 words) in length. Keep the formatting simple: 12-point Times New Roman font with 1.25-inch margins on the left and right. Cite any sources using the most recent MLA guidelines. Proofread very closely; there should be *no* typographical or grammatical errors. Pay very close attention to style and arrangement. Print your papers before class. As you write the essay, keep in mind that you will be reading it aloud to your peers. So, think not only about what you’re saying but *how it sounds* as you read it. Think of your essay as a “script” for a verbal “performance,” as if you were speaking at a funeral.

¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 39.

² Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, “Introduction: To Mourn beyond the Human,” in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, ed. Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 3–26.