

## **FROM READING TO RESPONSE: YOUR OWN WAY, IN YOUR OWN WORDS!**

People of all sorts write elegies, not just professional poets, but everyday citizens. Check out your local newspapers, and you'll see "amateur" elegies for the tragedy of the son or daughter whose lives did not reach the birthday the poem commemorates, for the aching though more timely loss of the beloved grandparent and parent or even for the dear pet. You have all experienced loss. What kinds of losses are there? Death, yes. Loss of ability. Loss of self esteem. Loss of an important relationship with a friend, parent, boyfriend/girlfriend. Loss of a friend. Loss of confidence. Loss of some thing or place you loved. Loss of your earlier selves.

Select one significant loss you have experienced as the subject of your own elegy. Though you need only write a single poem, rather than a series, you are to attempt a three part poem, with three distinct scenes. The first scene in your poem should recreate a scene before the loss, somewhat like Gentry's "Tantalus." The next should provide an image or scene that represents the loss itself, as in "Intensive Care, Oncology" or "The Blessing." The last should reflect a scene after the loss, possibly a scene of absence or a scene of looking back as in Gentry's "The Lamp," or "Crossing from Providence to Newport." Make sure your poem has a strong grounding in a particular setting, a real place with real objects, and that it is focused on sensory images, as Gentry's poems are. In your poem, try for a casual, personal voice, your own voice with simple, clear and honest language. Finally, be sure not to tell your feelings about the poem's subject. Let your emotions be shown through your images and the connotations of the words you use. If you are writing about a person you haven't seen recently, consider looking at pictures to help you create images, as Gentry has done.

If writing or integrating the three parts seems terribly difficult, don't worry. This is a first draft. You may choose later to develop only one section of the poem and let the others go. However, trying the three scenes will give you more options for revision.