

MOURNING MEN IN EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

By

ANDREW D. MCCARTHY

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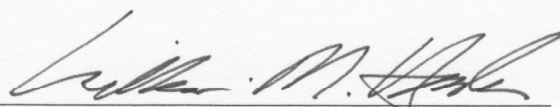
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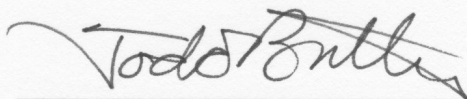


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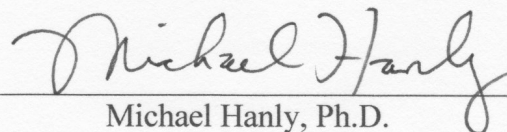
The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of ANDREW D. MCCARTHY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.



William M. Hamlin, Ph.D., Chair



Todd Butler, Ph.D.



Michael Hanly, Ph.D.

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Any and all remaining errors are my own.

# MOURNING MEN IN EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

## Abstract

by Andrew D. McCarthy, Ph.D.  
Washington State University  
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Chair: William M. Hamlin

This study examines the adoption and adaptation of the classical lament by English playwrights of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As a complex demonstration of sorrow, lamentations were traditionally performed by women, but in the drama of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, such displays came to be performed by men with startling frequency. By noting the ways in which medieval and Renaissance dramatists construct heirs to antiquity's grieving women, this dissertation enables us to better understand the complexity of religious tensions as well as constructions of masculinity in the years preceding and following the English Reformation.

Beginning with the drama of the Middle Ages, this dissertation reveals how the English dramatic tradition is built upon the performance of the lament. Moving from the liturgical drama into a detailed analysis of *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, and *Everyman*, this study argues that lamentations appear repeatedly in these moralities, performed by a variety of earthly and heavenly characters. This discussion is then juxtaposed with the *Ars Moriendi* tracts, works meant to prepare the dying Christian for the afterlife. Despite their intent to show people how to "die well," however, the tracts are nevertheless infiltrated by the unsettling presence of the lament, thus undermining their ostensible objective.

With this context in mind, the dissertation examines a number of plays by Elizabethan dramatists, including Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Doctor Faustus*, Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, arguing that the tradition of the lamenting man is continued and developed in their works. Writing in the wake of the English Reformation, these playwrights deploy the lament, a deeply ritualistic performance of grief, in ways that not only reveal the intense cultural tensions between Catholic and Protestant belief, but also complicate early understandings of what constituted appropriate masculine behavior. In drawing on a variety of discursive traditions, this study shows the continuity of experience between men and women in responding to death, while at the same time revealing the profound cultural anxieties and their manifestations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance in England.

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To Jessica and Alexander: for never giving me a reason to grieve.



## Introduction: Mourning Men in Early English Drama

Accept thou Shrine of my Dead Saint,  
Instead of Dirges this Complaint,  
And for sweet flowres to crowne thy Hearse  
Receive a strew of weeping verse  
From thy griev'd Friend; whom Thou mightst see  
Quite melted into Teares for Thee  
-Henry King<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 2008, I flew to London with two conference papers, a letter of introduction, a reservation at a questionable hostel, and a plan to begin research for my dissertation on the performance of masculine grief in medieval and Renaissance drama. Comfortably between the second and third years of my Ph.D. and having earned the distinction of “A.B.D.,” I was filled with all the youthful optimism that often accompanies those who fail to realize how much work is ahead of them. Once my reader card for the British Library had been obtained, I set out to find the lost manuscript (*Cardenio*, perhaps) that would catapult me into academic stardom, but I somehow managed to get sidetracked by all of the other cultural activities London has to offer.

While spending plenty of time attending plays and exploring museums, I happened upon an image that haunted me for the remainder of the trip and continues to occupy my thoughts today. On one of my visits to the British Museum, I came across an installation titled “Living and Dying” which depicted a variety of customs concerning life and death throughout the world. I don’t remember much about the display, with the exception of a photograph of a group of women from Northern Papua New Guinea.

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<sup>1</sup> See Henry King “An Exequy To his matchlesse never to be forgotten Friend.” *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, 1509-1659*, Ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin, 2005)

Covered in what appeared to be white paint, they stared death-like out from the frame, and I was instantly captivated.<sup>2</sup> Moving in for a better look, I learned that these women were mourning the death of a loved one, a process that would take them over a year to appropriately complete. The photo's accompanying note card explained that their ritual involved a number of steps, including months of self-imposed seclusion, shaven heads, and special mourning garments, but the most striking feature, at least to me, was the application of clay to their bodies. An important element of the women's mourning ritual involved making their grief outwardly visible, and to accomplish this, they covered their skin with white clay. Not only would this signify their grief to others, but as the clay hardened, it painfully pulled and scraped at their flesh. What fascinated me about this practice was that despite its startling foreignness, I was already deeply familiar with what it represented. Though I had never heard of or seen this particular rite, these women were engaging in a very specific mourning ritual, one that belongs to a tradition reaching as far back as antiquity and perhaps even farther. While seclusion and special mourning garments are recognizable aspects of grief, even in twenty-first century America, the women's self-flagellation through the application of pain inducing clay is at once alien and even disturbing. The author of the note card seemed to recognize this fact, ending rather unceremoniously with the casual observation that mourning rituals are less extensive today, but I wasn't thinking about the present. Rather, I was struck by the similarities between these tribal women from Northern Papua New Guinea and the mourning men who populated the stages of medieval and Renaissance England.

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<sup>2</sup> The caption for the photograph was "Women in Mourning, Collingwood Bay, Papua New Guinea, 1921. Photo: Frank Hurley/National Library of Australia." I am indebted to Jim Hamill of the British Museum for kindly providing me with this information.

I would be reminded of this connection a few days later as I sat at the reconstructed Globe Theatre on a beautiful, warm summer night and watched a performance of *King Lear*. After seeing the disguised Kent stocked, Lear begins to recognize that he has been too rash in his decision to banish Cordelia and place his peaceful retirement in the hands of Goneril and Regan. The moment, almost too brief to notice amidst the Fool's songs and the spectacle of the incarcerated Kent, foreshadows the impending storm of emotion that eventually erupts and pours forth from the aged King in the remainder of the play. Reflecting on the Fool's insistence that his daughters will become a source of never ending grief, Lear exclaims, "O, how this mother swells up towards my heart! / *Hysterica passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element's below!"(2.4.54-56).<sup>3</sup> As I heard these lines delivered and watched the agony register on the actor's face, I noticed how this outburst signals an important moment in Lear's unraveling; a process that will consume the play until the curtains fall and the rest is silence. Yet most striking to me were the similarities between Lear's behavior and those of the women from the photograph. Lear, monarch of ancient Britain, reacts to his losses and expresses his sorrow in a manner that echoes the ritual grief of the women of Papua New Guinea. Indeed, he even seems to recognize the extent to which his emotional experience partakes in a process typically thought of as feminine, as his response to the Fool ultimately suggests that his grief has caused him to lose his masculinity. Though separated by hundreds of years and thousands of miles, the mourning women of Papua

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare, unless otherwise noted, are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 2008). In the final chapter, I will further examine these lines and the critical trends that surround them.

New Guinea and the men of the Renaissance stage respond to death and loss in the same way. They lament.

It is important to define what we mean when we use the word *lament* or label a certain set of actions a *lamentation*, as the term has been rendered hackneyed through excessive misuse. As scholars have noted, the term *lament* signifies a number of different genres and can manifest itself in a number of different ways. On the most basic level, the lament is an expression of mourning—one not always directed towards the dead, but can be inspired by any loss. The biblical book of Lamentations, for instance, partakes in the long tradition of grieving the fall of great cities, something that is echoed in much of the literature depicting the fall of Troy and its aftermath.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in a number of cultures laments are sung as a part of the process of matrimony by both the bride and her family, though for the purposes of this study I am primarily interested in laments for the dead.<sup>5</sup> Lamentations can appear in seemingly innocuous forms such as an elaborate poem or song, much like the excerpt with which this chapter began, or take on the more disturbing characteristics of loud wailing and self-flagellation.<sup>6</sup> Margaret Alexiou, in her work on the lament in Greek tradition, has suggested that lamenting the dead was “essentially functional” and “by no means just a spontaneous outbreak of grief. It was carefully controlled in accordance with the ritual at every stage.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, when looking at the response as part of a universal folk tradition, one scholar has noted the exact

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<sup>4</sup> The prominent role Troy played in early English imaginations is evident in a number of Renaissance works depicting lamentations. Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage* is one example which will be discussed later in chapter two, as is Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*.

<sup>5</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pgs. 3-4.

opposite; the lament is most certainly, “the spontaneous outburst of distress by the living on sustaining a loss.”<sup>8</sup> While the discrepancy between these two definitions points to the difficulty of defining this term, it is imperative to note that the lament is a *performance* of grief, one that is typically reserved for women. It is this gendered dimension, where the lament is understood as a fundamentally disruptive feminine force, that we can begin to see what is at stake in reading the mourning men of medieval and Renaissance England as partaking in this ritual.

Scholars of the lament have shown the form to be an intensely feminine response to loss—a physical display of grief that often features weeping, wailing, hair pulling, and tearing the flesh. In discussing the differences between how men and women express sorrow, Gail Holst-Warhaft claims that in most “traditional” cultures the lament is performed by women, because “it is women who tend to weep longer, louder, and it is they who are thought to communicate directly with the dead through their wailing songs.”<sup>9</sup> Bade Ajuwon echoes this sentiment in his observation of women as typical singers of funeral dirges, noting that such songs often involve “wailing, sobbing, and weeping, behaviors that are particularly suitable for women—for in Africa as elsewhere such activities are considered typically female.”<sup>10</sup> The women’s grief then becomes a double-edged sword, as it “leaves in the hands of women who, both as child-bearers and midwives already have a certain control over birth, potential authority over the rites of death.”<sup>11</sup> Drawing on one of the largest comparative studies of mourning rituals, Holst-

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<sup>8</sup> See Bade Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition.” *Journal of Folktale Studies* 22 (1981), pg. 272.

<sup>9</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pgs. 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> See Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead” pg. 274.

<sup>11</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 3.

Warhaft reveals that women express grief with more frequency than men and this may be due to a number of factors, including the emotional ties women feel to the dead are stronger, that displays of grief are cries for help and women are more likely to request assistance in the face of loss, and finally, and most provocatively, the self-flagellation that often accompanies the lament is indicative of woman's lower social standing—women can react in such a way because they are not held to the same standard as men.<sup>12</sup> These explanations as to why the lament is typically a feminine response point to a belief that women are more emotional than men, a notion that was by no means foreign to Renaissance Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The interplay between ritual and emotion in classical women's lamentations is something that became particularly evident in sixteenth century understandings of responses to death. In Renaissance England, the lament was clearly a hybrid of these two ideas—at once deeply ritualistic *and* fraught with passion. One need only look at contemporary definitions of the word to see the extent to which both ideas occupied the minds of the English. As a noun, the performance aspect is emphasized, though at the same time acknowledging its intense emotional impact: “An *act* of lamenting, a passionate or demonstrative expression of grief. Also *poet.* the action of lamenting, lamentation.” As a verb, the term is aligned with emotional response: “To express

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<sup>12</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pp. 20-27. This begs the question, which Holst-Warhaft notes, of which comes first—do women lament because their lower social standing allows this freedom, or are they in this position because they engage in the disruptive behavior of the lament? While this chicken or egg problem is provocative and worth thinking about, the important issue, at least for this chapter, is the gender/class issue inherent in excessive grief. See P.C. Rosenblatt, R. Walsh, and A. Jackson, *Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1976) for the data Holst-Warhaft draws on for her argument regarding the lament and gender.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the emotional nature of women in the Renaissance, see Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993) and Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1980).

profound sorrow for or concerning; also, in mod. use, to feel sorrow for; to mourn for the loss of (a person); to bewail” but both definitions gesture to the fact that to lament is to engage in a *performance* of grief.<sup>14</sup> Because theatre is also deeply invested in performance, plays provide an invaluable space to interrogate the ways in which this particular act of grieving developed alongside contemporary discussions regarding appropriate forms of mourning. Indeed, the women’s laments that occupied the stage from classical antiquity through the Renaissance were clearly concerned with examining such questions. Sophocles’ *Antigone*, for instance, is profoundly interested in the tension between familial obligations to the dead and obedience to the state.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, with its extended depiction of a group of lamenting women, reveals the range of emotion and action that can accompany such a response. Margaret Alexiou and Gail Holst-Warhaft have written extensively on the woman’s lament in the Greek tradition, and while Alexiou examines the development of ritual lamentation, Holst-Warhaft is primarily interested in the lament for the dead and the ways in which grief can be employed for political purposes.<sup>16</sup> Recently, Katharine Goodland has studied the lament within the context of medieval and Renaissance drama, arguing that the plays represent an attempt to reconcile the excessively mourning woman with the dominant Christian ideology, an attempt resulting in a multi-layered vision that at once “threatens

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<sup>14</sup> “Lament” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2009. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> For more on women’s lamentation on the ancient Greek stage see Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pgs. 127-70 and Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. (New York: Columbia U P, 2000) As we will see in chapter two, Thomas Watson’s sixteenth century Latin translation of the play speaks to the extent to which such issues were very much relevant during the Renaissance.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Cambridge and London: Harvard U P, 2000)

and legitimizes Christian eschatology.”<sup>17</sup> For instance, the N-Town, Towneley, and York Lazarus plays all show excessive mourning as sinful, while the Chester play suggests that excessive mourning is a sign of humility which necessarily calls upon God. In turn, Goodland understands the women of the Renaissance stage as the offspring of their medieval “foremothers,” tracing the lamenting woman from the Middle Ages into the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

In the following pages, I trace a trajectory similar to that of Goodland, but I contend that lamentation is not only a feminine response to loss, but a response shared, developed, and performed by men. Beginning with the drama of the Middle Ages, I note that men respond to loss and death in a near identical fashion to women. Tracking this development from the early liturgical beginnings through the morality plays, I suggest that the performance of grief has long been a central concern of drama, indeed, the very subject upon which the English dramatic tradition is built. As Gary Kuchar has suggested, “Christianity is nothing if not a vast technology of mourning. From David’s psalms, to Jeremiah’s lamentations, to Jesus’ weeping, to Magdalene’s tears, Christian scripture draws much of its power of fascination as a religious and literary document from its representation of grief.”<sup>18</sup> E.K. Chambers argued that the drama of the Middle Ages emerged from “the very bosom of the Church’s own ritual” and though this claim has been questioned and significantly revised in the years since it was first articulated, it is safe to say that the medieval dramatization of biblical characters and narrative speaks

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<sup>17</sup> See Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pg. 35.

<sup>18</sup> See Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2008), pg. 1.



to the extent to which representations of mourning and grief occupied early English stages.<sup>19</sup>

It is not much wonder then that the playwrights of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries drew upon these antecedents for London's popular theatre. Writing in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, English Renaissance playwrights such as Marlowe, Kyd, and Shakespeare grappled with and attempted to articulate the profound cultural trauma occasioned by the vast religious and cultural changes that attempted to reorganize and reform responses to and for the dead. Though death and dying pervaded virtually every discursive tradition in the Renaissance, the popular drama of the period was uniquely equipped for such discussions.<sup>20</sup> In her examination of Greek women's laments, Holst-Warhaft has noted this very connection between tragedy and death, remarking, "Tragedy is an art preoccupied with death. It is, at least in part, an appropriation of the traditional art of women and we sense in its language, its inscrutable echoes of music and dance, an older body of ritual, a sub-stratum which informs and at times intrudes itself into an urban, male art."<sup>21</sup> As I argue, the men of the Renaissance stage take on elements of this "traditional art of women," reacting to the intense change precipitated by the Protestant reformers. Because tragedy, and revenge tragedy more specifically, is fundamentally concerned with death, there is no better place to begin an examination of the shifting conceptions of appropriate responses to loss.

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<sup>19</sup> See E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), pg. 2.

<sup>20</sup> As we will see, discussions regarding death and what constituted appropriate response to loss as well as masculine behavior infiltrated theological, medical, and legal writings as well as discussions regarding poetics and the theatre. Virtually every major writer in the period grappled with these issues.

<sup>21</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices* pg. 11.

Playwrights of the period clearly recognized the lamentation as a type of potent performance; one whose dramatic potential they could endlessly exploit to great effect in their tragedies. Undoubtedly drawing from the vast store of lamentations in the Bible, Ovid, Virgil, as well as the drama of Seneca, English playwrights found in the lament an effective act that could easily convey a specific emotion through clearly identifiable stage movements. At the same time, the staging of laments, with its intense focus on interacting with and responding to death, played a pivotal role in post-Reformation England's attempt to grapple with the reformer's violent rift in the relationship between the living and the dead. While Catholic conceptions of purgatory, "a formalized system of memory by which the living carried the dead forward with them throughout their lives" and transubstantiation had originally played significant roles in maintaining an intimate relationship between the quick and the dead, reformers attempted to emphasize their distance with the complete exhumation of the body and the Eucharist from the burial rite.<sup>22</sup> Where the 1549 Order for the Burial of the Dead in England's *Book of Common Prayer* maintained communication between the priest and the dead body and its soul, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's new liturgy stressed a profound disconnect from the corpse, with the service addressing only the living congregation.<sup>23</sup> In the 1552 edition, the corpse was moved from inside the church to outside by the grave, revealing a fear over the "communicative possibilities between the dead and the living."<sup>24</sup> The earlier rite also included prayers for the departed, but the new version, which appeared only three years

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<sup>22</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 3. For a provocative and sustained discussion of the importance of purgatory and the Eucharist in *Hamlet* as well as medieval and Renaissance culture, see also Stephen Greenblatt *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton U P, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 577.

<sup>24</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 4.

later, reflected the exorcism of the deceased from the world of the living. As Eamon Duffy reveals, “in the world of the 1552 book the dead were no longer with us. They could neither be spoken to nor even about, in any way that affected their well-being. The dead had gone beyond the reach of human contact, even of human prayer.”<sup>25</sup> The dislocation of the body is also evident in the movements of the priest who, at the moment of committal, would no longer turn towards the corpse, but to the congregation. Such reforms emphasized a focus on the present and the living, instead of dwelling on the past and remembering dead. Even the Eucharist, a service whose very purpose was a ritualistic commemoration of the dead commanded by Christ, was removed from the service, “in order to destroy the sense of continuing communion between the living and the dead which had been such a striking feature of late medieval religion.”<sup>26</sup> In his discussion of the *Book of Common Prayer*, C.S. Lewis notes, “Of all things, the Prayer Book dreads excess. It has almost an Augustan shrinking, not from passion, but from what came to be called enthusiasm.” Lewis continues on to postulate that the difference between “Roman and Anglican piety” was due, in part, to “the difference between the freely emotional Middle Ages with their ready tears and boyish ardours and the graver, more deliberative period that was coming in.”<sup>27</sup> Not only did the Prayer Book attempt to remove the dead from the world of the living, but it also worked to limit overly emotional

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<sup>25</sup> See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1992), pg. 475. For more on the differences between the 1549 and 1552 prayer books in their relationships with the dead, see Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2002), pgs. 109-12 and David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 1997), pgs. 396-416.

<sup>26</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1996), pg. 509.

<sup>27</sup> See C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pgs. 220-21. In this discussion Lewis also notes how exclamations have been removed from the prayers, revealing the degree to which reformers attempted to control passionate or “enthusiastic” responses. See also Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2001), pgs. 28-34.

responses within the ritual itself—a provocative revision when one considers the lament’s function as extremely passionate and oftentimes effusive display of grief.

As scholars have argued, the rise in the popularity of tragedy during the Renaissance appears to correspond with attempts to restrict the aforementioned Catholic mourning rituals. Remarking on this causal relationship, Frances Dolan notes, “[t]he theatre ... seems to have emerged from, criticized, and replaced the Catholic mass.”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Huston Diehl argues,

Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy emerged as a cultural form around the time that the reformers succeeded in suppressing the popular religious cycle drama. It flourished during a period when the English church substituted new forms of religious rituals and practices in place of the forbidden Mass, the outlawed ceremonies, and the discredited images of the medieval church. And it was produced at a time when a form of state censorship forbade the dramatization of explicitly religious material in the public playhouses.<sup>29</sup>

Given this suggestion that the theatre functioned as a replacement of the Catholic mourning ritual, it is perhaps little wonder that at the end of the sixteenth century, concern over excessive grief had spread beyond the scope of the reformers to those who saw the implications of such behavior as existing well outside the walls of the church. Fear over the lament, in particular lamenting men, moved to the unlikeliest of places: the theatres. In many ways, it is fitting that the lament and the theatre came together, as both

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<sup>28</sup> See Frances Dolan, *The Whores of Babylon*. (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1999), pg. 24.

<sup>29</sup> See Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1997), pg. 2.

are intimately invested in performance and often linger on the fringe of what is constituted as appropriate. Though each certainly had a place within English society, the lament and the theatre were nevertheless looked at with fear regarding both those who performed and those who witnessed the act. One need only look at contemporary definitions of tragedy to see how the English understood the genre as bound together with displays of grief. In *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577), the first published piece of anti-theatrical writing in England, the preacher John Northbrooke defines tragedy as “that kind of play in the which calamities and miserable ends of kings, princes, and great rulers are described and set forth, and it hath for the most part a sad and heavy beginning and ending.”<sup>30</sup> Northbrooke recognizes tragedies as containing sorrowful material, meant in some way to cause the audience to thoughtfully and somberly reflect upon the great fall of the play’s characters. Though the vast majority of those watching the plays would not have seen their own lives reflected in the tragedies, the subject matter was immediately understandable and undoubtedly fascinating to an English audience who flooded the theatres to see the performances. Indeed, the ritualistic performance of the lament, which must have resonated with an audience acutely aware of the restrictions placed on their grief may very well have found something comforting in such staged actions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) in *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard. (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> The permanent theatres of London could hold between 2’000 and 3’000 people and with multiple showings on some days, thousands of people would witness the performance of the lament. Indeed, as Andrew Gurr has estimated, between 1560 and 1642, the theatre witnessed over fifty million visits. For more, see R.A. Foakes, “Playhouses and Players,” *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, eds. A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P 2003), p. 9 and Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987), p. 50.

This relationship between the subject matter of tragedy and its effect on an audience appears repeatedly in contemporary writings about the theatre. In his *Defence of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney follows in a similar vein, claiming that tragedy “openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants.” Citing Plutarch’s account of the “abominable tyrant” Alexander Phraeus, “from whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity has murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood: so as he, that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy,” Sidney shows precisely how tragedy portrays both moments of excessive grief, while simultaneously prompting such displays in those watching the drama.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in *The Art of English Poesy*, George Puttenham remarks that the effect of lamenting is “altogether contrary to rejoicing: every man saith so, and yet it is a joy to be able to lament with ease and freely to pour forth a man’s inward sorrows and the griefs with which his mind is surcharged.”<sup>33</sup> Considering that many tragedies used the adjective “lamentable” in their title, it is evident that those who entered a theatre to watch a such a play knew they were going to witness a fall from power, but before they even saw the unfortunate fall, their response was already conditioned to see it as worthy of an outpouring of grief.<sup>34</sup> As a descriptor of tragedy, “lamentable” appears as early as 1563 in the title to Alexander Neville’s English translation of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, an especially fitting occurrence considering the extent to which the English understood Seneca as the

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<sup>32</sup> See Sir Philip Sidney, “The Defence of Poesy” *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2002), p. 230.

<sup>33</sup> See George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*. Eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn. (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 2007), p. 135.

<sup>34</sup> See the Database of Early English Playbooks, <<http://deep.sas.upenn.edu/>>.

great Roman writer of tragedies. It also appears in the titles of thirteen other plays between 1563 and 1600, including the works of Marlowe, Kyd, and Shakespeare, revealing that these playwrights understood the connection between the subject of tragedies and the lament.

The debates regarding the subject of tragedy, specifically the use of the lamentation in poetry and on the stage, provide a provocative way to contextualize the performance of the masculine lament. The theatre was a controversial subject during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and constant charges of effeminacy, directed both towards the actors and those in the audience, are particularly intriguing, especially when one considers the subject of tragedy. As we have already seen in the above quoted passages from Puttenham, Northbrooke, and Sidney, contemporary definitions of tragedy understood the form as dealing with “doleful”, “sad”, and “heavy” material that could potentially bring its viewers to tears. Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which played a large role in shaping Renaissance classification of plays, defined tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear the *catharsis* of such emotions.”<sup>35</sup> Though the definition of catharsis has been widely debated, the notion of an outpouring of emotion nevertheless has a function that is eerily similar to the lamentation, which has been defined as “the spontaneous outburst of distress by the living on sustaining a loss.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Aristotle, *The Poetics* trans. James Hutton (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982), 50. For a discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in Renaissance England, see Marvin Theodore Herrick, *The Poetics of Aristotle in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1903), pp. 8-34.

<sup>36</sup> See Bade Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition.” *Journal of Folklore Studies* 22 (1981), p. 272.

Indeed, one scholar has noted the similarity between the two concepts, seeing lamenting women as “tragic actors” whose performance of grief “provide[s] a catharsis for everyone who witnessed her performance.”<sup>37</sup>

We can see how concern over the power of tragedy and its relationship to the lament coalesced into an anxious hybrid in Stephen Gosson’s 1582 anti-theatrical tract, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*. Bringing together many of his worries regarding the stage, Gosson insists, “The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in tragedies drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude.”<sup>38</sup> Everyone from the opponents of theatre like Northbrooke and Gosson to its proponents like Sidney and Puttenham saw tragedies as being a source of sorrow, with the uncanny ability to draw forth a wide range of emotions in both the actors and audience. Given the fact that every lament performed on the English stage was a lament performed by a man, and every performance of grief, in essence a lament, it is not hard to see why the anti-theatricalists were terrified of its influence. In this quote from Gosson then, we can pull back the many layers of polemic to see the central kernel of contention. While dressing up like a woman and strutting the boards of a playhouse is certainly troublesome, especially considering how precarious masculinity was for these men, the real issue lies much deeper, below all the makeup and costumes. The actual concern is that the subject of tragedy is such that it causes an emotional response much like the one Aristotle

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<sup>37</sup> See Angela Bourke “More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women’s Lament Poetry” *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture* Ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993), p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> See Stephen Gosson, “Plays Confuted in Five Actions” *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 95.



outlines in the *Poetics*. In other words, because theatre has such power to instruct its audience, those watching tragedy will become captivated by the expressions of grief they witness, thereby turning woman-like in their “immoderate sorrow” and “womanish weeping and mourning.” The theatre is so terrifying because it teaches men to lament, and in this immoderate performance of grief they lose sight of their precarious masculinity.

The profound threat posed by the theatre can only be fully understood within the context of early English understandings of masculinity. As Stephen Orgel has noted, “Early Modern moralists continually reminded their charges that manhood was not a natural condition but a quality to be striven for and maintained only through constant vigilance, and even then with the utmost difficulty.”<sup>39</sup> Drawing on Judith Butler’s argument that gender is performative, Bruce Smith explains “Masculinity ... is a matter of contingency, of circumstances, of performance.”<sup>40</sup> With men who must struggle to maintain their masculinity suddenly performing and/or witnessing a traditionally feminine response to loss, it is not much wonder that anti-theatrical writers like Stephen Gosson, Philip Stubbes, and William Prynne expressed vehement concern about the theatre and its immorality. Believing the theatre to be a place where lessons are taught and learned, these writers understood that while the motions that occur on the stage may be hyperbolic, the actions of the actors have very real implications for the audience. The pervasive distress over the theatre’s power to instruct begs the question of what, exactly, it is teaching the audience. Though most scholars focus intensely on the sexual fears, on

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<sup>39</sup> See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996), pg. 19.

<sup>40</sup> See Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2000), pg. 4.

the ways in which the theatre instructs the youth of Shakespeare's London to "play the sodomites, or worse," there are other, albeit related, concerns that preoccupy the anti-theatrical writers.<sup>41</sup> In his *School of Abuse* (1579), Gosson begins to unveil what will become one of the strangest arguments against the theatre when he agrees with Plato's assessment of the poets, stating, "No marvel though Plato shut them out of his school, and banished them quite from his commonwealth, as effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enemies to virtue."<sup>42</sup> Poets, it seems, are effeminate and their effeminacy infects all those who come into contact with them. Drawing on another source from antiquity, Gosson continues this argumentative strain, noting, "Plutarch complaineth, that ignorant men, not knowing the majesty of ancient music, abuse both the ears of the people, and the Art itself: with bringing sweet consorts into Theatres, which rather effeminate the mind, as pricks unto vice, then procure amendment of manners, as spurs to virtue."<sup>43</sup> Not only are poets effeminate, but entering into a theatre is enough to effeminate one's mind, a notion he develops further on in his work, as he discusses both the theatre and the poets who are producing the plays, "There they set abroad strange consorts of melody, to tickle the ear; costly apparel, to flatter the sight; effeminate

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<sup>41</sup> Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, 121. For an extended and focused discussion of the anti-theatricalists and their obsession with the relationship between the theatre and sex, see Joseph Lenz's "Base Trade: Theatre as Prostitution," *English Literary History* 60.4 (1993): 833-855.

<sup>42</sup> Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 77. In writing on the anti-poetic sentiment, Peter C. Herman has also noticed this bizarre worry over "poetry's deleterious effect upon masculinity," claiming that Renaissance "Muse-haters" saw the threat of the stage as mak[ing] men stop acting like men and start acting more like 'fags.'" Herman quickly notes that he uses the slur to "help clarify the deep sexual threat posed by poetry" but I am not entirely convinced that writers like Gosson and Prynne saw it in such black and white terms. The sexual threat was certainly pervasive, but as I'll argue, it wasn't that men were acting like gay men, but rather acting like women. The distinction might be slight, but important one nonetheless. See *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment* (Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1996), pp. 89-90.

<sup>43</sup> Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 85-86.

gesture, to ravish the sense; and wanton speech, to whet desire to inordinate lust.”<sup>44</sup> Once again the fear regarding the theatre as promoting all manner of sexual lasciviousness is present, but the constant concern over effeminacy is striking. At first, poets are nothing more than effeminate writers, those Plato felt should be left outside the walls of his Republic. But as Gosson’s argument picks up steam, the charge of effeminacy moves from the poets, to those who enter into the theatre, to those who are on the stage acting. This final claim is the most worrisome, because not only are the actors moving with “effeminate gesture,” but these actions have an effect on the audience’s senses.

Gosson continues to perpetuate these arguments three years later in *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, the same work where he notes the effeminating influence of tragedy and the performance of grief. Pulling all of his beliefs regarding poets, the theatre, and effeminacy together, he develops an argument insistent on the theatre’s negatively didactic abilities. Claiming that the stage is ultimately a tool of the great deceiver, Gosson writes,

The devil is not so ignorant how mightily these outward spectacles effeminate and soften the hearts of men; vice is learned with beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, and those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to the gazers, which the players do counterfeit on the stage. As long as we know ourselves to be flesh, we are taught by other men’s examples how to fall.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Gosson, *School of Abuse*, pg. 89.

<sup>45</sup> Stephen Gosson “Plays Confuted in Five Actions,” *Markets of Bawdrie: The Dramatic Criticism of Stephen Gosson*, ed. Arthur Kinney (Salzburg, 1974), pp. 192-93.

The theatre becomes the devil's workshop, where the spectacle of the stage causes men to become effeminate and weak. Insistent that acting is a deception that teaches the audience all kinds of wickedness, Gosson grounds his argument in the conviction that the devil is somehow in on all of this, as if the devil wishes men to become effeminate through watching the comings and goings of the stage. The emotions stimulated through seeing a play are all part of the devil's scheme to unman those who were foolish enough to enter into the playhouse in the first place. Yet despite the devil's prominence, Gosson's argument ends by returning to the men who inhabit the stage, reminding his reader that because they are human, they are susceptible to the fallen stage player's example. The actors' lesson, which in the case of tragedy is the effeminate performance of grief, is easily transmitted through their perverse example.

William Prynne's lengthy *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy* (1633) takes up Gosson's approach to attacking the stage, viewing the theatre as a place of significant and pervasive effeminacy, though his focus rests not on the audience, but the actors. Prynne sees the men "metamorphosed into women on the stage, not only putting on the female robes, but likewise the effeminate gestures, speeches, pace, behavior, attire, delicacy, passions, manners, arts and wiles of the female sex."<sup>46</sup> What is striking about Prynne's claim is that the actors dressed as women adopt female mannerisms, and this is a troubling development. While one might argue that this is the point of acting, to take up one's character and portray them as accurately as possible, Prynne sees the adoption of feminine attributes as particularly troubling, undoubtedly influenced by the notion of masculinity as something needing constant defense. In his

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<sup>46</sup> See William Prynne "Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy" *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 290.

work on the anti-theatrical writings, Jonas Barish argues that Prynne's attack reveals a distaste and fear of anything relating to sexuality, as this is "equated with femininity, with weakness, with the yielding to feeling" and in the monstrous scenario Prynne envisions, the actors, as well as the audience, are threatened with the possibility of becoming like women or even worse.<sup>47</sup> Building upon Gosson's suggestion in the final sentence of the above quote, Prynne sees the theatre as potentially doing much more than simply effeminizing men:

Is this a light, a despicable effeminacy, for men, for Christians, thus to adulterate, emasculate, metamorphose, and debase their noble sex? Thus purposely, yea, affectedly, to unman, unchristian, uncreate themselves, if I may so speak, and to make themselves, as it were, neither men nor women, but monsters (a sin as bad, nay worse than any adultery, offering a kind of violence to God's own work) and all to no other end but this: to exhilarate a confluence of unchaste, effeminate, vain companions, or to become competent actors on a stage, the greatest infamy that could befall an ancient pagan Roman, or a Christian?<sup>48</sup>

Not only are men guilty of becoming like women in their charades, but they are destroying their entire sex in an unholy cascade of unmanning, unchristianing, and uncreating. The actors do this simply to titillate an audience that is already made effeminate and this is the problem with theatre. Prynne is initially concerned that the men and boys who play women will become so consumed in their roles that they will lose sight of their manhood and become weak and woman-like. Yet he also questions the

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<sup>47</sup> See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981), p. 85.

<sup>48</sup> Prynne, *Histriomastix*, 291.

safety of men who play their own gender on the stage, asking, “What wantonness, what effeminacy parallel to that which our men-women actors, in all their feminine (yea, sometime in their masculine parts) express upon the theatre?”<sup>49</sup> The transformation of the theatre is so awful, it is not simply the men playing women or “men-women actors” who are in danger of losing their precarious grasp on masculinity, but there is also the potential for men playing men to be somehow rendered feminine.

These charges of effeminization have been examined from a number of angles in recent scholarship, though the focus often rests in Renaissance understandings of gender. The work of Stephen Orgel and Laura Levine are two particularly nuanced accounts of this gender confusion, but the horror over the transformation of men to women or the making of “monsters,” to use Prynne’s term, can be traced from another direction.<sup>50</sup> We have already seen how lamentations, and performances of grief more broadly, were conceived of as a traditionally feminine response to death, acts that appeared repeatedly on the English Renaissance stage in characters like Shakespeare’s Tamora, Ophelia, and Cordelia.<sup>51</sup> Yet the men of medieval and Renaissance drama repeatedly perform such ritualistic expressions of sorrow. In the aforementioned studies of women’s grief, scholars have noted the various poetic conventions that compose laments of the Greek and English stages. The most common images in the depiction of the lament are tears and weeping and virtually every male character in this study confesses, at some point, to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pg. 290.

<sup>50</sup> See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996) and Laura Levine *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994)

<sup>51</sup> Even Elizabeth Cary’s closet drama *The Tragedy of Mariam* is interested in considering what constitutes an appropriate response to death. Upon hearing that her husband has died, Mariam initially feels nothing for her loss, but as she contemplates Herod’s death further, she prompts an outpouring of emotion. This scene, which begins the play, has interesting implications for the relationship between real and feigned grief, as well as the physical and mental aspects of mourning in Renaissance England.

shedding tears. Yet while they do so, there is also a pervasive awareness that such behavior threatens their very masculinity, a notion we see in Lear's plea, "And let not women's weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man's cheeks!" (2.4.272-73). Similarly, in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Aeneas' overwhelming grief in response to retelling the events of Troy prompts a response typically reserved for men from the Queen, as Dido finds that she must guide the Trojan warrior's emotions, "What faints Aeneas to remember Troy? / In whose defense he fought so valiantly: / Looke up and speake" (2.1.118-20). While the tears of mourning women serve as a source of empowerment, the tears of the grieving men almost always prompt some form of correction from other characters, correction that often hinges on discussions of gender.<sup>52</sup> For instance, when Claudius attempts to regulate Hamlet's grief, he tells the prince, "But to persever / In obstinate condolement is a course / Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief" (1.2.92-94). Other elements of ritual lamentation, including exclamations of "O" and "Alas" (words that attempt to articulate the inexpressible anguish of grief), repetition, series of questions directed at both the dead and the living, and curses formed to draw down justice from the heavens are adopted by mourning men, further linking their grief with the responses typically performed by women.

The masculine lament caused a number of problems for Renaissance England. The performance of such a highly ritualized response to loss stood in direct opposition to the attempts at reform made in the years following the Reformation. As we have just seen, the mourning men of the stage also threatened early understandings of what it meant to be a man, an equally troubling development with far reaching implications. In

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<sup>52</sup> For more on women's tears as a source of empowerment and nourishment, see Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pgs. 16-17.

his discussion of masculinity and Shakespeare, Bruce Smith notes the distinction made between the upper and lower parts of male bodies. While the lower half of the body was the seat of passion, “contaminated with the flesh, closer to the Devil” the upper part of the body was concerned with reason and intelligence, “closer to God and the angels.”<sup>53</sup> The division was then gendered, with the upper part of the body considered masculine, and the lower, feminine. Rational thought is then a sign of masculinity, while femininity is signified by emotional behavior. This distinction further reiterates why Protestant reformers attempted to paint the lament as excessively emotional and effeminate, accusations also leveled by the anti-theatricalists against tragedy and theatre more generally. By situating any physical display of grief as an act signaling the encroachment of femininity, reformers hoped to curb any emotional expression that challenged reformed thinking about responses to and for the dead. Likewise, by claiming the theatre will ultimately “effeminate the mind” the anti-theatrical writers appealed to the age old fear that one could become less of a man if they participated in the actions of the stage.

With this in mind, it is possible to see more fully what is at stake in reading lamenting men in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In a recent study of masculinity in early modern England, Jennifer C. Vaught has persuasively argued that the typically feminine displays of emotion, acts such as weeping and wailing, “function as sources of power for men in early modern English literature.”<sup>54</sup> The lament, conceived of as an empowering performance of grief reserved for women and composed of such outward displays of emotion, serves an identical function for the men of the Renaissance.

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<sup>53</sup> See Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, pg. 1.

<sup>54</sup> See Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pg. 1



Though various church authorities sought to limit and remove such ritualistic and passionate behavior as a way to diminish the connection between the present and the past, the men of the Renaissance stage repeatedly assert the emotional performance in response to their diminished relationship with the dead. As Michael Neill has argued, “More consistently than any other form ... it was revenge tragedy that spoke to the anxieties produced by this painful transformation in relations with the dead ... The terrible frenzies of the revenger, that berserk memorialist, can be understood as a fantasy response to the sense of despairing impotence produced by the Protestant displacement of the dead.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the frequency with which men lament on the Renaissance stage is a provocative development in and of itself, yet when further examined within the context of the popularity of revenge tragedy, it becomes increasingly evident that these playwrights were further drawing upon and revising the feminine tradition of the lament.

While lamentation may initially begin as an expression of grief, the performance can and often does turn to exclamations of anger that call out for violence. As Margaret Alexiou reveals, “Although the act itself rested with the men, unless there was no male survivor, the women maintained the consciousness for the need to take revenge by constant lamentation and invocation at the tomb.”<sup>56</sup> Though women typically could not participate in the act of revenge, their calls for vengeance through the lament allow them significant power in directing violence out from themselves and onto the offending party. These demands become almost as potent as the violent act of revenge itself, as Katharine

Goodland suggests: “The poetics of lament often blur the distinction between lament and

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<sup>55</sup> See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997), pgs. 245-6.

<sup>56</sup> See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1974), pg. 22.

revenge, reinforcing the quality of women's cries as "speech-acts" with agency."<sup>57</sup> This blurred distinction is particularly fitting within the context of the Elizabethan world, for as we have already seen, Protestant reformers and the anti-theatricalists had denounced the lamentation as blasphemous, barbaric, and effeminate, though proponents of the stage and playwrights themselves saw the lament as a particularly useful and even necessary process, full of theatrical potential. The act of revenge was equally vexed, as Fredson Bowers notes in his *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. While the chief argument against revenge was a religious one, God's command "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," Bowers reveals "much evidence of an Elizabethan sympathy for blood revenge," and his ultimate conclusion is that "There is no question that the Elizabethans firmly believed the law of God to forbid private vengeance. Correspondingly, there was a very real tradition existing in favor of revenge under certain circumstances."<sup>58</sup> With similar tensions and anxieties pulling at both the performance of the lament and the performance of revenge, it is not surprising that playwrights took the opportunity to stage both, exploiting their similarly explosive theatrical possibilities.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the introduction of the act of revenge as part of the masculine lament is one of the major and most provocative revisions of the form made by Renaissance playwrights. While the agency of the lamenting woman only allows her to call for vengeance through stirring up passionate emotions in the men who witnessed her performance of grief, the lamenting man is in possession of the agency

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<sup>57</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning*, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> See Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, Princeton: Princeton U P, 1966) pp. 37, 39-40.

<sup>59</sup> As John Kerrigan suggests, there is a long love affair between revenge and drama as "Vengeance offers the writer a compelling mix of ingredients: strong situations shaped by violence; ethical issues for debate; a volatile, emotive mixture of loss and agitated grievance." While most scholars will note, as Kerrigan does, this "mixture of loss and agitated grievance" no one has yet seen it as taking part in the lament. See *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996), pg. 3.

necessary to plot and carry out the revenge act. Thus characters like Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet share the traditional poetic conventions of the woman's lament, but use excessive displays of emotion to prompt *their own* action in seeking vengeance. The mourning man of early English drama therefore becomes a profoundly threatening hybrid, at once effeminized through his excessive displays of emotion, yet able to channel his ritualistic act into a swift and violent response. Such scripted behavior, which Protestants viewed with suspicion as lingering vestiges of Catholic performance, also posed a significant challenge to the providential theory prominent in late medieval and Renaissance England. By privileging man's emotional response over the promise of Christ's death and resurrection, as well as the divine command against acts of vengeance, displays of grief pulled at and tested virtually every aspect religious and social order. Reading the masculine lament in this manner allows us to not only examine the ways in which the performance of grief evolved in response to the period's religious shifts, but also how masculinity was constructed, defined, maintained, and even challenged in the face of catastrophic loss.

Beginning with the drama of the Middle Ages, I examine the continuities between English medieval drama and the *Ars Moriendi*. Looking first at the drama's liturgical beginnings in the *Quem quaeritis* tropes, I argue that the English dramatic tradition is built upon the performance of the lament. Moving from the liturgical drama into a detailed analysis of *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, and *Everyman*, I contend that lamentations appear repeatedly in these moralities, performed by a variety of characters. In some cases, the Mankind figure laments his sin and the prospect of his death. In other moments, the assortment of characters meant to guide or distract Mankind lament their

failure in bringing him to their intended goal. Regardless of who performs such displays, the lament's prevalence in these plays reflects an awareness of the form as an integral part of man's relationship to loss and grief. I then juxtapose these dramas with the *Ars Moriendi* tracts, arguing that these texts ultimately function as a type of drama in and of themselves. As guide books for the process of dying, the *Ars Moriendi* texts attempt to recast the moment of death from something that provokes terror and excessive displays of grief to a natural and welcome process for which one could prepare. Yet despite their intent to show people how to "die well," the tracts are nevertheless infiltrated by the unsettling presence of the lament, thus undermining their ostensible objective.

With this context in mind, I transition into a discussion of a number of plays by Elizabethan dramatists, arguing that the tradition of the lamenting man is continued and developed in their works. Writing in the wake of the English Reformation, these playwrights deploy the lament, a deeply ritualistic performance of grief, in ways that not only reveal the intense cultural tensions between Catholic and Protestant belief, but also complicate early understandings of what constituted appropriate masculine behavior. In chapter two, I focus on Christopher Marlowe, arguing that Thomas Watson's Latin translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* helps shape Marlowe's dramatic vision of the lament. Watson, who was most likely a Catholic, made a number of conspicuous additions to the text of Sophocles' play, privileging Antigone's burial rites over Creon's command to leave her traitorous brother unburied in disgrace. Marlowe then picks up on this ritualistic response to loss, placing the lament on Aeneas in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, subversively challenging the belief that grief was the domain of women. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe adds another dimension to his understanding of the lament, using the performance of

grief to convey the extent of Faustus' spiritual despair in the moments following the sale of his soul.

In chapter three on *The Spanish Tragedy*, I reveal how Elizabethan translations of Seneca play an integral role in Thomas Kyd's depiction of masculine grief. Fear over the lament was due, in large part, to the performance's ability to stir up passionate emotions and ultimately incite acts of revenge. Kyd recognizes the dramatic potential of such actions, as Hieronimo's increasingly intricate displays of grief over the death of his son continually prompt his own desire for retribution. By the end of the play, it becomes clear that such a performance serves not only as a method of provoking revenge, but also becomes the best type of vengeance, as the perpetrators of the play's crimes are doomed to everlasting lamentations. Turning next to Shakespeare's famous revenge tragedy in chapter four, I argue that the notoriously bizarre behavior of Hamlet is so unsettling because it participates in the tradition of the lamenting woman, something Claudius notes in his remark that the prince is behaving effeminately. Drawing on revisions to the "Order for the Burial of the Dead," in the *Book of Common Prayer*, as well as writings by the Protestant reformers Thomas Cranmer and Peter Martyr, I show how discussions regarding appropriate displays of grief occurred with frequency in the years following England's split with the church in Rome. I contend that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* enters into this discussion by valorizing the masculine lament as a way to interrogate the anxiety between Catholic and Protestant beliefs regarding responses to and for the dead.

In my final chapter on *King Lear*, I assert that the lament undergoes significant revision, and the intensely physical response to death and loss is internalized, materializing in the madness of the eponymous character. Juxtaposing Shakespeare's

depiction of the lamenting Lear alongside early understandings of the male body, I reveal that Lear's grief, and in turn his madness, stems partly from his age. The shift from an outward display to an inner emotional state also allows me to look at the material aspects of the lament, and weigh Lear's grief within the context of Renaissance theories regarding bodily humors, arguing that the lament was a deeply physical process, even when its outward displays were kept within. While recent studies have typically focused on the grief of women, my focus on the masculine laments of the medieval and Renaissance stage provides new ways of reading the religious, political, and social discussions concerning responses to death in pre- and post-Reformation England, as well as understandings and constructions of masculinity during this period. By drawing on a variety of sources, including play texts, popular proverbs, pro-and anti-theatrical writings, Elizabethan translations of classical plays, as well as the writings of Protestant reformers, I show the continuity of experience between men and women in responding to death, while at the same time revealing the deep cultural anxieties and their manifestations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance in England.

As I reflect back on the encounters with photographs and plays with which I began this introduction, the whole experience is quite remarkable, especially when couched in the larger goals of this dissertation. On an otherwise uneventful trip to the museum, I saw an early twentieth-century photograph of mourning tribal women. A few nights later I watched a performance of *King Lear*, a four hundred year old English play, in a reconstructed version of the theatre for which it was written. Though *Lear* is separated from the photograph by 300 years, their concurrent presence in the summer of

2008 reflects a continuity and fluidity of human experience—even if that correspondence exists in tragic loss and performances of grief.

## Chapter One: Early English Laments in the Drama of the Middle Ages

This world nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,  
And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.  
Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore.<sup>1</sup>

-- Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else,  
I do it exceptionally well.  
-- Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus"

I remember the moment more clearly than any other from my childhood. It was Good Friday and it was cold. I stood at the back of an old, creaking Anglican church in rural New Brunswick, dressed in a black cassock, and concealed behind an open door. My heart was racing and my palms were wet with perspiration as I waited for my cue. At the front of the church, elevated above the congregation, stood the parish priest in the pulpit, similarly dressed in black, reading somberly from an ancient, heavy Bible:

And when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran up and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*, lines 2846-49.



down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.<sup>2</sup>

The moment the final word escaped his lips, the priest glanced up, knowingly looked in my eyes, and slammed the Bible shut, startling the congregation as the thundering echo reverberated off the darkened stained glass windows. And with that, I switched off the lights.

I begin with this personal anecdote for multiple reasons. First, the drama of the medieval period, from its liturgical beginnings to the late morality plays, was a deeply personal event, not only for those in the audience, but those on the stage as well. In acting out biblical dramas or performing an allegory of the trials and tribulations of mankind's spiritual life, the actors of the Middle Ages were, in essence, performing their past, present, and future. Secondly, the roots of medieval drama exist in dramatic moments like the one I just described, moments that initially occurred within the walls of the church, not in medieval streets on pageant wagons. For as one scholar has noted, the "Latin drama of the medieval church had a hold on men's imaginations for approximately six hundred years, from the tenth century to the sixteenth."<sup>3</sup> Finally, it is fitting to begin this chapter, one that is concerned with death and mourning, with the death of Christ, as the medieval liturgy encouraged a concentrated imagining of Christ's death as a way of "participating in the Church's worship" and developing "individual and intensely inner spirituality."<sup>4</sup> Beginning as early as 1100 with Honorius of Autun's *De Tragoedis*, the

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<sup>2</sup> Mark 15:33-38.

<sup>3</sup> See Mary H. Marshall, "Aesthetic Values of the Liturgical Drama" *Medieval English Drama*, Eds. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1972), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> See Eamon Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 2003), p. 19.

medieval church clearly associated the drama of Christ's death with the celebration of the mass, not only in the Eucharist, but also as woven deep into the very fabric of the celebrant's sacred actions.

The focus on Christ's death in medieval drama is not particularly surprising given its doctrinal role in virtual every aspect of medieval Catholicism. From the aforementioned work of Honorius of Autun to the anonymous *Everyman* (ca. 1485), death dominates the action of the stage, eventually taking a physical shape and presenting itself to a terrified audience. Despite death's quotidian nature, responses to loss in the drama of the Middle Ages are strikingly varied. While the promise of Christ's resurrection is reiterated in the initial dramas, responses to death in the late morality plays suggest surprise and terror at the prospect of mortality. These responses, best understood as lingering vestiges of the classical lament, at once challenge and confirm the teachings of the church. "Mourning for the dead," remarks Katharine Goodland, "a practice that was always tentative under the Christian dispensation," nevertheless becomes a central concern of medieval drama, either in the reiteration of Christ's death on the cross, or in the cautioning to prepare for one's own death.<sup>5</sup> While Goodland has looked specifically at the laments of the Virgin Mary and other women from the mystery plays, little critical attention has been paid to the appearance of the lament in the morality plays of the fifteenth century, where the main character is both gendered male and serves as a representation of all mankind. By focusing on depictions of mourning at the beginning and the end of the period, it is possible simultaneously to trace the development of early

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<sup>5</sup> See Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pg. 4.

English drama and to examine the degree to which it pivots around representing, conditioning, and finally reforming the lament as a response to loss and death.

The lament as we encounter it on the medieval stage begins, not with the drama of classical antiquity as one might expect, but with the liturgy.<sup>6</sup> As E.K. Chambers notes in *The Medieval Stage*, after the break up of the Roman world and given the Church's clear distaste for the theatre, the drama of the Middle Ages emerges from "the very bosom of the Church's own ritual."<sup>7</sup> While one can debate the development of medieval drama and the extent to which it evolved or miraculously came into existence, the influence of its liturgical beginnings is undeniable. As David Bevington notes, "The liturgy itself long employed dramatic techniques such as dialogue, movement from one symbolic location to another, and the use of props."<sup>8</sup> An early form of this dialogue are the *Quem quaeritis* tropes—compositions inserted into the church services in order to provide a type of dramatic exchange and called by one scholar "the well-known central kernel" of early English drama.<sup>9</sup> These tropes do not change the essential meaning of the scripture; they simply add a "dramatic element" to the liturgy.<sup>10</sup> Meant to amplify an already complete and independent liturgical text, the *Quem quaeritis* tropes are understood by many as the "first chants to be transformed into actual plays," and although it is difficult to precisely

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<sup>6</sup> Though questions of influence are best left for longer studies, the lament is clearly developed and documented in the writings of antiquity. But as I hope to have made clear in the introduction, this particular response to loss appears to be common throughout the world, performed over the course of human history and it is this universal aspect that I find deeply intriguing about the lament as a response to loss.

<sup>7</sup> See E.K. Chambers *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1903), p. 2. The anti-theatrical prejudice is clear throughout the Middle Ages, see, for instance, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Chambers' remark is particularly compelling, as the lament begins as a ritualistic response to loss and we can see the extent to which ritual played a significant role in the burial of the dead in medieval Catholicism.

<sup>8</sup> See David Bevington *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> See Marshall, "Aesthetic Values" pg. 31.

<sup>10</sup> The terms "drama" and "dramatic" are particularly loaded terms in this context, a fact I feel compelled to point out, though I am unable to do more than simply gesture at in this awareness, given the limitations of the dissertation.

determine their date of composition, it is likely they appeared prior to the end of the tenth century.<sup>11</sup>

While the *Quem quaeritis* tropes necessarily drew from biblical narrative, their place in the development of medieval drama is nevertheless important. Though significant time has been spent discussing their place within the service, whether they were attached to the Introit of Easter Mass, matins, or the Vigil Mass, it is important to note, quite simply, the subject matter of these medieval proto-dramas. Meaning “whom do you seek?,” the tropes focus on the scriptural moment at which the three Marys visit Christ’s tomb and find it empty. They vary in length and involvement, but all pivot around the death and resurrection of Christ. Uniformly beginning with the angelic question “Whom do you seek in the sepulcher, O followers of Christ?” the response “Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, O heaven-dwellers” is given. That this is the moment upon which medieval drama builds is not surprising, considering the role it plays within medieval Catholicism, an importance we will return to later with the rise of the morality play and the development of the *Ars Moriendi*. Yet it is imperative to remember why the three Marys return to grave in the first place: to continue an elaborate mourning ritual. The fact that a biblical episode inextricably tied to grief and mourning becomes the starting point for the drama that follows suggests larger implications regarding responses to loss within the collective understanding of death in the Middle Ages.

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<sup>11</sup> See E. Catherine Duncan, “Voice Structure in the Liturgical Drama” *Medieval English Drama*, Eds. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1972), pg. 55 and David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pg. 21-22. For more on this, see O.B. Hardison, Jr. *Christian Rite and Christian Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins P, 1965) and Rosemary Woolf’s *The English Mystery Plays* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1972).

In her discussion regarding the aesthetic values of the liturgical beginnings, Mary H. Marshall suggests that the *Quem quaeritis* tropes, which would eventually take the form of the eleventh-and twelfth-century Easter dramas, were concerned not with grief, but with joy. She notes, “The Passion of Christ, his human suffering, was rarely dramatized within the church ... The emotional nexus of the great mass of liturgical plays lies in joy in the assurance implied by the divine Resurrection, secondarily the divine Birth.”<sup>12</sup> While this may certainly be true of those in the congregation who listened to the tropes and knew the search for the dead body of Christ was in vain, the physical representation of these moments suggest something else entirely. In the *Visitatio Sepulchri* from Aquileia and St. Lambrecht, the Marys first wonder who will roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb, only to be asked by angels, “Whom do you seek, O trembling women, weeping at this tomb?”<sup>13</sup> We clearly see the fingerprint of the *Quem quaeritis* tropes in this initial question by the angels, though the description of the women is new. Described as “trembling” and “weeping,” the Marys are described with the language of mourning, though this point apparently needs to be clarified, as the stage directions tell the two men who are playing the Marys to “turn to the people and to the choir” and say, “We came mourning to the tomb, we saw an angel of the Lord sitting there and saying that Jesus has risen.”<sup>14</sup> The need to clarify this moment is curious. It may suggest that the amateur acting is so terrible that the audience cannot fathom what is occurring and needs the dialogue to help clue them in to what is taking place. More

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<sup>12</sup> See Marshall, “Aesthetic Values,” pg. 33.

<sup>13</sup> See Bevington, 34 and 36. The lines are identical in both manuscripts.

<sup>14</sup> See Bevington, 34 and 37. These lines too are identical, with the exception that “God” replaces “Jesus” in the St. Lambrecht manuscript.

likely, it suggests a subtle anxiety regarding the performance of grief, especially when performed by men.

The Fleury playbook (ca. 1200) provides the most fully developed of these scenes at the sepulcher, and we have an entirely different description of the mourning Marys. Unlike the two, near identical *Visitatio Sepulchri*, Fleury's depiction of the scene begins, not with a question about who will open the tomb, but with a lament: "Alas! The good shepherd is slain, / Whom no guilt polluted / O lamentable deed!" (1-3).<sup>15</sup> The first Mary, with her exclamation and brief synopsis of what has happened, draws attention to the tragedy of Christ's death, going even so far as to suggest the adequate response to such an action. The second Mary, following immediately after responds, "Alas! the true shepherd has perished, / Who granted life to the dead. / O deplorable death!" (4-6). The first word of grief "Alas!" is repeated in all three of the opening responses to the death of Christ, suggesting a continuity between the three Marys. Unlike the first two representations, where the Marys simply state their lines in unison, this separation insists upon dividing the three into individual speaking parts. Though each of the three Marys speak, their lines nevertheless point to linguistic similarities, which are furthered by the fact that each women speaks the same number of lines, with the same frequency. When the third and final Mary makes her presence known, her response to the death of Christ marks an escalation of grief: "Alas! wretched Jewish people, / Whom an abominable insanity makes frenzied. / Despicable nation!" (7-9). Placing the blame of Christ's death on the Jews is nothing new, beginning as early as the moments following the crucifixion,

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<sup>15</sup> All line numbers refer to those in David Bevington *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975) unless otherwise noted.

yet what is remarkable is not the subject of this outburst, but the directed violence which guides the third Mary to make such a claim in the first place.<sup>16</sup>

The performance of the lamentation is tied closely to violence and in many societies, women who perform laments are acutely aware of the ability of this public display of grief to provoke violent retaliation in response to the death being mourned.<sup>17</sup> Within the Greek tradition, one scholar has noted that the lament functions as a “hunting down of murderers,” a notion that is clearly being exploited in this moment.<sup>18</sup> Picking up where the third lamenting Mary left off, the first Mary responds to the accusations against the Jews, “Why have you condemned to unholy death / The holy one, with savage hate? / O execrable wrath!” (10-12). Apparently not remembering Christ’s admonition to turn the other cheek, this Mary’s response mirrors the very wrath of which she accuses the Jews. This pattern is repeated in the second and third Marys, though the questions they ask are different. While the first Mary asks why the Jews have killed Christ, the second Mary asks what Christ did to deserve such treatment, calling the Jews a “damnable people,” leaving the third Mary to question what they are to do in the wake of such a loss. By reproaching the Jews for wrongfully murdering Christ, the three Marys fulfill their desire to articulate their grief, while at the same time remember Christ by way of those who put him to death. In discussing the representation of grief in the Latin church drama, Hans-Jurgen Diller has noted the difficulty of conveying “psychologically faithful portrayal[s] of emotional movements.” If not for the lament, attempting to adequately

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<sup>16</sup> See Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage, 1995) and Stephen Greenblatt “The Wound in the Wall” in *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), pgs. 75-109.

<sup>17</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Cambridge and London: Harvard U P, 2000), pg. 45.

<sup>18</sup> See Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual*, (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1995), pg. 92.

represent the grief of the three Marys would prove difficult; as Diller argues, “the lament, in which grief finds expression, was capable of an achievement which was not open to the presentation to wrath; it could bring the onlooker to share the situation and the feelings of the lamenter.”<sup>19</sup> The violent responses of the grieving Marys reveal the role the lament played in responding to loss, but they also reemphasizes the importance remembering the death and resurrection played within the medieval church’s worship. Yet Diller’s suggestion that the Marian laments encourage the congregation to partake in a similar emotional outpouring sets the stage for the development of the lamentation in future drama, and hints at the future concern that will become increasingly pronounced at the end of the fifteenth century.

The intensity of the lament becomes evident as the scene returns to the form of the *Quem quaeritis*, with angels asking whom the three Marys seek and their response. The stage directions are similar to the earlier versions of this scene, with the Marys turning to the audience and explaining that they journeyed to the grave in mourning. Yet the Fleury version differs from other depictions of this moment, as Mary Magdalene, who has previously been unidentified, steps in front of the other women and cries, “Alas my sorrow, alas what dire anguish of sorrow, / That I am deprived of the presence of my beloved master! / Alas, who has taken the beloved body from the tomb?” (38-40). One immediately notices the repetition of the word “alas,” which recalls the opening of the scene where each Mary begins her lament with the word. “Sorrow” is introduced for the first time in order to convey Mary’s grief, and after Peter and John leave her at the empty tomb, she repeats the opening of her solo lament, crying out, “Alas my sorrow, alas what

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<sup>19</sup> See Hans-Jurgen Diller, *The Middle English Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form*. Trans. Frances Wessels, (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1992), pg. 45.



dire anguish” (52). This constant repetition emphasizes Mary’s intense grief over the death of Christ and her solo performance stresses her loss over that of the others. She is inconsolable. And while two angels appear and encourage her to cease her weeping, it is not until the risen Christ repeats their encouragement and reveals himself to her that she stops completely. Strikingly, there is never any suggestion that this behavior is unacceptable and Diller suggests “the more grief she demonstrates, the more venerable she becomes to the believer.”<sup>20</sup> While this certainly appears to be the case in these liturgical beginnings, the Marian lamentations eventually fall under intense scrutiny in the Corpus Christi cycles, revealing the extent to which the expression of grief occupied a liminal space within medieval understandings of death and dying.

The displays of grief present in the liturgical beginnings had far-reaching implications for the medieval stage. The Corpus Christi cycles, which took the whole of biblical history as their subject, dramatized moments from just before Creation through the Last Judgment, but their debt to the ritual performances of the *Quem quaeritis* tropes and the lament is evident on a number of occasions, especially in performances of the Resurrection. In her recent monograph on female grief, Katharine Goodland has spent significant time examining the lament within these pageants and argues that the plays represent an attempt to reconcile the excessively mourning woman with the dominant Christian ideology, an attempt resulting in a multi-layered vision that at once “threatens and legitimizes Christian eschatology.”<sup>21</sup> For instance, the N-Town, Towneley, and York Lazarus plays all show excessive mourning as sinful, while the Chester play suggests that excessive mourning is a sign of humility which necessarily calls upon God. While these

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<sup>20</sup> See Diller, *The Middle English Mystery Play*, pg. 51.

<sup>21</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 35.

pageants and their laments have been the focus of a number of studies, the performance of grief also plays a predominant role in both morality plays and the *Ars Moriendi*, works that have yet to be analyzed within this tradition. As we have just seen, the *Quem quaeritis* tropes and the various cycle pageants they inspired are concerned with the grief of women, particularly that of the Marys. The morality plays mark a provocative departure from this tradition in that the lament continues to be employed, and yet is performed by men—oftentimes the representation of all mankind. The simultaneous appearance of the English *Ars Moriendi* alongside these morality plays reveals not only how pervasive the lament was in medieval understandings of death, but how these new dramas viewed the performance of grief as both an inevitable and deeply troubling part of the art of dying.

Developing alongside the plays of the Corpus Christi cycles, morality plays provided audiences with moral instruction, typically through thinly veiled allegory. As such, they feature a protagonist who represents all of mankind, his struggles with a variety of worldly temptations, and his interactions with a number of heavenly virtues.<sup>22</sup> Remarking on the rise of moralities, Eamon Duffy has suggested, “the emergence of morality plays in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries points to the growth of a type of religious sensibility oriented to moral and religious generalities, rather than to the narrative sweep of the Corpus Christi cycles.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, plays such as *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, and *Everyman*, are preoccupied with providing their audiences

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<sup>22</sup> As virtually every scholar who writes on the morality plays notes, the plays follow a sequence of innocence/fall/redemption. For an excellent overview of the form and function of morality plays, how they relate to the Corpus Christi plays, and their development within medieval culture, see Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play* (Boston and London: Routledge, 1975), pgs. 6-29.

<sup>23</sup> See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pg. 51.

with instruction for preparing for death, a notion V.A. Kolve sees as making them timeless, “*Everyman* or *The Castle of Perseverance* seem almost as modern today as they did in the fifteenth century, because their message is simple, (repent, prepare, think on your end) and because they deal only with things that are universal and unchanging in human experience.”<sup>24</sup> While it is true these plays are interested in encouraging preparation for the end, they are also preoccupied with another universal and unchanging human experience: grief.

Indeed, the presence of excessive mourning and the performance of the lament are clearly situated within the structure of the plays. *The Castle of Perseverance*, which dates from the early fifteenth century, is deeply interested in depicting responses to grief and loss, as the play builds up to the appearance of Death, who shoots Mankind with his dart, prompting a cosmic tug-of-war over the eternal resting place of The Soul.<sup>25</sup> In *The Banns*, which essentially function as the argument, the Second Flagbearer informs us that the play will explain “Whou Mankind into this world born is ful bare / And bare schal beried be at his last ende” (16-17).<sup>26</sup> Given this fascination with dying even at the moment of birth, it is not surprising that grief and responses to loss are prevalent in the play, and yet what is striking about the appearance of grief is that it comes not as a response to physical death. As the Second Flagbearer later reveals, when Mankind falls

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<sup>24</sup> See V.A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1966), pg. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Criticism on *The Castle of Perseverance* is largely interested in the staging of the play and discussing how the play would have been performed. This is understandable, given the exceptionally detailed directions and drawings that accompany the manuscript. The most obvious example of this scholarship is Richard Southern’s *The Medieval Theatre in the Round* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1975), though other recent works have taken up similar lines of argument.

<sup>26</sup> All quotations from *The Castle of Perseverance* are from *Medieval Drama* ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pgs. 796-900. I have quoted extensively and related much of the plot from the play, as it is not as well known as the other moralities, or the Renaissance drama discussed in the dissertation. All quotations have remained in Middle English.

into sin, “Thanne the Goode Aungyl makith mikyl mourninge / That the lofly liknesse of God schulde be lore / Thorwe the Badde Aungellys fals entisinge” (41-43). Not only will the Good Angel mourn Mankind’s fall into sin, but when Mankind repents, “The Badde Aungyl mournith that he hath missyd Man” (57). This antithesis, where the actions of Mankind will inspire mourning from one side or the other, is dramatically played out over the remainder of the play, as the Good Angel and the heavenly virtues mourn the initial loss of Mankind, while the Bad Angel and his hellish entourage will employ similar responses after Mankind repents and enters into the castle. The focus on mourning develops into an increasingly important role, as the language of the lament becomes engrained in the process of repentance, revealing the extent to which the performance of grief was so pervasive it developed into an acceptable and necessary part of religious life within English culture prior to the Reformation.

From the moment Mankind is born, his grief is immediately apparent through his speech, marking what has been called “a peculiar kind of emotionally charged and homely realism.”<sup>27</sup> Claiming he does not understand why he was brought into the world, Mankind does comprehend what his place on earth inspires, remarking, “but to woo and wepinge / I am born, and have ryth nowth / To helpe myself in no doinge” (289-91), thus echoing the Second Flagbearer’s sentiments with which the play began. Though he knows nothing else, Mankind recognizes that he is born to a world of woe and weeping, responses that appear to be divinely sanctioned, as they inspire him to cry out a few lines later,

Now, Lord Jhesu in hevene halle,

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<sup>27</sup> See Michael R. Kelley, *Flamboyant Drama: A Study of The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind, and Wisdom*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1979), pg. 33.

Here whane I make my mone!  
Coriows Criste, to you I calle!  
As a grisly gost I grucche and grone,  
...  
Alas! Men may be wondyr woo  
Whanne they be first forth browth.

(318-22, 325-26)

Beseeching God to hear his cries, Mankind compares himself to a ghost who complains and groans, further linking this initial response to death, even in the very moments following his birth.<sup>28</sup> The Good Angel even condones this behavior, suggesting it is welcome and even expected, remarking, “Ya, forsothe, and that is wel sese: / Of woful wo man may singe” (328-29) and proceeds to note that unlike other animals, man cannot help himself when he is first born, a clearly lamentable situation. The author of *Perseverance* insists on man’s need to call upon God for help, a notion furthered in the Good Angel’s lines “Nevyrthelesse, turn thee fro tene, / And serve Jhesu, hevene kinge” (331-32). Yet the fact that expressions of grief and sorrow are the language used at the moment of birth speaks to the larger concerns of the morality play—preparing the audience for death, even if their lives appear to be just beginning.

Indeed, *Perseverance* and the morality plays that follow draw on the language of grief and the lament as a way to encourage a constant preparation for the afterlife.<sup>29</sup> By

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<sup>28</sup> This comparison is striking, especially when one considers the interaction between Hamlet and his father’s ghost, something I will return to in chapter four.

<sup>29</sup> Sumiko Miyajima has suggested that despite the prevalence of mortality in fifteenth-century Europe, “death plays only a minor part in these English moralities,” noting that Death appears on stage in just *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*. This might seem like a bizarre omission, yet the authors of the

constantly lamenting life on earth as being full of woe, it is easy to look towards death and Heaven, where grief will inevitably end. The Good Angel is interested in conveying that very message, as he encourages Mankind to contemplate “Whanne thou schalt be closyd under clay! / And if thou thenke of that array / Certys thou schalt not sinne” (407-09). Despite such a sobering message, the Bad Angel’s insistence to think only of the present, to seize the day and worry about death when it comes time for such thoughts, wins the newly born man and leads him away from the Good Angel and his somber instructions. This development can hardly be seen as surprising. In his birth, the only thing Mankind knows is that he has been born into woe and grief, and that responses to these emotions have been condoned and encouraged by the Good Angel. And when the Good Angel realizes Mankind has been led away with promises of worldly pleasure, he responds to this loss in what can only be understood as a lament:

I weyle and wringe and make mone!

This man with woo schal be pilt.

I sye sore, and grisly grone,

For his folye schal make him split!

...

Alas, man, for love of thee!

Ya, for this gamyn and this gle

Thou schalt grocchyn and grone.

(447-50, 453-55)

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moralties used the lament as a metonymy for Death. The only thing more unnerving than the appearance of Death in physical form, is the performance of intense grief as a prelude to dying, a notion that we see clearly played out in the actions of the Good Angel. See *The Theatre of Man: Dramatic Technique and Stagecraft in the English Medieval Moral Plays* (Clevedon: Clevedon Printing Co., 1977), pgs. 109.

We have already seen this behavior in the opening moments of the play, as well as in the tropes of the tenth-century liturgy. Much like Mankind, the Good Angel will “make mone” but his behavior builds upon that of Mankind to include wailing, the wringing of hands, sighing, and groaning.<sup>30</sup> Not only does the Good Angel lament Mankind’s decision, but he mourns the fact that Mankind himself will come to a point where he too will lament his choices. Interestingly, despite the sorrow the Good Angel feels, he is insistent on how Mankind will suffer for his indiscretions, noting that the impending woe will torture him (“schal be pilt”), drawing attention to the physical ramifications of his decision to place his bodily desires before his heavenly needs. In this way, the lament shifts slightly from what we have initially witnessed. Excessive grief begins as an appropriately humbling response to loneliness, a calling out for God in recognition that one is alone, cold, and without comfort. However, as we see in the Good Angel’s response to the loss of Mankind and in his foreshadowing of Mankind’s future, the lament also serves a dual function as an expression of sadness and terror, an emotional recognition of what will be, or has already been, lost.

After we are presented with an extended view of Mankind’s fall into World’s trap, complete with appearances and enticements from the seven deadly sins, the Good Angel returns once again to express his increasing distress at the prospect of Mankind’s sustained foray into the world and his interaction and experimentation with various sins:

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Kelley repeatedly notes the Good Angel’s responses in *The Castle of Perseverance* as “laments,” but does not develop these observations further. This is indicative of the misuse of the term. Though Kelley is ultimately right in using the term, he is unaware of the implications of such usage. Other critics have noted the degree to which Mankind and other characters grieve in the play, as Arnold Williams notes that the Good Angel and other virtues “mourn” Mankind’s decisions. Remarkably, no one has unpacked the ramifications of reading these reactions in such a way. See *Flamboyant Drama*, pgs. 44, 47, 51, 58 and Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England*. (East Lansing: Michigan State U P, 1961), pgs. 151, 152.

So mekyl the werse—wele-a-woo!—  
 That evere Good Aungyl was ordeynyd thee!  
 Thou art rewlyd after the fende that is thy foo,  
 And no thinge, certys, aftyr me.  
 Weleaway! Wheder may I goo?  
 Man doth me bleykyn bloody ble;  
 His swete sowle he wil now slo!  
 He schal wepe al his game and gle  
 At one dayes time.

(1260-68)

Many aspects of the lament are apparent in this moment, as the Good Angel begins with an exclamation of grief, “wele-a-woo!” and then expresses anger at the lost soul, claiming to regret his assignment to watch over Mankind. Lamentations typically feature anger at the recently deceased, as “reproaching the dead seems to give some relief to the bereaved. The direct form of address confirms the continuing presence of the dead person in the thoughts of the bereaved.”<sup>31</sup> This appears to be exactly the case with the Good Angel, as he simultaneously vents his frustration at Mankind’s loss, while clearly continuing to worry about the well-being of his charge. In fact, his grief is so profuse it becomes disorienting, as he once again exclaims, “Weleaway!” and wonders “Wheder may I goo?” The loss of Mankind even afflicts the Good Angel’s body, as his complexion turns pale in response to grief. By drawing attention to the physical body, the Good Angel highlights the performance aspect of the lament and reveals the degree to which

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<sup>31</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *The Cue For Passion: Grief and Its Political Uses* (Cambridge and London: Harvard U P, 2000), pg. 47.



such a display is not only conveyed through language, but can also manifest itself on the lamenter's body. This is a particularly important development, as this lament is not being performed by a human character, but by a heavenly being. As Robert Potter has pointed out, "The characters of the morality plays, though fitted out with abstract names, are impersonated by human actors. This obvious fact adds a dimension of humanity to the most theological of moralities."<sup>32</sup> The fact that the Good Angel laments does not reflect some major theological significance, but it does suggest that such outpourings of grief are not only acceptable, but are part of the human condition—a notion the play seems insistent on returning to throughout the course of its action.

At this point in the play, various elements of the Good Angel's grief have become apparent. Much of his speech is devoted to exclamations regarding his sorrow at the loss of Mankind. Physical aspects including weeping, wailing, wringing of hands, and sighing have marked his response as belonging to the tradition of the lament, and the repetition of words and phrases helps to reveal an escalating tension of grief. For instance, the exclamation, "wele-a-woo" or "weleaway" serves as an audible marker of intense grief, signifying an intense emotional anguish no other word can express. By using this cry, the author of the play understood the implications—such a phrase renders the unintelligible intelligible, marking the sound of not only the Good Angel's grief over Mankind, but providing a haunting echo of the laments that will come should Mankind fail to repent. The Good Angel also returns to Mankind's devotion to "game and gle," always juxtaposing it next to the impending result, that he "schalt grocchyn and grone" and "schal wepe." This antithesis, that pleasure in the present will result in future

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<sup>32</sup> See Robert Potter, pg. 34.

lamentations, not only provides dramatic foreshadowing, but continually draws attention to the fact that Mankind is a terminal case and when his time is up, it will be a moment of intense grief for the decisions he has made. Finally, as we see in the Good Angel's response to the Bad Angel, the use of all of these elements comes together, as he cries out in a flurry of emotion, "Alas, Mankinde / Is bobbyd and blent as the blinde!" (1286-87), "Alas, Mankinne / Is soilyd and saggyd in sinne!" (1290-91), and "Alas, he is blendyd!" (1294). As we saw in the liturgical beginnings, the use of "alas" serves the same purpose of the other exclamations of grief, but the repetition coupled with the alliteration serve as literary markers of the lament, something Renaissance playwrights exploit for similar purposes in the masculine laments of the popular stage.

The Good Angel's lament is by no means an isolated incident in *The Castle of Perseverance*. When Confession hears the Good Angel's lament, he hails him as "good and trewe" and asks, "Why syest thou and sobbist sore? / Sertys, sore it schal me rewe / If I se thee make mourninge more" (1298-1301). That other characters in the play see this behavior as taking part in elaborate mourning ritual is important, but so is the fact that there is never any condemnation for this display of grief. In fact, after learning the cause of the Good Angel's grief, Confession quickly joins in on the lamentation. Standing before Mankind, Confession cries out, "What, Mankinde! Whou goth this? / What dost thou with these develys sevene? / Alas, alas, Man, al amis!" (1337-39). This exclamation of grief, composed of elements we've already encountered, does little to sway Mankind from his infernal company, but when Penance gets involved, the situation changes dramatically. Claiming he will pierce Mankind's heart with penitence, Penance details what will happen to Mankind: "But sorwe of hert with wepinge eye / For all thy sinnys

smert.” (1388-89). In other words, Mankind’s penitential response will mimic the grief we have already witnessed, complete with sorrow and weeping. Yet Penance explains that unlike a typical lament, there is a direct consolation for this grief, claiming,

They that syh in sinninge  
In sadde sorwe for here sinne,  
Whanne they schal make here endinge,  
Al here joye is to beginne.  
Thanne medelith no mourninge,  
But joye is joinyd with jentyl ginne.

(1390-95)

The process of repenting is one that takes on many elements of the lament. Penance claims that those who sigh with sorrow over their sins prepare themselves for heaven, where there is no mourning, but joy. That the language of repentance is the language of the lament is strange and it gets even stranger, as the stage directions note that “Penance pierces Mankind’s heart with the prick of conscience.” This act of spiritual violence causes Mankind to erupt in a flurry of emotion, much like what we have seen from the Good Angel,

A sete of sorwe in me is set;  
Sertys for sinne I syhe sore!  
Mone of mercy in me is met;  
For werldys mirthe I mourne more.  
In wepinge we my wele is wet.  
Mercy, thou muste mine stat a-store!

Fro oure Lordys lyth thou hast me let,  
Sory sinne, thou grisly gore!  
Owte on thee, dedly sinne!  
Sinne, thou haste Mankinde schent;  
In dedly sinne my life is spent.

(1403-13)

The Good Angel's concern over the physical grief Mankind would experience if he did not repent is made manifest in this moment, as Mankind laments his various sins through sighs, moans, mourning, and weeping. Unlike the laments we have already witnessed, Mankind does not mourn a loss or death. Rather, he laments his wicked past, noting twice that his sin is "dedly." Lamentation has become a part of repentance, functioning in a similar manner as at the beginning of the play—an expression of humility and desire for God's aid. Indeed, much like the Good Angel's approval of that initial expression of sorrow, Confession likewise endorses Mankind's behavior, proclaiming, "Whanne Mankinde crieth, I am redy. / Whanne sorwe of hert thee hathe take, / Schrifte profitith verily" (1430-32). The lament is no longer just an appropriately humbling response, but is now a necessary element in the process of confession and repentance, as Confession claims that Mankind's outpouring of grief also reduces his sin, "Now, Man, lete sorwe thine sinne slake" (1435). A few lines later, Confession makes this connection palpable as he encourages Mankind's repentance to follow the lament's model and "in mody monys, / If thou wilt wende to worthy wonys / Schrive thee now, al at onys," (1464-66). At the beginning of the play, lamentations are employed in a traditional manner: to

mourn what is lost. But nearly halfway through the play, the lament becomes adopted and adapted as a necessary and encouraged step in regaining one's spiritual health.

The prevalence of the lament as a response to spiritual loss and recovery can be gauged, in part, by the infernal mockery that occurs during the battle for Mankind outside the walls of the castle. While the lament has played a significant role in bringing Mankind back to the Good Angel and the various heavenly virtues, elements of the lament are employed by the fiends to express displeasure at losing the soul they thought they had won. When Backbiter learns that Mankind has absconded to the castle, he cries out, "Glotoun, Slawthe, and Lechery / Hath put me in gret mourninge" (1801-02). Considering the role the lament has played up to this point, this outburst is obviously meant as a type of mockery—if the lament can serve to save Mankind, perhaps it can be used to bring him back to the world of sin. This imagery is continued later when World violently beats his treasurer for allowing Mankind to escape, prompting Covetousness to exclaim, "Mercy, mercy! I wil no more. / Thou hast me rappyd with rewly rowtys! / I snowre, I sobbe, I sye sore!" (1864-66). The physical abuse World inflicts on Covetousness provokes the behavior, namely sobbing and sighing, that we have seen from the Good Angel and Mankind. Indeed, this is continued repeatedly throughout the battle for Mankind, as Pride cries out, "I weyle and wepe, with wondys wete;" (2202) and Wrath exclaims, "I, Wrethe, may singyn wele-a-wo!" (2217). The language of grief pervades the infernal reactions to the loss of Mankind to the castle, revealing the extent to which their responses serve as a counterpoint to the actions and reactions of the Good Angel. Indeed, while the Good Angel and the various virtues show how grief serves as an appropriate response to a spiritual condition, the Bad Angel's response becomes a clear

mockery, “For sorwe, I mourne on the mowle; / I carpe, I crye, I coure, I kacke, / I frete, I fart, I fesyl fowle!” (2406-08). While the spiritual flagellation of repentance brings Mankind closer to God, the Bad Angel’s scatological lament attempts to return the focus to the physical body and its sinful desires.

After all of the lamenting that occurs in response to Mankind’s oscillation away from the Good Angel and then to the Castle of Perseverance and then to Covetousness, Death finally makes an appearance and as we might expect, his arrival is greeted with an outpouring of grief. Death even recognizes this as part of his role, claiming, “A newe lessun I wil him teche, / That he schal bothe grucchyn and grise” (2832-33). The lesson Death will teach Mankind will cause him to tremble and complain, behavior we have already seen from Mankind himself, as well as virtually every other character in the play. Yet what is striking is just how similar this lament over death is to Mankind’s lament when he repents. As we saw earlier, Penance pricks Mankind’s heart with the “prick of conscience” causing him to call out for forgiveness in an extended lament. Similarly, the stage direction for this moment calls for Death to pierce Mankind with his dart and the response of the pierced is quite similar. Recognizing what has just happened, Mankind cries aloud, “A, Deth, Deth, drye is thy drifte! / Ded is my destiny” (2843-44). This repetitive exclamation of grief, as Mankind tries to comprehend what is about to happen increases in intensity as Mankind begins to weep, “For clappe of care now I crye; / Mine eye-ledys may I not lifte; / Mine brainys waxyn al emptye;” (2846-48). As he begins to die, Mankind mourns for the loss of his life, but not for his worldly decisions. He cries out to World for help, but World turns his back on Mankind, prompting an extended lament from the dying man that begins with, “Ow, Werld, Werld, evere worthe wo!”

(2882). During this emotional outburst, as Mankind addresses the audience and warns them not to make the same mistake, his language clearly participates in what we have seen of the lament, as he says, “Now, alas, my lif is lak! / Bitter balys I ginne to brewe” (2981-82) and his last words are, “I deye, certeynly! / Now my life I have lore. / Mine hert brekith, I syhe sore” (3003-06). Even after Mankind is dead and buried in the ground, The Soul of Mankind appears on stage and continues to express grief over his death. After upbraiding his dead body for the foolish choices he made, forsaking God in favor of sinful pleasures, The Soul exclaims, “Alas, Mercy, thou art too longe! / Of sadde sorwe now may I singe” (3060-61) and “Weleaay! I was ful wod / That I forsoke mine Aungyl Good” (3069-70). Just as the play has traced the life of Mankind from birth to death, the lament has likewise followed the action of the play. Appearing as the Good Angel’s response to Mankind’s fall and then as the appropriate performance of repentance, elements of the lament re-appear at the moment of death, the place where we most likely expect them. The pervasiveness of this response in *The Castle of Perseverance* suggests the degree to which the lament was a legitimate part of both physical and spiritual life and death. Indeed, the final words of the play reflect this theme, as God encourages the audience, “Evyr at the beginninge / Thinke on youre last endinge!” (3647-48), haunting words when one considers how Mankind began—with the lament.

The laments in *The Castle of Perseverance* are by no means isolated incidents within the morality tradition. *Mankind*, written somewhere between 1465 and 1470, uses the lament to describe Mercy’s disappointment and frustration in losing Mankind to Mischief and his band of troublemakers. After Mankind has fallen into folly amid the

racket of Mischief's celebration, Mercy is left alone on the stage to express his emotion, "My minde is dispersyde, my body tremmelith as the aspen leffe! / The terys shuld trekyll down by my chekys, were not yowr reverence. / It were to me solace, the cruell visitacion of deth!" (734-36).<sup>33</sup> Mercy displays a number of the lament's elements, from mental instability to tears, and he claims the only thing that could provide him with any sense of solace would be death. Indeed, in the lines that follow, it would appear as though Mankind is dead to Mercy, as he continues to grieve, "Without rude behavior, I cannot expresse this inconveniens. / Wepinge, sythinge, and sobbinge were my sufficiens; / All naturall nutriment to me as caren is odibull" (737-39). Weeping, sighing, and sobbing have become Mercy's nourishment and he refuses anything but the lament as a source of nourishment.<sup>34</sup> The insults of the various vices that precede this moment in *Mankind* might come to mind when Mercy refers to the "rude behavior" he needs to employ to express the anguish he feels at Mankind's mistake. However, Mercy is not referring to jokes or gestures about fecal matter. Rather, we must take this moment seriously, for as Meg Twycross has noted, "Mercy in *Mankind* is *not* silly, just because Mischief tries to make a fool of him: the play loses its force unless he is the anchorman."<sup>35</sup> The "rude behavior" Mercy refers to in the following lines is the weeping, the sighing and the sobbing—the actions he claims to be his sustenance in the wake of Mankind's indiscretion. Mercy seems to recognize that such outpouring of emotion is problematic and yet he continues to grieve the loss of Mankind through these physical demonstrations

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<sup>33</sup> All quotations from *Mankind* are taken from David Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, pgs. 901-938.

<sup>34</sup> As Goodland has noted, "Like Niobe, whose endless tears become her nourishment, the female mourner turn grief into sustenance and substance." *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 17.

<sup>35</sup> See Meg Twycross, "The theatricality of medieval English plays." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2005), p. 83.



of sorrow. Pamela M. King has remarked briefly on Mercy's behavior, suggesting that in this moment near the end of the play, there exists an "almost tangible emotionalism written into the role."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Mercy's reaction is not unlike the hyper-emotional responses of the three Marys in the reiterations of the *Quem quaeritis* tropes and is most certainly a recasting of the Good Angel from *Perseverance*.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the lament returns to the stage in *Everyman*, though it is not performed by a character like Mercy or the Good Angel, but by a man—the representation of all humanity. Believed to have been composed around 1495, *Everyman* enters directly into the discourse of the *Ars Moriendi* or "The Art of Dying" as the play pivots around Everyman's confrontation with and preparation for death. The play's tone is unlike many other medieval dramas, with humor completely absent in order to convey the seriousness of the subject matter. Unlike *Mankind* or *The Castle of Perseverance* where we are witness to the protagonist's fall into sin, *Everyman* begins with the protagonist's fall already complete, prompting one scholar to suggest that because of this, "there is no conflict, no *psychomachia*, but simply an orderly progress towards a predetermined end."<sup>37</sup> At first, what we see in *Everyman* is nearly identical to what we have already witnessed in the liturgical tropes and the earlier moralities. Like the three Marys and virtually every character in *Perseverance*, Everyman remarks, "Alas, I may well wepe with sighes depe! / Now have I no maner of company / To helpe me in my journey, and me to kepe" (184-86) after he has learned that he is to die.<sup>38</sup> Yet he points to the futility of his own lament, stating, "For though I mourne, it availeth nought"

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<sup>36</sup> See Pamela M. King, "Morality Plays." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Ed. Richard Beadle. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2005), pg. 248.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pg. 256.

<sup>38</sup> All quotations from *Everyman* are from David Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, pgs. 939-63.

(193). As we approach the end of the century, the lament and expressions of grief begin to change. While the lament was performed frequently and without condemnation in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Mercy's understanding of his lamentation as consisting of "rude behavior" and Everyman's belief that his laments are ineffective suggest a shift in understandings of the response. As King notes, in the course of *Everyman*, the "audience is made aware of the inevitability of death, and death's finality; suffering and loneliness eclipse any sense of what may lie beyond."<sup>39</sup> King rightfully points out the loneliness at the center of the action, as Everyman spends the play searching for someone to accompany him to the grave and yet this suffering and loneliness can be hardly said to convey the same degree of grief we witnessed in *Perseverance* and even *Mankind*. After being denied by Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods, Everyman turns to Good Deeds. Responding to his call, she replies, "Here I lie, colde in the ground. / Thy sinnes hath me sore bounde / That I cannot sterve" (486-88). Everyman's sins have effectively killed Good Deeds, leaving her buried in the cold earth. The stage directions note that she speaks from the ground, furthering this imagery of death and burial and though she can speak to Everyman and guide him towards Knowledge, Good Deeds is as good as dead.

With this first encounter in the mind, Good Deeds' resurrection is striking. After Everyman meets with Knowledge and begins to proceed through the four elements of penance (confession, contrition, absolution, and satisfaction), Confession tells Everyman he must "remembre thy Saviour was scourged for thee / With sharpe scourges, and suffred it paciently" (563-64). Everyman follows Confession's direction and self-flagellates as part of his due penance, exclaiming,

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<sup>39</sup> King, "Morality Plays," pg. 258.

Take this, body, for the sinne of the flesshe!  
Also thou delightest to go gay and fresshe,  
And in the way of dampnacion thou did me bringe;  
Therefore suffre now strokes of punisshinge!  
Now of penaunce I will wade the water clere,  
To save me from purgatory, that sharpe fire.

(613-18)

The scene is reminiscent of Mankind's encounter with Confession in *The Castle of Perseverance*, and yet it is a much more subdued vision of the process of repentance. There are no exclamations of grief and though it is clear Everyman is performing a profoundly physical act, his lines hardly convey the torturous lamentations of Mankind. As soon as Everyman has completed his penance, Good Deeds arises from the ground and announces that she is "delivered of my sickness and woe" (619) and proceeds to happily follow Everyman to the grave. This is by no means the vision of grief we witnessed at the beginning of the century, a fact made all the more striking considering that the subject matter and characters have remained the same. Indeed, if any of the morality plays would have an interest in depicting lamentations, it would be *Everyman*, a play whose central preoccupation is the moment of death. While there are a number of possibilities why *Everyman* does not take up this issue of grief to the same extent as its predecessors, the English *Ars Moriendi* and its popularity from the middle of the fifteenth and well into the sixteenth century, attempted to shift focus from lamenting as a response to death and loss or as part of repentance, to the art of dying well.

In the later Middle Ages, the lament comes into focus through the *Ars Moriendi* or *The Art of Dying*, which emphasized the preparation of the dying Christian for the judgment of the afterlife, regardless of the fear or terror it might evoke.<sup>40</sup> Appearing in the early fifteenth century as the lengthy and anonymous *Tractatus artis bene moriendi*, the work was translated into every European language, with English copies appearing as early as 1450. A shorter version, popularly titled *Ars Moriendi*, was redacted from the larger tract, though as David Atkinson has noted, “both works are notable for drawing together the many medieval commonplaces on death into a single voice celebrating Christian grace and redemption.”<sup>41</sup> The earliest versions of the English *Ars Moriendi*, titled *The Book of the Craft of Dying* appeared in manuscript form, but William Caxton, first printer of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, printed an English version in 1490 titled *The Arte and Crafte to Know Well to Dye*. These works, with their emphasis on aiding readers to “die well,” blurred the process of dying and mourning and became a type of drama in and of themselves, providing the living with the stage directions for how to appropriately prepare for and enter into death.

The bulk of the *Ars Moriendi* materials maintain a focused argument on the importance of preparing to die, yet they also function as a type of script, complete with question and answer sections to be rehearsed with the dying and prayers that should be read at specific, clearly defined moments. For instance, in the third chapter of *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, the living are provided with a series of questions to which the sick should answer “Yea.” Later, in discussing the prayers that are provided at the end of the tract, the author notes, “they may be often rehearsed again to excite the devotion of the

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<sup>40</sup> See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pg. 313-15.

<sup>41</sup> See David William Atkinson, *The English ars moriendi* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), pg. xi.

sick man,” suggesting a degree of performance and that by repeating these prayers in a ritual practice, the dying may be brought to a point of complete devotion.<sup>42</sup> The fifth chapter of the treatise *Orologium Sapientiae* is written in the form of a dialogue with the express purpose of revealing, “How the disciple of everlasting wisdom shall con learn to die for the love of Jesu,” and *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature* can best be described as a prose version of a morality play, where the title character interacts with a whole cast of characters, many of whom are identical to those we have already encountered in the plays themselves.<sup>43</sup> Even without these added dramatic elements, the very appearance of the works in the mid-to-late fifteenth century and their mission statement to teach men “to learn and have craft and knowledge to die well” serves a script-like purpose. As Robert N. Watson argues, the *Ars Moriendi* “was part of an elaborate cultural construction designed to block our view of nothingness. Voluminous meditations focused on the moment of dying as artful performance, thus putting the emphasis on technique rather than implications.”<sup>44</sup> Despite the attempt to cast the moment of death as an “artful performance,” elements of the lament repeatedly appear within the text, challenging the degree to which the tracts achieved their purpose.

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<sup>42</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, Ed. Frances M.M. Comper (New York: Arno Press, 1977), pg. 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Orologium Sapientiae*, Ed. Frances M.M. Comper (New York: Arno Press, 1977), pg. 105. *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature* features a number of laments by the Dying Creature to a variety of virtuous characters including a Good Angel, Faith and Hope, Conscience, and the Five Wits. Although no sinful characters make an appearance, the virtues respond to the Dying Creature’s laments by reminding him of his various errors in not adequately preparing for death. Strikingly, the tract ends with the Dying Creature calling out to Mary the “Mother of Mercy” thus prompting her supplication to her Son, which ends in her claim that “there is no more to do but that Ye let descend Your grace to the vessel so desposed.” Though Christ never speaks or makes an appearance, it is clear that the Dying Creature’s lamentation has worked. See *The Lamentation of the Dying Creature*, Ed. Frances M.M. Comper (New York: Arno Press, 1977), pg. 168.

<sup>44</sup> See Robert N. Watson, *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994),pg. 43.

The original translation of the Latin *Tractatus artis bene moriendi*, titled *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, features six chapters, all designed to help guide the dying to a happy death. The first chapter expands and expounds the purpose of the tract, encouraging readers to learn how to “die well.”<sup>45</sup> Filled with a vast store of maxims regarding death, the chapter draws on both classical and biblical sources. At one point the anonymous author challenges Aristotle’s fear of bodily death, insisting, “spiritual death of the soul is as much more horrible and detestable, as the soul is more worthy and precious than the body.”<sup>46</sup> Later, the author draws from the book of *Ecclesiastes*, “The day of man’s death is better than the day of man’s birth” thus echoing a sentiment we have just seen acted out in the morality plays.<sup>47</sup> Then, quoting someone simply identified as a wise man, “To die well is to die gladly and willfully.”<sup>48</sup> All of these quotations ultimately build up to what can be understood as the tract’s statement of purpose, “therefore we ought to take our death when God will, wilfully and gladly, without any grutching or contradiction, through the might and boldness of the will of our soul virtuously disposed and governed by reason and very discretion.” The good Christian should die in the knowledge that God has determined it to be the appropriate time. In departing the earthly world in an orderly manner, governed both by the promise of God’s salvation, as well as through “reason and very discretion,” the dying man reveals the

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<sup>45</sup> The vast majority of studies on death and dying in the Middle Ages are happy to point out the basic function of the *ars moriendi*, including brief overviews of what appears within the pages, but few take the time to provide developed analysis on the tracts themselves. For more on the *ars moriendi* tradition, see Margaret Aston “Death” *Fifteenth-century Attitudes*. Ed. Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994), pgs. 202-28; Paul Binski *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), pgs. 33-47; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997), pgs. 389-93; and Phoebe S. Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus: Ohio State U P, 1987), pgs. 27-49.

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 5

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 6. See *Ecclesiastes* 7:1.

<sup>48</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 7.

virtuous “boldness of the will of the soul.” According to the tract’s author, the process of dying is not an emotional affair, but one that is completely logical and scripted. In the final clause of this statement, the author goes on to note that one should die in this way, “though the lewd sensuality and frailty of our flesh naturally grutch or strive there against.”<sup>49</sup> The tract clearly recognizes that man’s natural inclination at the prospect of death is to grieve and lament or to “grutch,” yet the *Ars Moriendi* is insistent on making death into a drama whose happy ending is clear from the beginning.

The second chapter of the tract is concerned with the various temptations man faces as he readies himself for death. While many of the threats are the familiar foes of the devil’s arsenal including the loss of faith, despair, spiritual pride, and an unhealthy focus on temporal things, the third temptation is defined as impatience, but it is clear the fear is over the performance of excessive grief. In her study of the *Ars Moriendi* tradition, Nancy Beaty has noted that the “outstanding characteristic of this section is its meagerness of thought, in comparison with that of the two preceding sections.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, if one were expecting a detailed analysis of the sin of impatience, one would be sorely disappointed. Read as a discussion of excessive grief and the lament, however, the section takes on a new, provocative dimension. Explaining that many men are not ready for death, the tract notes that the unprepared, “maketh so impatient and grutching, that other while, through woe and impatience they become wood and witless, as it hath been seen in many men.”<sup>51</sup> By refusing to go quietly into death, the dying can become enraged and mad, losing focus at the most pivotal of times. The author then builds upon this

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<sup>49</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 8.

<sup>50</sup> See Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*. (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1970), pg. 14.

<sup>51</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 15-16.

description of the temptation of impatience by deploying wisdom from a variety of church fathers. First we hear from Saint Jerome: “Whoso taketh sickness or death with sorrow or displeasure of heart, it is an open and a certain sign that he loveth not God sufficiently. ... it is needful that he grutch not in no manner of sickness that falleth to him before death, or in his dying—be it never so painful or grievous.” And then from Saint Gregory, “There shall no man have the kingdom of heaven that grutcheth and is impatient; and there may no man grutch that hath it.”<sup>52</sup> Fear over the lament is evident here and the quotes build towards an increasing condemnation of the act. While Saint Jerome claims that those who lament their death are guilty of not loving God sufficiently, the quote from Saint Gregory goes even further, claiming that lamenting one’s death is an act that ultimately excludes the lamenter from heaven. These visions and revisions of the lament in the Middle Ages point to its mercurial nature and the difficulty the church had with understanding and controlling this response to loss, as the morality plays from the beginning of the century clearly encouraged the lament as part of a healthy spirituality that ultimately informs and guides the process of repentance.

Despite the strongly worded encouragement to avoid impatience or excessive grief as one prepares to die, the fourth chapter provocatively calls upon the dying to imitate the life of Christ, commanding, “therefore such things as Christ did dying on the cross, the same should every man do at his last end.” This is perhaps not surprising given the frequency with which tracts call on the reader to remember Christ’s passion, yet it is nevertheless a strange departure from the repeated and insistent command to die well. In the earliest manuscript edition of 1490, the anonymous author notes that Jesus “cried on

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<sup>52</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 16.



the cross” and “Also He wept on the cross.”<sup>53</sup> Following this observation is a lengthy description of how those on their deathbed should conceive of these outbursts of grief and sorrow, “The second was He cried. So should every man in his dying cry strongly with the heart, not with the voice. For God taketh more heed of the desire of the heart than of the crying of the voice. The crying of the heart to God is nought else but the great desiring of man to have forgiveness of his sins, and to have everlasting life.”<sup>54</sup>

Beaty has read these passages as an encouragement to the dying Christian, suggesting, “the reminder that the Great Exemplar of human holiness had also cried out and wept at the ‘laste ende’ must have been comforting,” but this passage is not meant to provide comfort.<sup>55</sup> Rather, the claim that God clearly prefers silent devotion over the performance of grief highlights a concern over the lament and excessive performances of grief.

Providing detailed instruction on the appropriateness of mourning one’s own death, this section of the *Ars Moriendi* reveals an anxiety over the influence of outward expressions of sorrow such as crying. In reiterating the command against the deathbed sin of impatience and the “grutching” that often accompanies it, the author of the tract reveals an awareness and concern over the influence of effusive cries at the prospect of death. Not only does it appear to question the legitimacy of the promise of Christ’s death and resurrection, but such a performance would be deeply unnerving for those who happened to witness it.

The chapter continues on to note that similarly, Christ also wept at his death and, not surprisingly, “With his bodily eyes and with tears of the heart, in token that so should

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<sup>53</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 27.

<sup>54</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 28.

<sup>55</sup> See Beaty, pg. 23.

every man in His dying weep with tears of his heart, that is to say, verily repenting of all his misdeeds.”<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that a distinction is being made between crying and weeping. While crying is simply the act of having tears fall from your eyes, weeping is a much more involved process. Caxton’s version sheds further light on the difference between these two acts, as *The Arte & Crafte to Know Well to Dye* (1490) follows the outline of the initial manuscript, but makes some significant changes. For instance, the passage excerpted above is rendered thus:

Secondly he ought to weep, not with his bodily eyes only, but with tears of his heart, in repenting verily himself. Thirdly he ought strongly to cry from the depths of his heart, and not by voice. For God beholdeth more the desire of the heart than the sound of the voice. Also to cry with the heart is none other thing, but strongly to desire remission of his sins and to come to everlasting life.<sup>57</sup>

Caxton’s manuscript reverses the order of weeping and crying, placing greater emphasis on the more involved act of grief by provocatively adding the word “only” to the description. Unlike the original, where outward displays should be strictly relegated to the heart with no allowance made for physical demonstrations of grief, Caxton’s version allows for some outward weeping. His ultimate suggestion, however, is that one should not weep outward entirely, but inwardly in one’s heart, the deep, holy place God desires and prefers.

Indeed, as the fourth chapter ends, the importance of maintaining control in the moment of death is reiterated: “And he that is dying, as long as he hath use of reason, let

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *The Craft to Know Well to Die*, pg. 70-71.

him pray devoutly within himself, with his heart and his desire, as he can and may, and so yield the ghost up to God and he shall be safe.”<sup>58</sup> This notion of being “safe”, a clear echo of Saint Gregory’s claim that those who are impatient or revel in excessive fits of grief are not allowed into Heaven, also returns to the beginning of the tract, where the author emphasized the importance of quietly entering into death, without the “lewd sensuality and frailty of our flesh” that becomes evident when one “grutch or strive there against.” These encouragements to avoid excessive mourning are placed throughout the tract, though they develop from arguments relying upon the threat of God’s displeasure to a discussion of masculinity. Indeed, one should embrace dying not in a flurry of weeping and crying, “But manly, therefore, and stiffly and steadfastly abide and persevere; and die in the very faith and unity and obedience of our mother Holy Church.”<sup>59</sup> The language here is clear. One should be “stiff” and “steadfast,” words that are certainly devoid of any emotional charge, and often linked to idealized visions of masculinity. In fact, to behave in this manner at the moment of death should not actually require much of the dying, for as the author argues, “God is true in His promises, and giveth us grace to withstand mightily, manly, and perseverantly; giving us might that we be not overcome, grace to get us merit, steadfastness to overcome with.”<sup>60</sup> The stoic-like embracing of death is provided by God and so to weep or wail is to not only behave effeminately, but to neglect the very gifts God has equipped one with in order to die well. This notion is once again reiterated late in the tract, as instructions for those helping the dying man to embrace his end are provided with the instruction, “Exhort him also that he be strong in his soul

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<sup>58</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 31.

<sup>59</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

against other temptations that be put and told, also mightily and manly withstand them all.”<sup>61</sup> In returning again to the notion of temptation, the reader is reminded of the grievous sin of impatience. Yet the insertion of a plea to one’s masculinity, to embrace death as a man “mightily” in steadfast fortitude, reveals an anxiety over the performance of the lament as not only ruining one’s chance of entering into Heaven, but also as having an effeminating influence.

In the prayer with which the *Book of the Craft of Dying* ends, the lament and excessive grief reappear, but this time the expression of grief is used to describe the behavior of Christ upon the cross. In asking Christ to be with the dying man, the prayer begins, “My Most Sweet Redemptor, most merciful Jesu, and most benign Lord, for that sorrowful voice Thou haddest in Thy manhood when Thou shouldst die for us, and were so consumed with sorrows and travails of Thy passion that Thou crydest Thee forsaken of Thy Father.”<sup>62</sup> Christ is depicted as being simultaneously wracked with grief as well as well as possessing an unequivocal manhood. Neither of these things appears to conflict with the other, as he is described as being “consumed with sorrows” and crying aloud, thereby contradicting all of the commands that have preceded this prayer. In Caxton’s version, this moment becomes increasingly complicated as the prayer reads, “O My Much Loved Redeemer, right piteous, Jesus right benign, we pray Thy lacrimable voice, by which in Thy humanity, when Thou shouldst die, Thou wert consumed by labors and sorrows, in such wise that Thou wert left of Thy father.”<sup>63</sup> First of all, Christ’s behavior is seen as taking part in the tradition of the lament as his voice is described as “lacrimable,”

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pg. 35.

<sup>62</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 43.

<sup>63</sup> *The Craft to Know Well to Die*, pg. 82.

but Caxton's version of the prayer also notes that this behavior, which challenges virtually all of what has come before, reveals Christ's humanity in that he was "consumed by labors and sorrows." Though the dying are meant to see excessive grief as deeply problematic and unmanly, they are nevertheless presented with conflicting messages. Christ's example is represented as the pinnacle of a good death, the very image the dying should imitate, yet his actions on the cross are simultaneously viewed as taking part in excessive grief, à la the "Man of Sorrows."

In the final prayer to God on behalf of the dying man, the *Book of the Craft of Dying* reveals a varied understanding of grief at one's death. While the tract attempts to dissuade excessive displays of sorrow, the prayer nevertheless asks for God's mercy regarding such behavior, "Have mercy, Lord, upon his wailings, have mercy upon his tears, and admit to the sacrament of Thy reconciliation him that hath no trust but upon Thy mercy."<sup>64</sup> The prayer clearly recognizes that though such outbursts are not entirely welcome, they are likely in such a moment and this does not deny the power and promise of Christ's death and resurrection. Such a tempered vision, appearing at the end of the tract, reveals the innate tension surrounding the performance of grief at the moment of death in medieval culture. In discussing the value of the *Ars Moriendi*, Atkinson has noted that not only do the tracts provide "insight into changing attitudes towards death," but that the *Ars Moriendi* tradition also functions as a "valuable barometer of the religious and philosophical shifts characterizing the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance."<sup>65</sup> In tracing the development of early English drama, from its liturgical

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<sup>64</sup> *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pg. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Atkinson, *The English ars moriendi*, pg. xi.

beginnings, through the morality plays, and into the *Ars Moriendi*, it is evident that the lament and the performance of grief were a prominent feature in these religious shifts.

From the English dramatic tradition's beginning in the Latin liturgy, elements of the lament were employed as a way to communicate the drama inherent in the moments following Christ's death and resurrection. Considering the ease with which one can convey grief through language, as well as the importance of remembering Christ's death in the medieval Christian tradition, it is not much wonder the liturgy developed the powerful theatrical potential of such a display. Yet as the Middle Ages progress and the drama of the period develops, it is clear that such responses were carefully revised. As portrayed in the moralities, the moment of death typically ends with the Mankind figure calling out to God in an expression of distress, thereby situating performances of grief as an appropriate response when it leads to one's recognition of God's sovereignty. As the morality plays develop, however, their depiction of grief and lamentation begins to hint at an underlying wariness over such displays. While laments appear repeatedly and without question or condemnation in *The Castle of the Perseverance*, by the late fifteenth century *Mankind* and *Everyman* are careful to avoid prolonged expressions or performances of grief. Indeed, in the former, the lament is reserved for the allegorical figure of Mercy who grieves Mankind's fall and in the later, a play where the performance of grief would be entirely appropriate, the expression of sorrow is so brief it is almost nonexistent. The rise of the English *Ars Moriendi*, which dominated medieval imaginations concerning the process of dying from the middle of the fifteenth century onward, undoubtedly played a significant role in attempting to reshape the lament as fundamentally disruptive and threatening display. As we have just seen, these tracts were concerned with the

distraction of such acts, distractions that could potential result in everlasting consequences. In attempting to teach one how to “die well,” the *Ars Moriendi* worked to delineate between appropriate and inappropriate responses to death, yet at the same time, laments feature prominently in these writings, appearing in the very actions of Christ himself. This tension reveals the degree to which the lament over death posed a problem for popular medieval theology. While lamentations were grounded in biblical narrative, something reiterated yearly in the Corpus Christi cycles as well as the church’s liturgy and morality plays, such expressions could also function as a distraction for both the dying Christian and those who witnessed his display. Indeed, the concern over responses to and for the dead present in these early dramas ultimately set the stage for the debates that would continue throughout the remainder of the fifteenth and through the sixteenth centuries as reformers and playwrights alike attempted to come to terms with what constituted appropriate grief as well as appropriately manly behavior in the wake of death.

## Chapter Two: Christopher Marlowe and the Masculine Lament

O silly brethren, born to see this day!  
Why stand you thus unmoved with my laments?  
Why weep you not to think upon my wrongs?  
Why pine not I, and die in this distress?  
*The Jew of Malta* 1.2.171-74

In his 1593 note accusing Marlowe of all manner of ill-behavior and belief, Richard Baines infamously reports that the playwright had claimed, "if there be any god or any good Religion, then it is in the papistes because the service of god is performed with more Ceremonies, as Elevation of the mass, organs, singing men, Shaven Crownes & cta. That all protestantes are Hypocritical asses." Though it is impossible to discern how much of this is truth and how much is fabrication, the accusation, with its emphasis on Marlowe's love of ceremony and ritual is nevertheless provocative. If we were to listen to Baines, we might be convinced that Marlowe was quite enamored of Catholicism's ritualistic elements, apparently guilty of also claiming, "That if Christ would haue instituted the sacrament with more Ceremoniall Reverence it would haue bin had in more admiration."<sup>1</sup> While this remark grows to an increasingly ridiculous level in Marlowe's supposed suggestion that the sacrament would have been better distributed through a tobacco pipe, the insistence that he enjoyed and encouraged ceremony not only continues to fuel recent discussion of where his religious sympathies rested, but also provides a new and useful lens through which we can begin to re-examine the strange

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Millar Maclure, ed. *Marlowe: The Critical Heritage, 1588-1896* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 37.



behavior exhibited by some his characters.<sup>2</sup>

The charges leveled by Baines are certainly absurd in many respects, but the tension between Protestant and Catholic belief in his note underscore a larger anxiety that is present in Marlowe's works, especially the plays *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *Doctor Faustus*. This essay follows in that tradition, but looks in a new direction, toward the grave, a hotly contested space during and following the Protestant Reformation. Through their oftentimes outlandish behavior, Aeneas and Faustus enter into the widely debated topic of appropriate grief and by reading the actions of these characters as taking part in the lament—an elaborate form of mourning that has its roots in classical antiquity—we can see the ways Marlowe adopted and transformed this response to loss for the Renaissance stage. Though the lament was and still is traditionally associated with women's grief, Marlowe's depiction of grieving men takes on a number of the form's characteristics, despite the fact that by the time he composed these plays Protestant reformers had attempted to paint excessive grief as overly-emotional, effeminate, and even blasphemous. In these two characters then, Marlowe manipulates Renaissance ideas of masculinity and appropriate grief by placing a distinctly feminine response on male characters, simultaneously revealing the intensely human experience of responding to loss and challenging attempts at reform. Though recent studies examining grief in Renaissance drama have largely ignored Marlowe's plays, focusing instead on the works

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<sup>2</sup> For recent, detailed analysis on Marlowe and his religious proclivities, see David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004) and Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2005). Riggs characterizes Marlowe's childhood relationship to religious belief as an "ironic, uncommitted stance" and suggests that as an adult, Marlowe "conceived of religion as a site of conflict rather than an accessible realm of sacred truth. His plays depict the struggles between Muslim and Christian, Christian and Jew, Christian and Epicurean, and Protestant and Catholic" (16). As this essay will argue, the latter is especially true in the plays that come at the beginning and end of his career.

of his contemporaries like Kyd and Shakespeare, Marlowe's depictions of masculine grief are particularly nuanced and thoughtful, providing complex musings on the nature of loss and responses to it, thereby setting the stage for those who followed in his wake.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to pin down what we mean when we use the word *lament*. As scholars have noted, the term signifies a number of different genres and can manifest in a number of different ways.<sup>4</sup> On the most basic level, the lament is an expression of mourning—one often, but not necessarily, directed towards the dead, for it can be inspired by any loss. It can appear in seemingly innocuous forms such as an elaborate poem or song, or take on the more disturbing characteristics of loud wailing and self-flagellation.<sup>5</sup> Margaret Alexiou, in her work on the lament in Greek tradition, has suggested that lamenting the dead was “essentially functional” and “by no means just a spontaneous outbreak of grief. It was carefully controlled in accordance with the ritual at every stage.”<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, when looking at the response as part of a universal folk tradition, one scholar has noted the exact opposite; the lament is most certainly, “the spontaneous outburst of distress by the living on sustaining a loss.”<sup>7</sup> While the discrepancy between these two definitions points to the notorious difficulty of defining the lament, the interplay between ritual and emotion is something that became

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<sup>3</sup> The two most recent book length studies on grief, Katharine Goodland's *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) and Tobias Doring's *Performances of Mourning in Shakespearean Theatre and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2008) mention Marlowe only in passing, with no detailed examination of grief or the lament in his plays.

<sup>4</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 1. While this paper will look specifically at the lament as a response to death, it is important to note that there are laments over the fall of great cities, as seen in the book of Lamentations, and in some cultures laments are also sung as part of the marriage ceremony.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> See Bade Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition.” *Journal of Folktale Studies* 22 (1981), p. 272.

particularly evident in sixteenth century English understandings of responses to death.

In Marlowe's England, the lament was clearly a hybrid of these two ideas—at once deeply ritualistic *and* spontaneous. One need only look at contemporary definitions of the word to see the extent to which both ideas occupied the minds of the English. As a noun, the performance aspect is emphasized, though at the same time acknowledging its intense emotional impact: “An *act* of lamenting, a passionate or demonstrative expression of grief. Also *poet.* the action of lamenting, lamentation.” As a verb, the term is clearly aligned with emotional response: “To express profound sorrow for or concerning; also, in mod. use, to feel sorrow for; to mourn for the loss of (a person); to bewail”<sup>8</sup> but both definitions gesture to the fact that to lament is to engage in a *performance* of grief.

Because theatre is also deeply invested in performance, plays provide an invaluable space to interrogate the ways in which this particular act of grieving developed alongside contemporary discussions regarding what constituted appropriate forms of mourning. The potential for grief to transform into a performance was a large reason why the lament came under the violent attack of Protestant reformers in the mid-sixteenth century. With Catholic conceptions of purgatory and transubstantiation playing significant roles in maintaining an intimate relationship between the quick and the dead, the Protestant Reformation emphasized their distance with the complete removal of the body from the 1552 burial rite. Even a quick glance at the funeral service in England's *Book of Common Prayer* reveals the extent to which Archbishop Cranmer worked to divorce any relationship between the living and the dead. Where Cranmer's 1549 edition maintained communication between the priest and the dead body and its soul, his new liturgy

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<sup>8</sup> “Lament” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 2009. Emphasis added.

stressed a profound disconnect from the corpse, with the service addressing only the living congregation.<sup>9</sup>

While the 1552 Prayer Book was seen as much more radical than the 1549 version, it cannot be attributed to Cranmer alone.<sup>10</sup> The theologian Peter Martyr aided Cranmer in the production of that volume and the first edition of Martyr's own *Loci communes* or *Common Places* was printed in London by the French minister Robert Masson in 1576. Modeled after Calvin's *Institutes*, the *Loci communes* went through a number of editions in the seventy-five years following its initial publication and was particularly popular amongst the English, both at home and abroad. Though Martyr's commonplace "On wine and drunkenness" appeared in the Elizabethan Book of Homilies, the book contains two lengthy sections on mourning and burial, thus revealing discussions concerning the dead were still occurring almost twenty-five years after Cranmer made his decisive cuts in the *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>11</sup> Yet Martyr's book is anything but a discussion. Rather, Martyr's beliefs concerning the dead display reformed thinking about the subject, as he delineates between Biblical mourners who mourned appropriately and those who did not. Detailing for his reader what constitutes inappropriate mourning, Martyr writes:

Faults they be if thou mourne immoderatelie, that is, over-much. After which manner we read that Samuel was reproved, when he lamented over-much for Saule, being now cast out of his kingdom. Over this, if indecent things be done; as the renting of the bodie, and such like: or else, if it be

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<sup>9</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 577.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>11</sup> See Mark Taplin's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Pietro Martire Vermigli. According to Taplin, the *Loci communes* went through fourteen editions between 1576 and 1656.

done feinedlie.<sup>12</sup>

Martyr's language tells us a great deal about the attempts to reform and moderate responses to loss. First, there is the suggestion that grief is something one can and should control. To "mourne immoderateliē" is to lose control, an act for which Samuel was reproved by God.<sup>13</sup> There is no allowance for mourning "over-much," a direct admonishment against lingering over the body. Despite the sustained anti-Catholic strain of the *Common Places*, the previous quotation reveals a more significant concern regarding grief. We have already seen why mourning "over-much" maintains a connection with the dead, a bond that must be severed in order to diminish the Catholic cultural force of Purgatory. This is continued in the section *Of buriall*, as Martyr further promulgates a division between this world and the next, stating, "Those things which be done at funerals, and in burieng of dead bodies, belong unto them which be alive; they be their consolations, they nothing profit the dead."<sup>14</sup> The forced shift in focus from the body of the mourned to the body of the mourning is significant, for as Martyr warns in the previous section, "if indecent things be done; as the renting of the bodie, and such like: or else, if it be done feinedlie" then one is guilty of mourning immoderately. This concern over the living body is curious. Though Martyr goes to great lengths to speak against self-slaughter in other passages, he is not speaking about suicide here. Rather, he is outlining the deeply troubling and often violent behavior of the lament.

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<sup>12</sup> See Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Common Places of the most famous and renowned Divine Doctor Peter Martyr*, p. 315.

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Samuel 16:1. Martyr's decision to draw on this verse in particular is puzzling, as the interaction between God and Samuel is hardly an example of a divine reprimand. Though God does ask Samuel how long he will mourn for Saul, it is hardly any sort of direct condemnation, especially since the issue seems to be one of length, not that he lamented in the first place. Goodland has noted that the lament was "a practice that was always tentative under the Christian dispensation" (3) and evidence like this may have played a role in keeping lamentation in a liminal space between an acceptable and inappropriate response to loss.

<sup>14</sup> See Martyr, p. 319.

Despite the fact that reformers like Martyr and Cranmer were working to show excessive grief as a blasphemous and unfortunate product of Catholicism, literary depictions of the form were still present. Sophocles' *Antigone*—a play deeply concerned with the politics of grief—was published in a Latin translation by Thomas Watson in 1581, the same year as Marlowe's matriculation as a pensioner at Corpus Christi, Cambridge. Dedicated to the Earl of Arundel, a known and persecuted Catholic, the decision to translate and make available this particular play at this specific moment in time is tantalizing, as the anxiety seen in *Antigone* echoes the recurring debate over the dead in Marlowe's England.<sup>15</sup> Park Honan claims that Marlowe found “with pleasure” Watson's translation of the play and “one suspects that he read it closely.”<sup>16</sup> Sophocles' masterpiece, often viewed as the “classical statement of the struggle between the law of the individual conscience and the central power of the state,” deals with a similar, if not identical issue at the heart of Renaissance discussions of the performance of grief.<sup>17</sup>

Though grief was typically seen as a deeply personal emotion, reformers weren't necessarily concerned with private displays. It was when the private became public, when

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<sup>15</sup> See Mark Eccles, *Christopher Marlowe in London* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1934), p. 128, where Eccles argues that Watson wrote in Latin so “the widest possible audience might hear him.” Riggs, however, suggests the opposite, claiming that by writing in Latin, Watson was “not risking the exposure that an English version would bring” (188). Considering the subject matter of the play, as well as the religious leanings of its translator, Riggs is most likely correct in his assessment.

<sup>16</sup> See Honan, p. 132. Unfortunately, this is all the evidence Honan provides for Marlowe's reading of Watson's *Antigone*. It is a well established fact that Marlowe and Watson struck up a friendship following the publication of the latter's translation and were involved in a wide variety of activities together, though the details of their activities fall outside the purview of this essay. It is worth noting, however, that Watson appears to identify himself as a Catholic, a significant fact considering the subject matter of *Antigone*. For more, see Honan, pp. 132-143, Charles Nichols, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), pp. 177-84, and Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 2002), pp. 81-90.

<sup>17</sup> See David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, eds. *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, Volume II: Sophocles, p. 3. Scholarship has largely ignored Watson's version of *Antigone* and the implications of his decision to translate this particular play. Most critics are content to look at the dedicatory verses as a way to get at Watson's biography, leaving the content of the literature unexamined.

one sprinkled dust over a corpse despite explicit commands not to do so, for example, that the reformers grew worried. In fact, public acts of mourning were viewed as doubly dangerous, not only because they were potentially so disruptive with loud outbursts of wailing and other physical manifestations, but also because to act in this way was a very obvious challenge to the reformed way of thinking on the subject.

Though it might be possible to read *Antigone* as ambivalent in its representation of the conflict between the title character and Creon, Watson adds not one, but two arguments to the play. The first is what we might expect from such a device—a brief outlining of the play’s plot points. The second argument, however, is spoken in iambic trimeters by the character Nature and offers a very specific interpretation of what we are about to encounter. With a simultaneous focus on the performance of grief as well as the importance of obeying authority, it may very well be the case that Watson felt the subject matter of the play informed discussions regarding what constituted an acceptable response to loss. As Dana Sutton notes, “Although the thrust of this poem is that rebellion against bad government is in any event to be rejected, Watson willingly concedes that Creon’s edict is indeed an impious statute that violates the laws of Nature.”<sup>18</sup> As Nature herself will note, “Behold, sad Antigone will now come on the stage; grieving, she will boldly cover her unburied brother by casting on dust, overcome by pious emotion, and she will invite her sister to join her in so doing.” At first glance, it is evident that Nature sides with Antigone, claiming the young woman’s actions are bold and her emotions pious. Antigone’s lamentation, it seems, is an appropriate reaction to the loss of her brother, even if Polynices is a traitor. There is no sense, implied or otherwise, that her

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<sup>18</sup> See Dana Sutton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Watson (1556-1592)* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 7.

grief is excessive or misplaced. Yet Nature continues her argument, stating, “But the poor girl does not yet perceive that raw emotion must yield place to the laws of one’s country.” What is striking in Nature’s assessment of the situation is that she never criticizes Antigone’s emotional outburst directly. Her lament is only a problem because it disobeys Creon’s decree, and Nature even throws the importance of obedience to an impious order into question, later noting that she will “fill [Creon] with tearful grieving, overthrowing his entire house with disaster.” Though it is Antigone who suffers initially, Nature’s argument for the play is insistent that the young woman has done what is right, ending her piece with the proclamation “So you, my servants, learn from such great evils how wholesome it is to cleave to Nature’s laws. If I be unwilling, naught will go aright.”<sup>19</sup>

Nature clearly sides with Antigone’s actions, but this is not the only addition Watson made to his Latin translation. While Nature’s argument shapes the way a reader might view the events that follow in the play, Watson also attached four Pomps and four Themes to the end as a way to further explore the larger issues brought up in the play’s action. Sutton claims these emendations were “written as performance pieces no less than the play itself” and, in many ways, contrast what Nature has already said at the outset of the play.<sup>20</sup> The second theme, for instance, is dedicated to looking at how “The Example of Antigone Teaches What an Evil Thing it is to Disobey a Public Magistrate’s Edict” and offers a startlingly different understanding of Antigone’s behavior from what we initially heard from Nature. Though it never once directly references the play or any of its characters, the second theme reads like a corrective to Nature’s arguments about

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<sup>19</sup> Sutton, *Complete Works of Thomas Watson*, 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> Sutton, *Complete Works of Thomas Watson*, 4.



Antigone's "bold" and "pious" actions. Beginning with an affirmation of Mother Nature's invention of just laws, the theme moves into a forceful critique of those who would place the performance of grief over their responsibilities to the state. Much like the reformer's concern over excessive grief and its disruptive qualities, the theme insists, "Sharp grief over personal catastrophe takes away all concern for duty" and "No power of private grief legitimately resists the fasces of justice."<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to say what exactly prompts this sudden about-face. The audience is initially led to believe that Antigone's actions make her a heroine recognized by Nature, but Watson significantly tempers this notion with an assertion that one must always remember the public ideals of duty and justice as opposed to personal issues of grief. Considering Watson's intended audience coupled with the danger inherent in making Antigone an unqualified heroine, this theme may have simply been an attempt to cover his tracks. Regardless, the fact that the play was circulating with these additions, offers insight into the issues Marlowe would explore in his first dramatic attempt.

Despite attempts to discourage excessive displays of grief, lamentations appear repeatedly in the drama of the period. Though there have been a number of studies focusing on the grief of women, those traditionally responsible for the lament, little attention has been paid to men who perform an eerily similar response.<sup>22</sup> Marlowe's plays are an ideal place to begin an examination of this phenomenon, for by the time he composed *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Cranmer and Martyr had effectively denounced any lingering over the dead and removed the body from the funeral service. Yet when we

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>22</sup> There are a number of works that look at grief in English Renaissance literature, but none have read men and their responses as lamentations. Jennifer C. Vaught comes closest in *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

look at Marlowe's first play, we can see the extent to which the lament is still present and performed by men. Indeed, it even appears to be an acceptable response to loss as Venus, upon seeing her son, remarks "Whiles my *Aeneas* spends himselfe in plaints, / And heaven and earth with his unrest acquaints" (1.1.140-41).<sup>23</sup> Not only is Aeneas mourning the losses incurred at Troy and the storm he believes to have caused the deaths of a number of his companions, but he does so in a manner that requires his entire being ("spends himselfe") while simultaneously making his grief apparent to all on earth and those above it. Given the fact that it is rare to have stage directions noting the performance of a lament in English Renaissance drama, Venus' description of her son is telling.<sup>24</sup> Aeneas' response to loss is profound and loud—not only visible and audible to those who surround him, but his cries are so effusive they reach the heavens. In fact, Venus condones and promotes this behavior, leaving Aeneas alone at the end of the first scene, prompting him to question,

Why talke we not together hand in hand?

And tell our griefes in more familiar termes:

But thou art gone and leav'st me here alone,

To dull the ayre with my *discoursive moane*. (1.1.245-48, emphasis added)

Aeneas is not only mourning the catastrophic losses already incurred at Troy and on the tempestuous seas that have him shipwrecked at Carthage, but Venus's departure also spurs on a sense of loss. As he calls after his mother, begging, "Stay gentle Venus, flye

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<sup>23</sup> All quotations from *Dido, Queen of Carthage* are taken from *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> See Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1999). As they note in their entry on "lament," it is a "seldom called for demonstration of sorrow, with every occurrence but one...in a dumb show."

not from thy sonne, / Too cruell, why wilt thou forsake me thus?" (1.2.242-43), we hear echoes of Christ's words on the cross and simultaneously see the ways in which Aeneas laments the sense that he is left alone, losing both his companions and his mother.

The description of Aeneas' grief in this opening scene is enough to be classified by reformers as excessive, yet the key to this passage is in the word "discursive." In his examination of the play, Rick Bowers comments on this passage, explaining Aeneas' behavior as representative of the "male hysteric" and wondering what it is Aeneas actually wants.<sup>25</sup> The answer lies in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which cites this particular usage of *discursive* as the earliest example of "conversational," revealing the extent to which Aeneas, and by extension Marlowe, sees grief as relying upon multiple voices, couched in the tradition of the lament.<sup>26</sup> Aeneas is upset he cannot share his grief with his mother, though he has in fact just done so. Appearing in disguise, Venus has discussed the entire situation with her son, even attempting to comfort him with news that the ships he believes to have lost are actually safe. She then exits, and it is only here Aeneas recognizes her, though this proves to be of no solace. The language of this scene, beginning with Venus's recognition of her son's lament, along with Aeneas' desire to talk in "familiar termes" with linked hands, clearly reflects a sense that a collective response to loss is desirable and even necessary for working out the emotions of intense grief. The belief that "Grief is lessened when imparted to others" was proverbial in Renaissance England, appearing repeatedly in the works of Edmund Spenser and other of Marlowe's

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<sup>25</sup> See Rick Bowers, "Hysteries, High Camp, and *Dido, Queen of Carthage*" *Marlowe's Empery: Expanding His Critical Contexts*, Eds. Saran Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2002), p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Roma Gill notes this in her footnote. The other definitions of discursive see it as relating to reason, but reason is not what is occurring in the opening moments of the play, especially with regard to Aeneas' behavior.

contemporaries.<sup>27</sup> However, despite imparting his grief to his disguised mother, Aeneas is unable to find any comfort, suggesting that Marlowe sees this behavior as requiring a counterpoint, a response to his exclamation of grief. To simply impart one's grief to another is not enough—one must express their sorrow in an increasingly climactic fashion.

In the brief scene following this outburst, we learn that Aeneas is not alone in his anguish, as Illioneus expresses a near identical response. In happening upon Iarbus, he tells his fellow survivors they should “plaine to hime the summe of your distress” (1.2.2). The end of the preceding scene has shown us a similar interaction between Aeneas and Venus, and Iarbus' question “Why, what are you, or wherefore doe you sewe?” (1.2.3) draws attention to this parallel response. Though unaware they are interacting with one another, Aeneas and Illioneus engage in an antiphonal lament, with one beginning the cry and the other returning it, with more details and a greater outburst. Both men are asked to explain who they are and what they are doing, and their responses are quite similar:

*Aeneas:* Of *Troy* am I, *Aeneas* is my name,  
Who driven by warre from my native world,  
Put sailes to seeke out *Italy*:  
And my divine descent from sceptred *Jove*.  
With twise twelve Phrigian ships I plowed the deepe,  
And made that way was my mother *Venus* led:  
But of them all scarce seven doe anchor safe,  
And they so wrackt and weltred by the waves,

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<sup>27</sup> See Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1950), p. 275-76.

As every tide tilts their oken sides:  
And all of them unburdened of their loade,  
Are ballassed with billowes watrie weight.  
But hapless I, God wot, poore and unknowne,  
Doe trace these Libian deserts all despised,  
Exild from *Europe* and wide *Asia* both,  
And have not any coverture but heaven.

(1.1.216-30)

*Illioneus*: Wretches of Troy, envied of the windes,  
That crave such favour at your honors feete,  
As poore distressed miserie may pleade:  
Save, save, O save our ships from cruell fire,  
That doe complaine the wounds of thousand waves,  
And spare our lives whom every spite pursues.  
We come not to wrong your Libian Gods,  
Or steale your household lares from their shrines:  
Our hands are not prepar'd to lawless spoyle,  
Nor armed to offend in any kind:  
Such force is farre from our unweaponed thoughts,  
Whose fading weale of victorie forsooke,  
Forbids all hope to harbour neere our hearts.

(1.2.4-16)

Alexiou notes that the origin of the ritual lament comes from the “antiphonal singing of two groups of mourners, strangers and kinswomen, each singing a verse in turn followed by a refrain sung in unison,” and that elements such as dialogue and refrain are some of the “oldest structural features” of the lament.<sup>28</sup> In Greek tragedy, this antiphony is called the *kommos*, what Aristotle defined in the *Poetics* as “a lament in which chorus and actors both take part.”<sup>29</sup> H. C. Baldry, in his study of the Greek tragic theatre, develops Aristotle’s definition, noting that the *kommos* takes place when “the tension of the play rises to a climax of grief or horror or joy and one or more of the actors and the whole chorus give voice to their emotion in turn.”<sup>30</sup> While these two passages are not deliberately antiphonal in that Aeneas and Illioneus are not together when they mourn their losses, the similarities in the passages point to an antiphonal element, especially when one considers the extent to which Illioneus’ response develops what Aeneas has already spoken. Though antiphony present in the ritual Greek laments developed through call and response, ultimately building to “a crescendo of emotion of rising intensity,” the unknowing exchange between these two men builds the tension for the concentrated outpouring of grief that follows in the next scene when they are brought together in front of Dido.<sup>31</sup>

As a number of scholars have noted, exclamations of words like “O” and “Alas” can signify the beginning of the lament, but repetition of words and sounds is a literary

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<sup>28</sup> Alexiou, p. 13, 150.

<sup>29</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics*. Trans. James Hutton. (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982), p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> See H.C. Baldry, *The Greek Tragic Theatre* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1971), p. 64 and Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 57 where Rehm points out that *kommos* means “literally ‘a beating’ of the breasts in mourning” and occurs, among other places, in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, when the eponymous heroine returns to the stage for the last time.

<sup>31</sup> Alexiou, p. 41.

device playwrights adopted for the stage to further emphasize such displays of grief.<sup>32</sup> In line seven of Illioneus' response we have the repetition of "save," but the alliteration through the passage aligns much of the language of grief with the events the shipwrecked warriors have suffered through. "Wretches," "windes," "wounds," and "waves" along with "crave," "cruell," "complaine," all point to physical aspects of grief while also depicting the specific elements that have left them in such a position.<sup>33</sup> Like Aeneas' response just a few lines before his, Illioneus places the language of grief on the inanimate ships, praying, "Save, save, O save our ships from cruell fire, / That doe complaine the wounds of thousand waves," (1.2.7-8). Unlike Aeneas, who is a little more subdued in relating the details of his misfortune, Illioneus' pleading with Iarbus goes well beyond simply responding to the initial question about who he is and what he is doing. Illioneus is distraught and begs for mercy, despite the fact that Iarbus has not made any intimation of threatening behavior. As Linda M. Austin has explained, "Lamentation sounds like some forms of prayer—litanies or antiphonal chants. Sentences rephrase sorrow; words may be descriptive or, more simply, exclamatory, but always they return to the scene of death or the utterance of grief."<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that these two men are obviously mourning very personal losses, the language Illioneus uses significantly develops and extends what Aeneas has said about the ships. Though Aeneas notes that

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<sup>32</sup> Ajuwon, p. 277.

<sup>33</sup> As scholars have pointed out, *Dido* was written to be performed by children, though whether or not it was actually performed seems to be subject to debate. In her introduction to the play, Roma Gill notes that because the intended actors of *Dido* were children, the focus rests on the language, "They asked for practised elocution, but little emotion" (119). She then cites Harold Newcomb Hillebrand's assessment of the child actors as "animated marionettes, endowed with beautiful speeches but no action" (264). The recognition that the emphasis rests on language is important. While the lament is a performance, a great deal can be uncovered through the use of specific literary devices, as we can be seen in the speeches of both Illioneus and Aeneas.

<sup>34</sup> See Linda M. Austin, "The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 53.3 (1998), p. 283.

the vessels have sailed through the tempestuous waters, his companion views the situation as being more than just that, instead seeing them as partaking in the grief that he is currently experiencing, in essence returning to the most recent grief inducing event. In his use of the word “Complaine”, a word often used to denote lamentation, Illioneus shifts the emotional response away from himself and onto the inanimate ships, much like Aeneas had done before him. Illioneus builds on the lament of his captain, bringing himself to a state of frenzy wherein he envisions the ships as an extension of his body—taking part in and responding to the suffering he has experienced. And in the next scene, Aeneas responds in kind by developing what we’ve seen here, in a passion that eventually subsumes the earlier events.

The call and response of masculine grief becomes most pronounced in Act 2 of *Dido*, as the major characters of the play come together and we are presented with the re-telling of the events of Troy. In her recent work on female mourning in early English drama, Katharine Goodland notes that the lament usually combines five elements, including the lamenter's relationship to the dead, the lineage of the deceased and their place in the community, details of the death, anger at the deceased, family members, or enemies, and a competitive display of anguish.<sup>35</sup> Many of these elements are implied in Aeneas' words to his mother and Illioneus' words to Iarbus, yet Marlowe continues to bring this masculine performance of grief into sharper relief. Discussing his emotional state, Aeneas claims that his sorrow is greater than that of Niobe, who according to Aeneas, "for her sonnes death wept out life and breath, / And drie with grieve was turnd into a stone, / Had not such passions in her head as I" (2.1.4-6). This competitive display

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<sup>35</sup> Goodland, p. 18.



is telling in that Marlowe contrasts the grief of Aeneas not with another man, but with a woman, a choice that allows us to see the extent to which Marlowe recognizes the lament as a response not typically performed by men. Niobe weeps for her son, experiencing all of the mental torment that accompanies the loss of a child. While there are any number of moments of men experiencing loss that could have been drawn upon to further illuminate this moment, the decision to juxtapose the grief of Aeneas against that of a woman shows the extent to which Marlowe wishes to emphasize the transformative qualities of Aeneas' grief. This detail becomes even more pronounced as Aeneas repeatedly notes both his weeping and sighing—acts that play a large role in signaling the lament, much like the previously discussed use of words like “O” and “Alas.”<sup>36</sup> Aeneas' description of himself allows us to see his behavior in this way and those who surround him join in on the emotionally charged moment, as Achates, in response to Aeneas remarks, “And in this humor is *Achates* to,” (2.1.10). Like the aforementioned antiphony of Aeneas and Illioneus, Achates joins in the performance of grief after seeing his own emotional state reflected in Aeneas.

The passions and humors of Aeneas and Achates provide interesting insight into what Marlowe is doing with his construction of masculine lamentation. While Niobe's grief played a physical role, ultimately turning her into stone, the grief of these men manifests itself inwardly, on their minds. Following Achates' lead in referring to himself in third person, Aeneas imagines himself at Troy, confessing, “O yet this stone doth make *Aeneas* weepe,” (2.1.15). And when Achates asks him what he means, Aeneas is well

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<sup>36</sup> See Ajuwon, p. 277, Austin, p. 283. Aeneas repeatedly uses “O” in this scene—comment on the number of times used, link to the language of the scene and the importance it plays in maintaining the sense of grief.

aware of the transformation that has caused him to envision himself back at Troy:

*Achates* though mine eyes say this is stone,  
Yet thinkes my minde that this is *Priamus*:  
And when my grieved heart sighes and sayes no,  
Then would it leape out to give Priam life:  
O were I not at all so thou mightest be.  
*Achates*, see King *Priam* wags his hand,  
He is alive, *Troy* is not overcome.

(2.1.24-30)

Following this outburst, the men attempt to calm Aeneas down and Achates, who has recently confessed to experiencing a similar type of response to the situation, suggests that “Thy mind Aeneas ... Deludes thy eye sight” (2.1.31-32). Aeneas’ grief, which began with the detailed account of his shipwreck, has evolved to a point of frenzy, where he can no longer control his emotional response. And when the citizens of Carthage appear before them, even his fellow warriors recognize his behavior as the lament, warning Aeneas, “Leave to lament, lest they laugh at our fears” (2.1.38). While his companions make some allowance for their captain's grief, it is quickly tempered with concern for how others might view their leader's performance. It has been suggested that lamentation on the early modern stage “most frequently elicits sharp criticism from the other characters, inviting the audience’s scrutiny as well as its empathy,” but this moment can hardly be seen as inviting scrutiny.<sup>37</sup> Rather, this exchange works to bring the masculine grief of Aeneas into a place of complete empathy, where the audience is

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<sup>37</sup> See Goodland, p. 2.

encouraged to participate, along with Aeneas' men, in sympathizing with a man who has experienced incalculable loss.

Yet this empathy is immediately thrown into question once Aeneas happens upon Illioneus and the other men he thought were lost. In the process of sharing their stories, Illioneus relates to his re-discovered comrades that they have told Dido about what has happened and her response is strikingly similar to what we have seen from Aeneas: "Oft hath she askt us under whom we serv'd, / And when we told her she would weepe for grieffe, / Thinking the sea had swallowed up thy ships," (2.1.66-68). Until this point in the play, Marlowe has portrayed the masculine lament without any sort of negative judgment or any hint of "sharp criticism." The men partake singularly and communally in expressing their losses and with the exception of the suggestion that Aeneas postpone his grief in the presence of strangers, there is no sense that to grieve excessively is to do anything inappropriate. However, this moment, early in the second act, marks a point at which this all begins to change. In a play where only men grieve, it might be easy to ignore their behavior, but when Dido begins to respond in a similar way, both masculinity and lamentation are quickly questioned. As Sara Munson Deats has noted, Marlowe's plays, "share [an] anxiety concerning the instability of masculine subjectivity" where masculinity is represented "not as something essential and universal, but as a state constantly threatened by usurpation from the 'woman' within."<sup>38</sup> When Aeneas is eventually brought before Dido, we see the extent to which the masculine lament is

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<sup>38</sup> See Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997), p. 65. See also Constance Brown Kuriyama, *Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U P, 1980) where she makes a similar point regarding Marlowe's concern "with escaping the pernicious effeminizing influence of seductive maternal characters" (117).

rendered problematic, justifying the men's aforementioned concern regarding Aeneas' grief. In his statement "Well may I view her, but she sees not me," Aeneas seems to recognize that his grief has either physically changed him or that Dido is not going to see the "real" Aeneas.<sup>39</sup>

In her work on masculinity and emotion, Jennifer C. Vaught has suggested "Weeping and wailing and other demonstrations of excessive emotion often function as sources of power for men in early modern English literature."<sup>40</sup> But the opposite is most certainly the case here, as the Queen immediately notices Aeneas' strange behavior and repeatedly asks him to remember who he is, commanding at one point, "Remember who thou art, speake like thy selfe" (2.1.100). What is Aeneas' "selfe"? His mother initially noted that he "spends himselfe in plaints" at the beginning of the play, suggesting that he was using himself up in the process of mourning. While Venus doesn't seem to find anything amiss in her son's actions, Dido is quick to notice and critique the bizarre behavior, appealing to a side of Aeneas we have yet to see, a masculinity presumably marked by the martial traits typically valorized in Renaissance England.<sup>41</sup> Dido believes she knows what/who Aeneas really is and calls upon him to show her the warrior who bravely defended Troy. The power of the lament is evident here, as Aeneas has

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<sup>39</sup> This, of course, poses a bit of a problem for an audience watching the play. Marlowe's Aeneas, at least in the first two acts, is a man consumed by grief. It is almost certain an audience of the play would have been, at the very least, familiar with Aeneas the warrior, founder of Rome and great grandfather of Brutus of Britain. But the only Aeneas anyone sees up until this point is a man lamenting. For more on the early modern period's varying depictions of Aeneas, see Deats, p. 106-115. See also Brian Gibbons "Unstable Proteus: Marlowe's *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*" *Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn, 1968), pp. 25-46 where he claims it is "characteristic of Marlowe to treat Aeneas, a very *type* of the Renaissance hero, with sardonic irreverence."

<sup>40</sup> See Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> See Deats, p. 71 where she notes that masculinity "was equated with active assertive, forceful, and rational, whereas feminine suggested passive, submissive, pliant, and passionate."

effectively misplaced his selfhood in the process of grieving, leaving those around him confused by his actions. After Dido asks for news of Troy, an opening that would typically allow Aeneas to describe himself in the manner the Queen is obviously expecting, Aeneas responds pitifully,

A wofull tale bids *Dido* to unfould,  
Whose memorie, like pale deaths stony mace,  
Beates forth my senses from this troubled soule,  
And makes *Aeneas* sinke at *Didos* feete

(2.1.114-17).

The imagery in this response is both provocative and telling. Dido's request facilitates Aeneas' lament in that by calling for a retelling of the events of Troy, she allows him to continue to work out his grief.<sup>42</sup> Yet the way he describes remembering as "pale death's stony mace," which he notes "Beats forth my senses from this troubled soul" brings forth another, more disturbing element of the lament. Part of the concern regarding immoderate grief is the potential for it to make itself known on the lamenter's body. If we remember Martyr's interest with the rending of flesh, we can see the extent to which Aeneas' grief continues to partake in the form. For Aeneas, a man who has already admitted to a tortured mental state, retelling the events of Troy will serve as a type of self-flagellation by which he is forced to remind himself of his loss, thus perpetuating the cycle of grief we have seen since the play commenced. And when he is finally persuaded to describe the gruesome scene, there is very little doubt that he is lamenting.

What is provocative about Aeneas' response is the continuation of imagery. When

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<sup>42</sup> See F.P. Wilson, *The English Drama 1485-1586* (New York and Oxford: Oxford U P, 1969), pp. 76-77 for a discussion of this image.

we first encounter him at Carthage's wall, he speaks with the language of stone. He remembers Niobe's transformation, comparing his grief in a competitive display of anguish, and then turns to the wall, telling his companions, "O yet this stone doth make *Aeneas* weepe" (2.1.15). The mental strain of his grief causes him to envision the events of Troy, superimposing them on the city of Carthage. While Niobe wept herself dry, eventually turning to stone, Aeneas sees himself as malleable and subject to the stone's resolute lack of emotion. According to Aeneas, the very process of remembering is like having personified death's "stony mace" flagellating his emotions, thus prompting him to behave in a manner that is confusing to Dido and presumably the others who have gathered around to witness this initial exchange between the Queen and her guest.<sup>43</sup> As the encounter continues, however, things begin to change. After Aeneas attempts to break off telling his story, begging, "And then, O *Dido*, pardon me" (2.1.159), Dido refuses this behavior, forcing Aeneas to finish what he has started. Yet this interruption is telling. As Aeneas continues the tale, he no longer tries to stop the story as a way to end the process of remembering. Dido, however, repeatedly interrupts in ways that are similar to what we have witnessed with Aeneas, crying out, "O *Hector* who weepes not to heare thy name?" (209), "O end Aeneas, I can heare no more" (243), and "I dye with melting ruth, *Aeneas* leave" (289). In her invaluable essay on the play, Roma Gill has suggested that these ejaculations were inserted as a way to "make the scene 'theatrical.'"<sup>44</sup> While it is certainly true these outbursts give the scene a dramatic feel that might otherwise be

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<sup>43</sup> See Bowers's essay, where he notes, Aeneas's re-telling of the story is "the ultimate classical narrative, in hysterical terms that mimic and overstate culturally permissible expressions of grief and distress" (99).

<sup>44</sup> See Roma Gill, "Marlowe's Virgil: *Dido, Queen of Carthage*" *The Review of English Studies* 28 (May, 1977), p. 154. Gill also notes that these ejaculations might have served as a way for the actor playing Aeneas to catch their breath.

lacking, Dido's lines also begin to signal the transition from the masculine lament to the feminine. After the Queen's final outburst, Achates is called upon to finish the story because, according to Aeneas, "sorrow hath tired me quite" (293), but the masculine lament is finished. Aeneas' grief has reached its frenzied climax and is resolved, echoing George Puttenham's observation, in *The Art of English Poesy*, that the effect of lamenting is "altogether contrary to rejoicing: every man saith so, and yet it is a joy to be able to lament with ease and freely to pour forth a man's inward sorrows and the griefs with which his mind is surcharged."<sup>45</sup> The process of remembering, though a tiring enterprise, leaves Aeneas entirely spent of emotion and for the remainder of the play, he returns to a more familiar masculine figure.

But that is not to say lamentation is absent from the remainder of the play. As Dido descends into madness over Aeneas' betrayal and Anna responds to her sister's suicide, their language and actions echo and build upon what we have seen with Aeneas. What had begun as an inversion of gendered responses is righted, much in the same way that Watson attempts to provide a corrective gloss for his translation of *Antigone*. Aeneas falls to the background of the play, allowing Dido front and center to lament the cruel fate that has befallen her. While she plans and executes her self-immolation, Anna and Iarbus are left with no choice but to follow their sister/love interest. In the closing moments of the play, however, the masculine lament resurfaces for a fleeting moment. Responding to Anna's cry for help, Iarbus rushes to the scene and, upon hearing what has happened to his beloved Dido, cries out, "Cursed *Iarbus*, dye to expiate / The grieffe that tires upon thine inward soule. / *Dido* I come to thee, aye me *Aeneas*" (5.1.316-18). The

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<sup>45</sup> See George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*. Eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn. (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 2007), p. 135.

very last word of Iarbus is the name of his rival suitor, but calling upon the Trojan warrior in this moment does much more than simply remind us of the competition between the two men. By returning to Aeneas in these final moments, we see how the two men, despite their significant differences, respond to loss in similar ways. The jilted lover's grief has reached a point where suicide is the only way to escape his soul's agony. Aeneas spoke in similar terms about his grief, noting how his senses and self felt the weight of this anguish, but Iarbus' discussion of his soul hints at the turn Marlowe will take in his depiction of Faustus.

As we have seen, Marlowe's first play is deeply interested in representing masculine grief and examining the ways in which it appears similarly to its feminine counterparts. From Aeneas' initial lament to that of Iarbas at the end of the final scene, Marlowe juxtaposes this behavior next to that of Dido and Anna to reveal a certain fluidity of gender. Both men and women lament in *Dido*, suggesting that Marlowe saw certain possibilities in representing similar responses to loss. Yet when Marlowe begins work on *Doctor Faustus*, the form of the lament takes on a new appearance. In many ways, Marlowe simply transferred the lament from women to men in his first foray into drama, playing with the repercussions of such a reversal. When he writes *Faustus*, however, we see a matured Marlowe revising his notions of the concept and shaping the lament in some interesting ways. *Dido* featured very physical losses to be mourned, but in *Faustus* it seems as though nothing is lost. However, a closer look at the play reveals something else at work just below the surface. As Faustus contemplates the loss of his soul, the language he uses to describe his emotional state is the language of despair, a notion that, as we will see, has connections to the issue of excessive grief and reveals



how Marlowe continued to re-shape the concept of the masculine lamentation even after his initial representation.

Given the interest in uncovering Marlowe's religious beliefs, coupled with the Baines accusations with which this essay began, it is imperative we turn our attention to *Doctor Faustus*, a play Leo Kirschbaum labeled the most "obvious Christian document in all Elizabethan drama."<sup>46</sup> *Doctor Faustus* enters into this discussion precisely because of the role despair plays in revealing the extent of Faustus' grief. On the surface nothing is being mourned. Faustus willingly sells his soul to the devil and spends his remaining time on earth in the company of Mephistopheles, enjoying fine food and playing a variety of memorable pranks. Although the comedy and terror brought about by appearance of devils might serve as the more entertaining matter, a deep-seated anxiety regarding death and dying pervades the early scenes.<sup>47</sup> After dismissing other career opportunities, Faustus discusses the possibility of medicine and his interest extends well beyond providing a cure for the sick. Recognizing his own limitations as a mortal, he wonders, "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man. / Wouldst thou make man to live eternally? / Or, being dead, raise them to life again?" (1.1.23-25).<sup>48</sup> It may be the case this is simply a

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<sup>46</sup> See Leo Kirschbaum, "Marlowe's *Faustus*: A Reconsideration", *The Review of English Studies* 19 (1943), 225-41. This is hardly the last word on the subject, as a number of other scholars have noted elsewhere. For the purposes of this essay, however, Kirschbaum's statement, no matter how hyperbolic it may in fact be, highlights the larger implications of exploring the issues of excessive grief in Marlowe's most controversial of plays.

<sup>47</sup> See Beach Langston "Marlowe's *Faustus* and the *Ars Moriendi* Tradition" *A Tribute to George Coffin Taylor*. Ed. Arnold Williams (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1952), pp. 148-67. Langston argues that the structure of *Doctor Faustus* is heavily influenced by the *ars moriendi* tradition. As I argue elsewhere, this tradition is also heavily influenced by the lament. See also Douglas Cole's discussion of *Doctor Faustus* as partaking in the morality tradition in *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Princeton: Princeton U P, 1962), pp. 231-43.

<sup>48</sup> All quotations from *Doctor Faustus* are taken from *Doctor Faustus A- and B- texts (1604, 1616)*, eds. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester and New York, Manchester U P, 1993). This passage seems to echo "Memento homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris" or "Remember man, that you are

foreshadowing of Faustus' quick descent into "cursed necromancy," but the lines also highlight an anxiety that belies the masculine front Faustus attempts to construct. As he moves into his discussion regarding the possibility of divinity as his preferred course of study, the issue of death resurfaces again in the famous partial quoting of Romans 6:23. While this passage could be read as a cavalier dismissal of divinity, a moment that reveals Faustus has long made up his mind about his career and in turn his soul, the fact that it returns again to the issue of death suggests much more is going on here. In his reading of this passage, Matthew N. Prosser persuasively argues, "In short, Marlowe, possibly for the first time in the English theater, seriously dramatizes the mind at work, coiling back on itself, dredging up the underlying emotions and motives and displaying them for our consideration and judgment."<sup>49</sup> Faustus grasps for something that will allow him to avoid the unknowable depths of death, casting divinity aside in favor of magic where he can "try [his] brain to gain a deity" and defer the terror of death indefinitely. With its simultaneous focus on the fear of death and the workings of mind, this passage serves to reveal the ways Marlowe envisions the masculine lament as manifesting inwardly, an idea that, as we will see, has larger implications with regards to Renaissance understandings of masculinity.

The attempt and promise of becoming a magician is so consuming that Faustus appears to lose sight of this initial fear, but his fellow scholars reflect a concern he seems to have forgotten or pushed from his mind. Worrying that Faustus has in fact turned to magic, the Second Scholar confesses, "Were he a stranger, and not allied to me, yet

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dust, and unto dust you shall return" from Genesis 3:19, further linking these opening moments of the play with death's inevitability.

<sup>49</sup> See Matthew N. Prosser, *The Gift of Fire: Aggression and the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 147.

should I *grieve* for him. But come, let us go and inform the Rector, and see if he, by his *grave* counsel, can reclaim him” (12.2.35-38, emphasis added), while the First Scholar cries out, “O, but I fear me nothing can reclaim him” (1.2.39). Faustus is initially obsessed with cheating death and his turn to magic fills him with a faulty confidence. The two scholars, however, recognize death is the only fate for Faustus and the Second Scholar’s language of grief notes this fear while the pun on “grave” further highlights the recognition that Faustus is toying with the everlasting death he notes in 1.1. The First Scholar’s language, with its exclamation and sense of despair, hints at what we are about to see in the remainder of the play. The encounter between the two scholars then provides a microcosm of the disparate behavior we witness in Faustus. The Second Scholar’s rational discussion of impending death is not unlike Faustus’ initial thoughts—there is a sense of order in his words as he recognizes the situation is beyond his control and so he must appeal to a higher authority (the Rector) for help. We also see a logical progression, that death is inevitable, so one should live one’s life in preparation for death. The First Scholar, however, with his exclamation of doubt, hints at the Faustus we are about to encounter. While one scholar represents a resignation to the inevitability of death, the other reflects the polar opposite—a sense of hopelessness regarding the end. In other words, despair.<sup>50</sup>

While it is clear the First Scholar is not actually despairing, his response sets the stage for a number of provocative exchanges. At the end of the play, it is very clear that Faustus despairs, but the first extended view of this type of behavior comes, perhaps not

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<sup>50</sup> The issue of despair in *Doctor Faustus* has been widely discussed by a number of scholars. See Lily B. Campbell “*Doctor Faustus*: A Case of Conscience” *PMLA* 67 (1952): 219-239; John C. McCloskey, “The Theme of Despair in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*” *College English* 4 (1942): 110-113; Arie Sachs, “The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63 (1964): 625-47.

surprisingly, from Mephistopheles. In the initial encounter between the would-be magician and devil, Faustus asks a number of questions regarding the nature of hell, prompting the following outburst:

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!

(1.3.78-84)

The devil's despair at this moment in the play is intriguing. The first thing it establishes is the shift away from the physical lament we have already seen in *Dido*. Aeneas' grief plays upon his mind and body, manifesting itself in weeping and sighs, as well as the mental delusions that cause him to remember the tragedy at Troy. In *Doctor Faustus*, however, Marlowe is more interested in looking at the spiritual aspects of excessive grief, as highlighted in the last line of the above quote. The loss Mephistopheles relates to Faustus is not corporeal—he has not witnessed the death of his King, the loss of his city, or the sinking of his ships. Rather, he has lost heaven and that loss, because it cannot torment a physical body, torments his soul. Though it is clear from the rest of the play that Mephistopheles is toying with Faustus, using this moment as a way to prompt Faustus into action, the placement of grief within the language of the soul marks a

pronounced shift in Marlowe's examination of grief.<sup>51</sup> While *Dido* represents an initial testing of ideas, placing the lament on the male body and watching the fallout of Aeneas' behavior, *Faustus* reveals a sustained thinking about the same issue, developed into spiritual terms.

What is striking about Mephistopheles' mock lament is that it allows Faustus to reprimand such behavior. Lamenting often provokes such criticism from other characters and that is exactly what we see in Faustus' brusque dismissal. Fancying himself quite masculine, he instructs Mephistopheles not to worry about hell or God, but instead, "Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude" (1.3.85). This strident, hyper-masculinity continues throughout the play, even in the very face of God's warning. In a reversal of what we see with Aeneas, Faustus begins the play espousing all the virtues of manliness, only to have these virtues slowly erode as the play progresses. In his discussion of masculinity, Bruce R. Smith notes the early modern distinction made between the upper and lower parts of male bodies. While the lower half of the body was the seat of passion, "contaminated with the flesh, closer to the Devil," the upper part of the body was concerned with reason and intelligence, "closer to God and the angels."<sup>52</sup> The division was then gendered, with the upper part of the body considered masculine, and the lower, feminine. This dynamic informs much of the language of grief—while women will lament and despair, thus engaging in passionate behavior that oftentimes manifests itself in physical ways, men will engage in thoughtful recollection, remembering the promise

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<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that Mephistopheles' mock lament echoes Martyr's concern that some mourning might be performed "feinedlie." Marlowe plays upon the fear regarding the lament's ability to slip from a legitimate outpouring of grief to just another example of empty Catholic ceremony. We see a similar exchange later in the play, when Faustus and Mephistopheles accost the Pope, prompting a dirge that devolves into nothing more than curses.

<sup>52</sup> See Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000), p. 1.

of salvation.<sup>53</sup> This ordering is clear in the opening scenes of the play, and as Faustus moves from Aristotle to Galen to the Bible his masculinity is constructed through, to use Prosser's term, his "mind at work." Yet as he progresses through the play, this notion becomes increasingly complicated as he chooses to exercise the lower half of his body, asking Mephistopheles for a wife because he is "wanton and lascivious" (2.1.137).

Faustus, the great scholar of Wittenburg, has sold his soul to the devil for incalculable power, but his first demand is for a wife. Though Mephistopheles denies him and proclaims marriage as nothing but a "ceremonial toy," the slippage between what Faustus says and what Mephistopheles hears is intriguing. Faustus simply wishes to sate his lust, not join someone in a holy union. He appears to have lost any desire to acquire knowledge and stimulate his mind, preferring instead to put the desires of his body at the forefront of his demands, and along with this new devotion to his physical passions comes a crippling despair. Faustus clearly lacks the ability to see that by placing his physical desires, or lower part of his body, above the upper, he allows himself to teeter on the brink of hopelessness. Though Kirschbaum has noted that Mephistopheles "offers Faustus sensual satisfaction in order to distract his mind from spiritual concern—which might, of course, lead to repentance," the focus on the physical actually places Faustus in a place where despair, and not repentance, is at the forefront.<sup>54</sup> Though Faustus believes it is only through the service of his passions that he keeps his despair at bay, it is actually the other way around. By indulging his wildest desires, and thereby subverting his reason and intelligence, he permits despair to begin tugging at the edges of his consciousness,

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<sup>53</sup> For other discussions of man's bifurcated nature, see Deats, p. 50-59, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare* (Durham: Duke U P, 2004), p.

<sup>54</sup> See Kirschbaum, p. 235.

something we see almost immediately after he has begun to exercise his desire. As he plunges headlong into his first real encounter with doubt, Faustus surveys a variety of implements that would aid him in committing suicide, and confesses, “And long ere this I should have slain myself / Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair” (2.3.24-25). The experience of “sweet pleasure” is momentarily enough to persuade Faustus to forget his sense of desperation and he proclaims, “Why should I die, then, or basely despair? / I am resolved Faustus shall ne’er repent” (2.3.31-32). According to Faustus, the pleasures afforded him are enough to defer any fear of death or damnation, though as we see, these deferrals are only momentary, as a cycle of despair followed by temporary resolve marks the remainder of the play.

As Faustus’ despair increases in intensity, so do the various entertainments meant to distract him. At first, Faustus brings himself back from despair, simply by thinking about the songs Homer’s apparition has sung. But a few lines later, as he and Mephistopheles get into an argument, the host of hell must appear and provide Faustus with a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. This then leads to a variety of other, more exotic exchanges, with Faustus playing his pointless pranks on the Pope, the Knight, and the Horse-Courser. Interestingly enough, Faustus is moved to the front and center of these exchanges, offering to entertain people instead of being entertained. In the midst of all these jests, despair appears to give way to an orgy of fulfillment, where Faustus becomes inundated with such a wide variety of distraction that he, and the audience along with him, forget that time is still ticking away. Even as death approaches in Act 5, Faustus manages to remain distracted. Wagner tells us that Faustus has given him all of his things, though the servant remains confused by his master’s behavior. Noting that such a

thing is done near the end of one's life, Wagner contrasts what he knows with what he sees in Faustus' actions, stating, "And yet methinks if that death were near / He would not banquet and carouse and swill / Amongst the students, as even now he doth" (5.1.3-5). In the final scenes of the play, we see how misdirected Faustus has become, as he asks to take Helen as his paramour—a moment that shows just how deeply the "masculine" intellect has been subverted by "feminine" passion. By making the most beautiful woman of history his lover, Faustus mistakenly believes he can prove his hyper-masculinity, by which he will "extinguish clean / Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow" (5.1.85-86). This moment is particularly useful in highlighting the dual anxiety that informs this play. From the onset of the play, Faustus is concerned about death, and kissing Helen is the final step in remedying the pesky issue of mortality. And this leads to the second problem—Faustus' privileging of his passions. As W.W. Greg has noted, in this moment Faustus is guilty of the sin of demoniality, and we see how his attempts to indulge his passions ultimately lead him deeper and deeper towards a sense of spiritual hopelessness.<sup>55</sup> For just prior to his time on earth expiring, when he recognizes what he has done and what has been lost, Faustus erupts in a flurry of despair and lamentation.

To return once again to the *Loci communes* and the discussion of excessive grief, Peter Martyr notes that certain "indecent" things were done at the graveside, such as the self-flagellation identified as part of the disruptive feminine responses to grief and seen portrayed in new ways in *Dido*. Yet as the reformer develops his discussion of grief, he notes that the physical response, though potentially disruptive, is not the biggest problem: "Finallie, that mourning is most to be disallowed, which proceedeth of denieng the

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<sup>55</sup> See W.W. Greg, "The Damnation of Faustus" *The Modern Language Review* 41.2 (1946): 97-107.



resurrection and not to sorrowe over-much, we attribute unto faith; seeing we have the comfort of the resurrection, the which with over-much lamenting we seeme to denie”<sup>56</sup> It is not a question of the physical body, but rather a matter of the spirit, a condition we first saw with Iarbus and now with Faustus, where the soul, and not the body, is the center of grief. For Martyr, by focusing too intensely on death, the living can lose sight of the miracle and comfort of the resurrection and to prolong mourning over the physical is to ignore the power of Christ’s accomplishment and fall into despair, something brought up repeatedly in Faustus’ lingering over the implements of suicide.<sup>57</sup> For reformers like Cranmer and Martyr, lamenting and despair are two sides of the same coin. To lament is to fall into despair and in doing so, one is guilty of multiple errors the reformers sought to remedy.

It is likely the impetus behind the decision to highlight the link between despair and lamentation came, at least in part, from Marlowe’s reading of *The English Faustus Book*. With five of the final six chapters explicit in their representation of Faustus’ closing moments as partaking in excessive grief, the source provided Marlowe with ample material to shape his own depiction of the fallen scholar.<sup>58</sup> Because stage directions for laments were so seldom given, the *Faustus Book* provides us with invaluable insight into the influences shaping Marlowe’s depiction of Faustus. For instance, in Chapter 58, we learn that Faustus “was grieved, and wailing spent the time, went talking to himself, wringing his hands, sobbing and sighing, he fell away from flesh and was very

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<sup>56</sup> See Martyr, 315

<sup>57</sup> For a sustained analysis of the relationship between despair and suicide, see Rowland Wymer, *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> The language used in the chapter titles of the *English Faustus Book* clearly shows that we are meant to see Faustus as lamenting. “Bewailed”, “Mourning”, “Sorrow”, “Complained”, “Complaint” are all used, further revealing the extent to which we are meant to see Faustus’ final moments as taking part in the lament.

lean and kept himself close.” This description of Faustus’ behavior prior to his death is important in helping us envision what Marlowe himself may have intended for an on-stage portrayal of Faustus’ actions. Yet what is so striking about the *Faust Book*’s lament is that it quickly transitions from the effusive behavior often seen as part of these displays of grief to a more internal, mental state. While Chapter 58 gives us a picture of Faustus’ actions, Chapters 59 and 60 move away from the body and focus on the mental aspects of Faustus’ grief. In a move that Marlowe leaves out of his play, the *Faust Book* notes that after his initial physical lament, Faustus wishes to “write his mind” so that he “might peruse it often and not forget it.”<sup>59</sup> Similar to what we saw with Aeneas’ remembering, the *Faust Book* Faustus wishes to recollect his various indiscretions so he may lament his poor choices. What follows in the remainder of Chapter 59 and continues on in the next two chapters is a sustained linking of despair and lamentation, as Faustus cries out at the end of each of the chapters, “then woe is me, what helpeth my wailing?”, “Ah, woe, woe is me, be where I will, yet am I taken”, and “What mean I then to complain where no help is? No, I know no hope resteth in my groanings.”<sup>60</sup> Despite lamenting, Faustus ultimately believes there is no hope for him and nothing he can do will change that fact. Instead of prolonging his lament, he appears to straighten himself out and gives a lengthy oration to the students, warning them not to follow in his errors.

Though the *Faust Book* clearly conveys a sense that excessive grief will not solve any of the Faustus’ issues, it is worth taking a moment to look closely at the language Faustus uses in his self-professed futile lamentations. In the final chapters “O” and “woe is me” are constantly repeated, much in the way Marlowe used and built upon this

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<sup>59</sup> See *The English Faust Book*, ed. David Wootton. (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2005) p, 144.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 146.

language of grief in *Dido*. Austin has suggested that this language, specifically the exclamation “woe is me,” is a “performative phrase that conjures the spectacle of the body in an agony of mourning. One hears and in effect sees, in verbal sound and semaphore, the grief of the survivor.”<sup>61</sup> In a striking omission, Marlowe never has Faustus use that specific phrase, but his constant use of “O” (eight times in the last 46 lines), serves an identical purpose.<sup>62</sup> As Faustus waits for his time on earth to expire, his soliloquy of intense grief is filled with “performative phrases” conveying a mental anguish difficult to witness. We also see many of the same elements of the lament that we saw with Aeneas. Faustus' place within the community at Wittenberg is remembered, and as he confesses to his fellow scholars what he has done, the details of his death are relayed. When he is left alone, Faustus expresses his anger at the loss of his soul by cursing his parents, himself, as well as Lucifer. And finally, in his long soliloquy, Faustus juxtaposes his grief with animals who are “happy, for when they die / Their souls are soon dissolved in elements” (5.2.103-04). This competitive display of anguish, wherein Faustus' grief over his soul is unlike the “brutish beasts” not only follows many of the elements of the lament, but also shows the extent to which Faustus' despair has crippled the scholar, forcing him to believe that his soul is no longer in his control, that it has, in effect, been lost forever.

These final moments are strikingly similar to other displays of grief in early English drama and the last thing Faustus says before the devils enter to take him away is “O *soul*, be changed into little water drops / And fall into the ocean, ne’er be found!”

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<sup>61</sup> Austin, 823.

<sup>62</sup> Indeed, one need only speak these two exclamations and see how one would need to listen closely to differentiate between the two.

(5.2.111-12, emphasis added). In Medieval and Renaissance drama, “the melting and softening effect of tears” is a recurrent image in lamentations.<sup>63</sup> Like Hamlet’s “O that this too too sallied flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into dew” (1.2.129-32), Faustus’ lamentation over his lost soul provides a provocative way to read the closing moments of the play. While Hamlet asks for his “sallied flesh” to melt, Faustus pleads with his soul to disappear, marking the shift from the physical to the spiritual. Standing on the verge of hell, feeling the seconds quickly pass, he appears unable to believe that God will save him. Addressing neither God nor the devil, Faustus begs for the dissolution of his soul at the apex of his spiritual lamentation and thereby exhibits all of the Protestant Reformer’s fears about excessive grief and the denial of Christ’s resurrection. Believing he is beyond Christ’s redemptive power, Faustus wishes for his soul to melt into the ocean, a place where he believes the devil will be unable to find him. Unlike the strident Faustus who was initially offering lessons in manly fortitude, this weeping scholar, whose wish for dissolution is equivalent to the tears of grieving women, despairs and laments, and then is gone.<sup>64</sup>

Yet in the B-Text of the play, there is still more. After Faustus has been removed from the stage, his fellow scholars enter and provide an interesting endnote to what the audience has just witnessed. When the group enters the room and sees the remnants of Faustus’ flesh strewn about, the Second Scholar cries out, “O, help us, heaven! See, here

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<sup>63</sup> I am indebted to Katharine Goodland’s discussion on this point.

<sup>64</sup> See Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997) where she argues that *Doctor Faustus* “emblemizes the rejection not only of physical females but of the feminine in all of its manifestations” (203). She then reads the conclusion of the play as dramatizing the “total ascendancy of the masculine, with the haunting absence of the feminine—in both its inlaw and outlaw aspects—so palpable as to constitute a presence” (223). While it is certainly true the play is nearly devoid of female characters, Faustus’ sustained lament clearly places the feminine at the forefront of the play.

are Faustus' limbs, / All torn asunder by the hand of death" (5.3.6-7). While the last words of Faustus are still fresh in the minds of those who saw his final moments, this cry to heaven will sound at once similar and startlingly discordant, as Faustus' last words, "O, Mephistopheles," contrast sharply with that of the "O, help us, heaven." While both phrases do the same thing—that is, cry out in anguish for some sort of assistance—we are meant to see them as distinct opposites. Faustus' fear of death ultimately proves to be justified and his lamentations, no matter how profuse or prolonged, cannot save him, as he never moves past the hopelessness of despair, instead perpetually dwelling on his perceived loss. Yet the Second Scholar appears to see the lamentation as not only present, but also acceptable. Reflecting on what has happened and making arrangements to move forward, he states,

Well, gentlemen, though Faustus' end be such  
As every Christian heart laments to think on,  
Yet, for he was a scholar, once admired  
For wondrous knowledge in our German schools,  
We'll give his mangled limbs due burial;  
And all the students, clothed in mourning black,  
Shall wait upon his heavy funeral.

(5.3.13-19)

And now we've returned to where we began—the role of ceremony for Marlowe. Michael Neill has seen these B-Text additions as "designed to transform the arbitrary violence of ending into a ritual of consummation," yet this is precisely the fear of

Protestant reformers.<sup>65</sup> The burial ceremony is meant to mark the end, but lamentation dwells on and extends the sorrow of death. In other words, lamenting ensures ceremony's indefinite continuation and the fact that "every Christian heart laments to think on" Faustus' end, coupled with the black clad students who "Shall wait upon his heavy funeral" returns to this very point. The scholars' grief over Faustus' death will prolong the lamentation we traced in Faustus, perpetuating the performance of grief long after the final curtain.

Marlowe's adoption, revision, and insertion of the lament into Renaissance discussions regarding appropriate grief had far reaching implications, not only concerning attempts at reform, but also with respect to constructions of masculinity. In *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, the young playwright toyed with contemporary understandings of gender by placing the lament, a traditionally feminine response to loss, on Aeneas the great Trojan warrior. In *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus initially espouses a clearly defined model of masculine behavior, yet falls into a despair inspired lamentation that simultaneously contradicts his masculinity and the very promise of Christ's death and resurrection. In deploying the lament in this manner, Marlowe's plays function transgressively, challenging attempts at reforming the moment of death from a ritualistic outpouring of grief to carefully controlled expressions of Protestant belief. Indeed, these depictions are all the more subversive given their performance by men who should, for all intents and purposes, reflect "manly fortitude." Marlowe's dramatic portrayal of masculinity forced his Renaissance audience to confront that which it found most terrible and frightening—grief so consuming it could move man to abandon all he holds sacred.

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<sup>65</sup> See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Morality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997), p. 211.

### Chapter Three: “Perform Anything in Action”: Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and the Performance of Revenge as Masculine Lamentation

To lament the dead avails not and revenge vents hatred.

To lament the dead avails not and to the living it is hurtful.

- English Renaissance proverbs

In an exchange late in Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, as Hieronimo’s grief reaches a fevered pitch and his bloody revenge plot builds towards climax, Balthazar asks the Knight Marshal if it wouldn’t be better to play a comedy instead of the tragedy they are busy preparing. Well aware that he and Lorenzo have killed Hieronimo’s son, the Prince of Portugal is worried about what the performance of a tragedy might do to the already precarious mental state of their playwright/director. Hieronimo, still acting the fool, dismisses this suggestion, responding,

A comedy?

Fie! comedies are fit for common wits;

But to present a kingly troop withal,

Give me a stately written tragedy,

*Tragedia cothernata*, fitting kings,

Containing matter, and not common things.

My lords, all this must be perform'd

As fitting for the first night's revelling.

The Italian tragedians were so sharp of wit

That in one hour's meditation  
They would perform anything in action.<sup>1</sup>

(4.1.156-66)

The success of Hieronimo's revenge plot hinges upon the performance of a tragedy wherein the characters played by his son's murderers are killed, but his brusque rejection of comedy as "fit for common wits" points to competing contemporary attitudes regarding the power and place of the theatre in Renaissance England. In his *Arte of English Poesy*, George Puttenham would articulate a sentiment similar to that of Hieronimo, claiming, "Besides those poets comic there were others who served also the stage, but meddled not with so base matters: for they set forth the doleful falls of unfortunate and afflicted princes, and were called poets tragical. Such were Euripedes and Sophocles with the Greeks, Seneca among the Latins."<sup>2</sup> While comedy might serve as entertainment for base born people amused by trifles, Hieronimo argues that "stately written tragedy" provides material more fitting the contemplation of kings. Of course tragedy is all the more suitable for carrying out his revenge and finally putting an end to the intense grief that has haunted him throughout the play, but the concern of Balthazar and subsequent dismissal by Hieronimo gesture towards late sixteenth-century anxieties concerning the representational power of excessive grief on the English Renaissance stage.

*The Spanish Tragedy* is an ideal place to examine these concerns because it is a play intensely aware of its own theatricality, a notion T.S. Eliot clearly recognized when

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from *The Spanish Tragedy* are taken from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, Eds. David Bevington, et al (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), 3-73.

<sup>2</sup> See George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, Eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn. (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 2007), p. 115.



he called Thomas Kyd an “extraordinary dramatic (if not poetic) genius.”<sup>3</sup> From the characters of Don Andrea and Revenge watching from the side of the stage, to the appearance of a book of Seneca and constant allusions to the Roman’s plays themselves, to the final play-within-the-play, Kyd’s revenge tragedy constantly and deliberately draws attention to its form.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the play is also obsessed with depicting excessive grief. As we have already seen from previous chapters, Protestant Reformers had attempted to regulate mourning rituals in the years following the Reformation, but the public staging of tragedies had nevertheless allowed for displays of grief to repeatedly appear. While these displays were often performed by female characters, the advent of revenge tragedy opened up a space into which men began to participate in the troubling form of the lament, thus blurring lines of what constituted appropriate grief, as well as masculine behavior. As we saw in the introduction, the anti-theatrical writings of the period reveal a pervasive concern regarding theatre’s effeminizing influence, but there also exists a fear regarding the potential for tragedy to negatively influence the audience in ways similar to that of the lament. By placing Kyd’s play into this contemporary context, we can see the extent to which the playwright participated in and responded to these discussions, reforming a typically feminine response to loss by introducing revenge,

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<sup>3</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that as a child, Thomas Kyd was enrolled in Merchant Taylor’s School, where he came under the direction of headmaster Richard Mulcaster. It was here, immersed in a curriculum that included acting in English and Latin plays, that the playwright undoubtedly developed his taste for the theatre. There is even evidence to suggest that while enrolled, Kyd may have performed at court as one former pupil, who was enrolled around the same time, remarked on how Mulcaster “presented sum playes to the court, in which his scholars wear only actors, and I on among them, and by that means taughte them good behavior and audacitye.” For more on Kyd’s early life and development, see Arthur Freeman, *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). For more on the Merchant Taylor’s acting at court and Mulcaster’s unorthodox curriculum, see Michael Shapiro, *Children of the Revels* (New York: Columbia U P, 1977), pp. 14-15 and Lukas Erne *Beyond the Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester and New York: Manchester U P, 2001), p. 2. The quotation from Kyd’s schoolmate regarding Merchant Taylor’s is quoted in T.W. Baldwin, *Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1944), pp. 420-21.

thereby providing men with an outlet for their excessive grief—an outlet that would prove to be just as troubling as the lament itself.

At the end of the sixteenth century, concern over excessive grief had spread beyond the scope of the reformers to those who saw the implications of such behavior as existing well outside the walls of the church. Fear over the lament, particularly the lament performed by men, moved to the unlikeliest of places: the theatres. In many ways, it is fitting that the lament and the theatre came together, as they are intimately invested in performance and often linger on the fringe of what is constituted as appropriate. Though both certainly had places within English society, the lament and the theatre were nevertheless looked at with fear regarding both those who performed and those who witnessed the performance. One need only look at contemporary definitions of tragedy to see how the English understood the genre as bound together with displays of grief. In *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577), the first published piece of anti-theatrical writing in England, the preacher John Northbrooke defines tragedy as “that kind of play in the which calamities and miserable ends of kings, princes, and great rulers are described and set forth, and it hath for the most part a sad and heavy beginning and ending.”<sup>5</sup> Much like the above quote from Puttenham, Northbrooke recognizes tragedies as containing sorrowful material, meant in some way to cause the audience to thoughtfully and somberly reflect upon the great fall of the play’s characters. Though the vast majority of those watching the plays would not have seen their own lives reflected in the tragedies, the subject matter was immediately

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<sup>5</sup> See John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) in *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard. (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 16.

understandable and undoubtedly fascinating to an English audience who flooded the theatres to see the performances.<sup>6</sup>

This relationship between the subject matter of tragedy and its effect on an audience appears repeatedly in contemporary writings about the theatre. In his *Defence of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney follows in a similar vein, claiming that tragedy “openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants.” Citing Plutarch’s account of the “abominable tyrant” Alexander Phraeus, “from whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity has murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood: so as he, that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy,” Sidney shows precisely how tragedy portrays both moments of excessive grief, while simultaneously prompting such displays in those watching the drama.<sup>7</sup> Given the fact that many tragedies used the adjective “lamentable” in their title, it is evident that those who entered a theatre to watch a tragedy knew they were going to witness a fall from power, but before they even saw the unfortunate fall, their response was already conditioned to see it as worthy of an outpouring of grief.<sup>8</sup> As descriptor of tragedy, “lamentable” appears as early as 1563 in the title to Alexander Neville’s English translation of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, an especially fitting occurrence considering the extent to

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<sup>6</sup> The permanent theatres of London could hold between 2000 and 3000 people and with multiple showings on some days, thousands of people would witness the performance of the lament. Indeed, as Andrew Gurr has estimated, between 1560 and 1642, the theatre witnessed over fifty million visits. For more, see R.A. Foakes, “Playhouses and Players,” *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, eds. A.R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway. (Cambridge: Cambridge U P 2003), p. 9 and Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> See Sir Philip Sidney, “The Defence of Poesy” *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2002), p. 230.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Database of Early English Playbooks, “lamentable” appears in the title of thirteen plays from 1563-1600, including, but not limited to, works by Marlowe and Shakespeare.

which the English understood Seneca as the great Roman writer of tragedies, a notion we have seen in Puttenham and one we will return to later in the essay. The use of “lamentable” as an adjective for tragedy is especially pertinent to a discussion of *The Spanish Tragedy*, as the title page from the 1592 playbook reads “The Spanish Tragedie, Containing the lamentable end of *Don Horatio*, and *Bel-imperia*: with the pittifull death of olde *Hieronimo*.” Before we even know why or how he dies, the title of the play insists we see the death of Horatio as being worthy of lamentation, a notion further developed throughout the course of the play in the behavior of Hieronimo.

The debates regarding the subject of tragedy, specifically the use of the lamentation in poetry and on the stage, provide a provocative new way of re-contextualizing the anti-theatricalists and the plays they abhorred. The constant charges of effeminacy, both towards the actors and those in the audience, are particularly intriguing, especially when one considers the subject of tragedy. As we have already seen in the above quoted passages from Puttenham, Northbrooke, and Sidney, contemporary definitions of tragedy understood the form as dealing with “doleful”, “sad”, and “heavy” material that could potentially bring its viewers to tears. Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which played a large role in shaping Renaissance classification of plays, defined tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear the *catharsis* of such emotions.”<sup>9</sup> Though the definition of catharsis has been widely debated, the notion of an

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<sup>9</sup> See Aristotle, *The Poetics* trans. James Hutton (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982), 50. For a discussion of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in Renaissance England, see Marvin Theodore Herrick, *The Poetics of Aristotle in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1903), pp. 8-34.

outpouring of emotion nevertheless has a function that is eerily similar to the lamentation, which has been defined as “the spontaneous outburst of distress by the living on sustaining a loss.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one scholar has noted the similarity between the two concepts, seeing lamenting women as “tragic actors” whose performance of grief “provide[s] a catharsis for everyone who witnessed her performance.”<sup>11</sup>

We can see how concern over the power of tragedy and its relationship to the lament coalesced into an anxious hybrid in Stephen Gosson’s 1582 tract, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*. Bringing together many of his worries regarding the stage, Gosson insists, “The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in tragedies drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude.”<sup>12</sup> Everyone from the opponents of theatre like Northbrooke and Gosson to its proponents like Sidney and Puttenham saw tragedies as being a source of sorrow, with the uncanny ability to draw forth a wide range of emotions in both the actors and audience. Given the fact that every lament performed on the English stage was a lament performed by a man, it is not hard to see why the anti-theatricalists were terrified of its influence. In this quote from Gosson then, we can pull back the many layers of polemic to see the central kernel of contention. While dressing up like a woman and strutting the boards of a playhouse is certainly troublesome, especially considering how precarious masculinity was for these men, the

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<sup>10</sup> See Bade Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition.” *Journal of Folklore Studies* 22 (1981), p. 272.

<sup>11</sup> See Angela Bourke “More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women’s Lament Poetry” *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture* Ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993), p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> See Stephen Gosson, “Plays Confuted in Five Actions” *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 95.

real issue lies much deeper, below all of the makeup and costumes. The actual concern is that the subject of tragedy is such that it causes an emotional response much like the one Aristotle outlines in the *Poetics*. In other words, the subject of tragedy is the lament, and because theatre has such power to instruct its audience, those watching tragedy will become captivated by such a response to loss, and thereby turn woman-like in their “immoderate sorrow” and “womanish weeping and mourning.” The theatre is so terrifying because it teaches men to lament, and in this immoderate performance of grief they lose sight of their precarious masculinity.

As I noted earlier in my discussion of Marlowe’s Aeneas and Faustus, the lament as a classical genre is considered a distinctly feminine response to loss and we can see the extent to which the writers opposed to theatre understood this to be true. The lamentation had long been associated with women’s grief, largely because in most cultures men are required to grieve privately in the belief that it is somehow disgraceful for them to publicly weep over the dead. As Gail Holst-Warhaft has noted, “Men and women may both weep for their dead, but it is women who tend to weep longer, louder, and it is they who are thought to communicate directly with the dead through their wailing songs.”<sup>13</sup> Drawing on one of the largest comparative studies of mourning rituals, Holst-Warhaft notes that women typically express grief with more frequency than men. This is likely the product of a number of factors, including the belief that the emotional ties women feel to the dead are stronger, that displays of grief are cries for help and women are more likely

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<sup>13</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-2. See also Bade Ajuwon, “Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition.” *Journal of Folklore Studies* 22 (1981), p. 274. This notion gains further traction when one considers that in some cultures, women can act as professional mourners. See Ajuwon, pp. 275-77 and Holst-Warhaft pp. 6-8.

to request help in the face of loss, and finally, and most provocatively, the self-flagellation that often accompanies the lament is indicative of woman's lower social standing—women can react in such a way because they are not held to the same standard as men.<sup>14</sup> All of these explanations as to why women lament point to a belief that women are in some way more emotional than men, a notion that was by no means foreign to Renaissance England. The lamenting woman is then viewed as a threat to social and political order for a number of reasons. First, in a society such as post-Reformation England, where mourning rituals were looked at with suspicion over their potentially Catholic roots, mourning the dead was seen as blasphemous, as the effusive performance detracted from the promise of salvation.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, because women already maintained control over the rites of birth as mothers and midwives, the lamenting woman suddenly possesses a degree of power over both life and death. And finally, and most importantly for this study, in the case of wrongful death, the lamenting woman's vocalized grief serves as a reminder of the deceased, thereby potentially inciting a cycle of revenge.

As a response to death, the lament is unsettling not simply because of the violence that can manifest itself on the lamenter's body. It is true that the physical aspects of the lament are deeply troubling, but the influence of the performance is equally disturbing in its far-ranging impact. While the lament may initially begin as expression of grief, the

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<sup>14</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, pp. 20-27. This begs the question, which Holst-Warhaft notes, of which comes first—do women lament because their lower social standing allows this freedom, or are they in this position because they engage in the disruptive behavior of the lament? While this chicken or egg problem is provocative and worth thinking about, the important issue, at least for this chapter, is the gender/class issue inherent in excessive grief. See P.C. Rosenblatt, R. Walsh, and A. Jackson, *Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1976) for the data Holst-Warhaft draws on for her argument regarding the lament and gender.

<sup>15</sup> Katharine Goodland's *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) takes up this very issue in her examination of medieval English drama and the role the Virgin Mary plays in the performance of lamentations.

performance can and often does turn to exclamations of anger that call out for violence. Indeed, as Margaret Alexiou has pointed out, “Although the act itself rested with the men, unless there was no male survivor, the women maintained the consciousness for the need to take revenge by constant lamentation and invocation at the tomb.”<sup>16</sup> Though women typically could not participate in the act of revenge, their calls for vengeance through the lament allow them significant power in directing violence out from themselves and onto the offending party. These demands become almost as potent as the violent act of revenge itself, as Katharine Goodland suggests: “The poetics of lament often blur the distinction between lament and revenge, reinforcing the quality of women’s cries as “speech-acts” with agency.”<sup>17</sup> This blurred distinction is particularly fitting within the context of the Elizabethan world, for as we have already seen, Protestant reformers and the anti-theatricalists had denounced the lamentation as blasphemous, barbaric, and effeminate, though proponents of the stage and playwrights themselves saw the lament as a particularly useful and even necessary process, full of theatrical potential and the very subject of tragedy. The act of revenge was equally vexed, as Fredson Bowers notes in his *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. While the chief argument against revenge was a religious one, God’s command “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” Bowers reveals “much evidence of an Elizabethan sympathy for blood revenge,” and his ultimate conclusion is that “There is no question that the Elizabethans firmly believed the law of God to forbid private vengeance. Correspondingly, there was a very real tradition existing

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<sup>16</sup> See Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1974), pg. 22.

<sup>17</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning*, p. 20.



in favor of revenge under certain circumstances.”<sup>18</sup> With similar tensions and anxieties pulling at both the performance of the lament and the performance of revenge, it is not surprising that playwrights took the opportunity to stage both, exploiting their similar explosive theatrical possibilities.<sup>19</sup>

### Heywood’s Seneca

In writing on the role of revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, many critics point to the influence of Seneca in Kyd’s development as a dramatist, tracing the bloody revenge for which the Roman was known to the popular English stage.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to overestimate the influence of Seneca on the development of Elizabethan theatre as a whole, as T.S. Eliot famously remarked, “No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca.”<sup>21</sup> And while the aforementioned anti-theatricalists were denouncing the popular stage, those who sought to defend it from such attacks drew their counterpoints from Seneca’s example. Thomas Lodge, in his *Reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse*, notes “Seneca sayeth that the study of poets is to make children ready to the understanding of wisdom, and that our ancients did teach *artes eleutherias, ie, liberals*, because the instructed children by

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<sup>18</sup> See Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, Princeton: Princeton U P, 1966) pp. 37, 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> As John Kerrigan suggests, there is a long love affair between revenge and drama” as “Vengeance offers the writer a compelling mix of ingredients: strong situations shaped by violence; ethical issues for debate; a volatile, emotive mixture of loss and agitated grievance.” While most scholars will note, as Kerrigan does, this “mixture of loss and agitated grievance” no one has yet seen it as taking part in the lament. See *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996), pg. 3.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the influence of Seneca on the English stage, including his influence on specific playwrights, see Howard Baker, *Induction to Tragedy* (Louisiana: Louisiana State U P, 1939), A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An essay in the theatrical tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), John W. Cunliffe, *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1893), F.L. Lucas, *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1922), Robert Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), and Bruce Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage, 1500-1700* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> See T.S. Eliot “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation.” *Selected Essays 1917-1932*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 51.

the instrument of knowledge in time became *homines liberi, ie philosophi*.<sup>22</sup> Gosson and others like him saw the stage as a perverse schoolroom, but Lodge argues the exact opposite, claiming that Seneca saw poets as bestowing wisdom on children, thereby turning them into “free men.” Similarly, in his *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney praises parts of the early English play *Gorboduc* by noting, “it is full of stately speeches and well sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca’s style, and as full of notable morality which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poesy.”<sup>23</sup> Although Sidney is ultimately disappointed with Sackville and Norton’s play, the comparison to Seneca’s style highlights the degree to which Senecan tragedy was revered in Renaissance England—not only were his writings drawn upon in support of the theatre, but his ability as a dramatist was also readily acknowledged.<sup>24</sup>

While most studies have been content to note the passages from Seneca that pop up in the course of *The Spanish Tragedy*, or comment on how revenge comes to Kyd via Seneca, few have taken the time to fully examine the plays themselves in relation to Kyd’s masterpiece.<sup>25</sup> Two of the three works most commonly cited in reference to Kyd appeared in English translations by the same person and were circulated in the years leading up to the penning of *The Spanish Tragedy*.<sup>26</sup> Jasper Heywood’s translations of

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<sup>22</sup> See Thomas Lodge, “A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays” Ed. Tanya Pollard. *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Sourcebook* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 42. Lodge and Kyd were schoolmates at Merchant Taylor’s School and it is almost certainly the case that such sentiments were the product of Mulcaster’s teaching.

<sup>23</sup> Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> For more on Sidney’s “praise” of *Gorboduc* via Seneca, see Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> See Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985) and Scott McMillin “The Book of Seneca in *The Spanish Tragedy*” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 14.2 (Spring 1974), pp. 201-08.

<sup>26</sup> The other play is *Agamemnon*, translated by John Studley in 1566. While nearly all educated Elizabethans encountered Seneca at the universities, the English translations of Seneca were also quite

*Troas* and *Thyestes*, published in 1559 and 1560 respectively, were also later assembled with eight other plays and published by Thomas Newton in 1581 as *Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies, Translated into Englysh*. While it is most likely the case that revenge came to Elizabethan tragedy through Seneca, as Fredson Bowers and others have claimed, revenge is not the only element of these dramas that made its way into English minds and theatres.<sup>27</sup> By briefly looking at Heywood's work of translation, we can see how the displays of grief common in Seneca's works captured the Elizabethan imagination and how, in many ways, Seneca taught the Elizabethan playwrights how to lament.

Depending on how one dates *The Spanish Tragedy*, Newton's collection of the English Seneca could have appeared as many as six years before Kyd finished his play.<sup>28</sup> Regardless, it seems likely that the playwright would have familiarized himself with these new translations and drawn on them as he worked. What is remarkable about Heywood's translations of Seneca is that they stretch the very definition of translation, adding arguments, scenes, and developing speeches of the original plays.<sup>29</sup> *Troas* is a notable example of this, as nearly three hundred lines are added to the original, focusing increased attention on both the laments of the Trojan women, as well as Achilles' call for vengeance. In his argument, Heywood explains that he has deliberately chosen not to focus on the men of the Trojan war, but has decided on something of a more lamentable

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popular, prompting Thomas Nashe to remark in the preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* "English Seneca read by candlelight yields many good sentences, as blood is a beggar and so forth: and if you entreat him fair in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches." Quoted in Lorraine Helms, *Seneca by Candlelight and Other Stories of Renaissance Drama*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> See Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, pp. 41-47.

<sup>28</sup> I am inclined to agree with Lukas Erne's assessment that *The Spanish Tragedy* was finished in 1587. See Erne, *Beyond The Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester U P, 2001), p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> As Robert Miola has pointed out, both Studley's *Agamemnon* and Heywood's *Thyestes* feature "additional final speeches foretelling future vengeance." See *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 66.

nature, “The worke I wryght more woeful is alas, / For I the mothers teares must here complayne.”<sup>30</sup> The deaths of warriors is not as notable or as “woeful” as the suffering of the women, a notion he continues in the following stanza, crying out, “ay woe is mee, / My song is mischiefe, murder, misery, / And hereof speakes this doleful tragedy.”<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the function of an exclamation like “ay woe is mee,” Linda M. Austin suggests that such an outburst is “a performative phrase that conjures the spectacle of the body in an agony of mourning. One hears and in effect sees, in verbal sound and semaphore, the grief of the survivor.”<sup>32</sup> In describing himself as lamenting the fate of the Trojan women, placing their grief above that of the men, Heywood simultaneously draws attention to the role of grief in Seneca, and develops a connection between the mourning we are about to witness in the play and that of its translator. In translating *Troas*, Heywood feels as though he is not simply retelling the lament, but that he has become a part of it and his constant reminder that his narrative allegiances rest with the women further complicates his response to loss. Given the concerns of the reformers I noted in the previous chapter, that lamentation was an effeminate by-product of Catholicism, coupled with the accusations of the anti-theatricalists, the prevalence of grief in these opening lines is striking, especially when one considers where Heywood’s religious sympathies ultimately rested.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> All quotations from the Elizabethan translators of Seneca come from Thomas Newton, ed. *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English* (New York: AMS Press, 1967). No line numbers are provided, so all future citations will note the play and page number. *Troas*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Linda M. Austin, “The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53.3 (1998), p. 283.

<sup>33</sup> Shortly after his time in Oxford where he worked on these translations, Heywood traveled to Rome to become a Jesuit. Considering the degree of devotion required to make such a treacherous decision, and the fact that his grandmother was Elizabeth More, Sir Thomas More’s sister, we can be certain that the translations and his additions are inflected with strains of Catholic belief regarding death and mourning.

Heywood's understanding of the translation of Seneca's play as becoming a type of lamentation becomes increasingly clear in the following stanza. After noting that the subject matter of the play is enough to cause him to cry out in anguish over the "doleful tragedy," Heywood moves on to invoke the "fury fel" as his muse, proclaiming:

That worckest woe guyde thou my hand and pen,  
In weeping verse of sobbes and sighes to wryght,  
As doth myne author them bewayle aright:  
Helpe woefull muse for mee besemeth wel  
Of others teares, with weeping eye to tell.<sup>34</sup>

For Heywood, the process of translating this tragedy is enough to cause him to excessively grieve. In the course of re-writing *Troas*, he notes that his hand and pen are guided by woe, thereby causing his verses to sob, sigh, and weep, all physical elements of the lament. And while he notes that in his original Latin Seneca had bewailed the Trojan women, Heywood asks his infernal muse to aid him in relating the tears of others as he himself weeps in translating the play. In composing this argument, Heywood appears to justify all of the initial worry regarding the theatre's ability to effeminate men, a particularly troubling notion especially when one considers that Seneca's *Troas* is one long lamentation performed by the women who have, at least temporarily, survived the sack of Troy. It is difficult to conceive of another more blatant performance of the lament than what appears in the first two scenes of the opening act, as Hecuba leads the company

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Much like Thomas Watson's Latin translation of *Antigone*, the translations of Seneca may have allowed him the opportunity to work out his beliefs regarding the lament behind the guise of translator—something his preface to *Troas* hints at when he claims it was done "for myne owne private exercise" and is "in myne opinion herein blameless" (3). For more on Heywood and his travels and trials as a Jesuit see Dennis Flynn's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry.

<sup>34</sup> *Troas*, p. 7

of women in a performance of grief that incorporates virtually every aspect of lamentation, including weeping, wailing, rolling on the ground, and the beating of breasts. In juxtaposing his argument with the women's lamentation, Heywood reveals the degree to which re-writing the tragedy becomes a lament, thereby exposing and confirming all of the reformers and anti-theatricalists' fears.

Considering the additions Heywood made to his translation of *Troas*, it is perhaps not surprising that a year later he turned his attention to *Thyestes*, a play with many of the same elements of grief as his earlier work, but this time focused on men. It seems likely, given Heywood's interest in linking his grief as translator to that of the Trojan women, that the grief present in the closing moments of *Thyestes* spoke to Heywood in some fundamentally similar ways. In the final scene, when Atreus explains to Thyestes that he has just consumed the flesh of his children, we are presented with the effusive cries of the father, "alas I wretch what waylinges may I geve? / Or what complayntes? What woeful woordes may be enough for mee?"<sup>35</sup> Distraught that his children are inside of him, Thyestes finds it impossible to conceive of an expression of grief that would adequately articulate his sorrow. Echoing Hecuba's encouragement for self-violence in *Troas*, the tormented father notes the inefficacy of words to express his anguish, and calls to Atreus to lend him a sword so he can cut his children out. When his brother denies him this, Thyestes exclaims, "thy selfe thy bosoms teare, / And let thy brestes resound with stroakes."<sup>36</sup> Though he ultimately decides such action would be disrespectful to the dead, the similarities between this play and the earlier work are obvious. Thyestes responds to the loss of his children in much the same way as Hecuba and the company of women

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<sup>35</sup> *Thyestes*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>36</sup> *Thyestes*, p. 91.

from *Troas*, crying out in grief and seeking to perform violence on his body in an attempt to undo his unnatural act and give vent to his incredible sorrow.

But this display is not enough for the English translator. Much like the additions spread throughout *Troas*, Heywood's addition to *Thyestes* comes as a fourth scene to the final act where he feels the needs to develop the grief of the eponymous character. Returning to the stage alone, Thyestes calls upon all of Hell's occupants, who he believes have turned their backs on him because of his monstrous act. In what is most certainly meant to be seen as a lamentation, Heywood reshapes his tragic hero's response in some interesting ways. While the penultimate scene has a number of elements typically associated with the lament, this final appearance reforms his response to include vengeance. But Thyestes is not looking to avenge himself on his brother Atreus. Rather, he is looking for a type of divine vengeance for his own actions, calling out, "Let torments all of hel / Now fall upon this hatefull head, that hath deserved them well" claiming that "Yee all be plagued wrongfully, your guiltes be small, in sight / Of myne, and meete it were your pange on me alone should light."<sup>37</sup> In this competitive display of anguish, where Thyestes begs for increasingly violent punishment for his sins, he calls after the "infernall fiends" in his final lines, insisting, "Yee scape not fro me, so yee Gods, still after you I goe, / And vengeance aske on wicked wight, your thunder bolte to throe."<sup>38</sup> Vengeance becomes a part of the lament, as Heywood rewrites the play in order to have a grieving Thyestes return for a final extended soliloquy where, in his grief, he begs for the gods to strike him from the face of the earth.

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<sup>37</sup> *Thyestes*, p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> *Thyestes*, p. 95.

Interestingly, in the additions Heywood made to the earlier translation of *Troas*, revenge is also a prominent theme, similarly couched within the tradition of the lament. At the beginning of the second act, following the extended performance of grief from Hecuba and the other Trojan women, the “Spright” of Achilles appears and delivers thirteen rhyme royal stanzas demanding vengeance.<sup>39</sup> The similarity between this addition and the addition of the argument at the beginning of the play is immediately evident, as the argument is also composed of thirteen rhyme royal stanzas. While Heywood uses the argument to reveal the similarities between the grief of women and his grief at being the poet who must convey their laments, the spirit of Achilles represents an about-face where, despite the women’s intense grief, he still longs for and demands vengeance. Robert Miola has suggested that in adding the revenge seeking ghost of Achilles, Heywood was “clearly illuminating contemporary attitudes,” a provocative notion considering that lamentation is the subject of *Troas* and revenge is merely a later addition.<sup>40</sup> The first few stanzas are filled with prideful vaunts, as Achilles details all of his accomplishments on the battlefield, noting that the Greeks called for his help, while the Trojans were afraid of his prowess. But when he provides the details of his death, he quickly turns to revenge, claiming, “Whereof the Hel will now just vengeance have, / And here agayne, I come my right to crave.”<sup>41</sup> What is striking in Achilles’ speech is the degree to which he insists that Hell is also calling for revenge, as if the underworld

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<sup>39</sup> As Kerrigan has noted, the appearance of Achilles marks “the first vengeful ghost of Tudor revenge tragedy.” Though brief, Kerrigan provides a passing analysis of Heywood’s translation of both *Thyestes* and *Troas*, noting that as an “ardent Christian” who “within months of completing his version, he had joined the Society of Jesus” Heywood’s additions to the plays ultimately contradict Seneca’s own beliefs. See *Revenge Tragedy*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>40</sup> Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy*, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Troas*, p. 17.



knows that the only appropriate response to Achilles' loss of life is vengeance. Achilles notes that "The deepe Averne my rage may not sustayne" and that "Vengeance and bloud doth Orcus pit require; / To quench the furies of Achilles yre."<sup>42</sup> Three stanzas later he insists,

Now mischiefe, murder, wrath of hell draweth nere,  
And dyre Phlegethon floud doth bloud require:  
Achilles death shall be revenged here  
With slaughter such as Stygian lakes desire:  
Her daughters bloud shall slake the spirites yre,<sup>43</sup>

A careful reader will note that the similarities between the argument and this speech do not exist in form alone, as the first line of the above quoted passage is reminiscent of Heywood's claim that his song is one of "mischiefe, murder, misery." While the initial addition was interested in revealing the similarities between his lament and that of the women, this second addition is concerned with revenge and how the spirits and gods of the underworld will have blood for the death of Achilles.

Heywood's additions to Seneca, with their increased focus on detailing the connection between lamentation and revenge, provided a great deal of material from which Kyd appears to draw. The call for revenge was typically part of the women's lamentation, but Heywood's work insists that men could both lament and call for revenge, though it is important to note that neither Achilles nor Thyestes is able to do more than articulate his desire—neither is capable of taking revenge into his own hands. As the first and most successful revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy* provides a model

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Troas*, p. 18.

laboratory for examining the performance of masculine grief and its connection to the act of revenge. As we have already seen, opponents of the theatre argued that performances of tragedy were dangerous because their subject matter was such that it encouraged its audience to dwell on sorrowful subjects, thereby perpetuating immoderate grief and lamentations. Gosson saw this potential reaction to the performances of theatre as ultimately eroding manly “fortitude,” thus setting the stage for the later charges of effeminacy. As a work written by a playwright “with a strongly marked sense of theatre,” *The Spanish Tragedy*, is an ideal place to begin examining these issues, as it is a play steeped in grief, but one that pays very little attention to women and their responses to loss.<sup>44</sup> Though Bel-imperia and Isabella certainly respond to the deaths of Andrea and Horatio, the play offers only passing representations of their grief.<sup>45</sup> Yet Kyd’s play repeatedly returns to and foregrounds masculine grief, depicting men as performing the lament, thus responding much in the way that was expected from and reserved for women. In fact, as Hieronimo’s grief develops, it eventually subsumes that of his wife and Bel-imperia, causing him to expand his role as lamenter into that of the avenger, a deeply troubling notion that at once recognizes the tradition of the lament and reforms it.

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<sup>44</sup> See Wolfgang Clemen, “The Uses of Rhetoric.” *Shakespeare’s Contemporaries*, eds. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 47.

<sup>45</sup> In fact, Kyd’s depiction of Bel-Imperia’s grief is far more subdued than that of Horatio. Despite asking for details, she remains emotionally detached, commenting that Andrea’s death has “buried my delights” leaving her in a “cheerless mood” (1.4.5,59). Though she seems to recognize the fruitlessness of excessive grief, asking, “what avails to wail Andrea’s death” her thoughts nevertheless turn to revenge as she decides to take Horatio as her new lover to spite Balthazar’s advances (1.4.60). This careful calculation, what David Bevington must have in mind when he calls her an “astonishing character” who is “sexually experienced, cool, self-assured” stands in direct opposition to what we know about the lament as being an emotional outpouring of grief. On the other hand, Isabella’s grief is certainly a more traditional representation of the lament, though in committing suicide in private, she fails to avenge her son’s death or prompt Hieronimo’s revenge. In essence, her lament is empty, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. See David Bevington, *English Renaissance Drama* (New York and London: Norton, 2002), pg. 5.

Responses to death and loss are apparent from the onset of this play and their initial depictions reveal a degree of ambivalence. As the play opens, we are greeted by the recently deceased Don Andrea and his newly appointed companion, Revenge.<sup>46</sup> In this first encounter the structure of the lament is immediately evident, as Don Andrea informs us that he has just died, introduces himself by name, relates his place within Spanish society, provides us with the details of his death, and expresses his displeasure at his unfortunate end, all of which are structural elements of lamentation. Though Andrea does not disclose these details amidst a flurry of emotion, his speech draws attention to the process of mourning in a way that reveals the importance of responding to loss. In this opening sequence, Kyd is insistent in bringing a variety of reactions to death to the audience's awareness. After telling us his body has been sent to Hades, Andrea informs us that "churlish Charon" will not let him cross the river because his "rites of burial not performed, / I might not sit amongst the passengers" (1.1.20-22). Evidently, responses to death dictate the direction of the play from the very beginning, with Andrea's progress into Hades stunted because his burial rites have not been performed. The lack of a response on earth prevents Andrea's appropriate end in the afterlife until we learn that before three days were over, "By Don Horatio, our knight marshal's son, / My funerals and obsequies were done" (1.1.25-26), thereby allowing Andrea's passage into Hell proper. While these stops and starts might seem par for the course in one's descent into the underworld, it is nevertheless important to question why these details are provided in the first place. It is true that Horatio's actions help us to see the bond between friends, a

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<sup>46</sup> See Howard Baker's "Ghost and Guides: Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and the Medieval Tragedy" *Modern Philology* 33.1 (1935): 27-35 where Baker argues, somewhat persuasively, that the Ghost of Andrea is not yet another element drawn from Seneca, but is rather a "stock character" from "medieval metrical 'tragedies.'"

bond that becomes reinforced later in his dalliance with Bel-Imperia, but the emphasis placed on Andrea needing proper burial before his soul can continue into Hell reveals how Kyd understood the performance of grief as an integral part of responding to death—not just for those who have recently departed, but also for those who remain on earth.

It appears at first as though Kyd is clearly espousing a certain way of reacting to loss. Both Andrea and Horatio respond in a manner we might expect, one angry at his untimely demise and the other fulfilling the obligations of a warrior-friend, but as Andrea moves deeper into Hell, Kyd's representation becomes increasingly unclear. In fact, the three judges of the underworld find it difficult to decide upon an appropriate response to Andrea's death. Though Minos notes that Andrea "lived and died in love," prompting Aeacus to suggest he "walk with lovers in our fields of love" (1.1.42), Rhadamanth is hesitant to place a warrior alongside lovers, claiming that he should be sent to the "martial fields" where he'll keep company with the great Hector and the Myrmidons. (1.1.38, 42, 47). Ultimately Minos decides they are ill equipped to pass judgment, a strange admission given that it is their job to make such decisions, and proposes they send Andrea to Pluto who will undoubtedly pass the appropriate sentence. The inability of the three judges points to the importance and difficulty of responding to Andrea's death, a notion that is further highlighted as Andrea makes his way to Pluto's court. Noting the three paths, the fields of lovers and warriors to his right, the pits of hell to his left, and the central path leading to the Elysian green, the audience is confronted with the sense that there is an appropriate response to a person's death, a notion that is furthered

with Andrea's cataloguing of the specific torments greeting those who end up in the "deepest hell."<sup>47</sup>

Kyd juxtaposes the certainty of death and judgment that surrounds Andrea with an uncertainty that lingers long enough to get deferred by Pluto so that Proserpine may make the ruling on his fate. In allowing the Queen of the Underworld to pass judgment, we get the sense that she comprehends the situation in a way no man can. While the judges bicker about which of the fields the fallen warrior-lover is meant for, Proserpine's smile reveals an immediate awareness of the appropriate response to the death, a response that does not involve either of the two initial options. Provocatively, Proserpine devises a fate more fitting Andrea's suit, whispering her plan in Revenge's ear. Considering what we know of the lament, this behavior is not surprising, though scholars of the play have often examined this passage in an attempt to discover Andrea's motive for revenge.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the very question of Andrea's lust for revenge prompted one critic to remark, somewhat snidely, "death is, after all, one of those things that happen in war" but by focusing our motive hunting on Andrea, we lose sight of the larger picture.<sup>49</sup> Women, those typically responsible for the lament, were feared for their ability to promote and incite revenge—a

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<sup>47</sup> See Molly Smith, "The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in *The Spanish Tragedy*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 32.2 (1992): 223. Smith reads this passage, with its emphasis on costly methods of execution, as indicative of the play's link to the "spectacle of public punishment." For more on the staging of violence in Kyd, see James Shapiro, "'Tragedies naturally performed': Kyd's Representation of Violence" *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. Eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 99-113.

<sup>48</sup> One of the strangest attempts is William Empson's theory regarding Andrea's death. See William Empson's, "The Spanish Tragedy" *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. R.J. Kaufmann (London and Oxford: Oxford U P, 1961) 60-80. Empson finds the whole exchange in Hades difficult to fathom, commenting that there is "no reason why the administration of Hades should be disturbed, let alone why Proserpina should grin and whisper." The answer I hope to have made clear is that within the context of the play, revenge is initially controlled by women, a product of the play's reliance on the tradition of the lament.

<sup>49</sup> See Steven Justice, "Spain, Tragedy, and *The Spanish Tragedy*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 25.2 (1985): 277.

fear that is realized in Proserpine's judgment. And so from the beginning of the play, revenge is suggested as the appropriate response to the death of Andrea, and in the rhyming couplet that ends the scene, all of the anti-theatricalists' fears are recognized, as Revenge remarks, "Here we sit down to see the mystery, / And serve for chorus in this tragedy" (1.1.90-91). Andrea will sit and watch a tragedy, a play that will undoubtedly feature laments, while at the same time provoking such behavior in the audience.<sup>50</sup>

What is striking about this development is the way in which the gendering of grief comes to bear upon the role revenge plays in the course of action. While Revenge is a divinely sanctioned response to loss, it is one authorized by a woman. Yet in the opening act, all lamentations are performed by men. Mourning what he assumes will be the death of his son, the Viceroy of Portugal is overcome with grief, claiming that he will "feed our sorrows with some inward sighs, / For deepest cares break never into tears" (1.3.6-7). The Viceroy initially seems to recognize that excessive grief, particularly when it involves audible sighs and weeping, is not appropriate for men, especially men of his stature. If one feels inclined towards expressing his emotional unrest, it is best that he keep it concealed in a sentiment that echoes *The Spanish Tragedy's* stoic roots. Yet in the very next line he contradicts this sentiment, asking, "But wherefore sit I in a regal throne? / This better fits a wretch's endless moan" (1.3.9). Contemporary understandings of the word "wretch" reveals a closeness between the word and the act of lamenting, but in the stage direction that follows this outburst, we are presented with a rare opportunity to see how the playwright conceived this scene to be acted, with the instruction "Falls to

the ground.”<sup>51</sup> The Viceroy’s performance of throwing himself to the stage serves as a physical display of his grief, an act that signifies the beginning of his lament in earnest, for in his prone state he removes his crown and addresses Fortune in an outburst of sorrow. Indeed, a few scenes later, the Portuguese ambassador to Spain will inform the court of this behavior, remarking, “Sad is our king, and Portingale laments, / Supposing that Don Balthazar is slain” (1.5.119-20), thus revealing the degree to which the play insists on seeing grieving men as partaking in the lament. As G.K. Hunter suggests, “the long aria of grief put into the viceroy’s mouth ... gives the first statement of what is to become the central theme of *The Spanish Tragedy*.”<sup>52</sup> Though critics of the play are often obsessed with debating justice and the morality of private revenge, the central theme of the play is the lament.

Despite taking off his crown, the Viceroy defiantly proclaims that Fortune “will not rob me of this sable weed” even though she is deaf and so “hears not my laments” (1.3.20, 24). This behavior is strange, especially because there has not been any word that his son is, in fact, dead. And yet the Viceroy desperately clings to a performance of grief to the very detriment of his throne. Even as he recognizes there is no advantage in behaving in such a manner, he notes, “Why wail I, then, where’s hope of no redress? / Oh, yes, complaining makes my grief seem less” (1.3.31-32), suggesting that the outpouring of emotion is, in some way, a cathartic experience. Because the audience has just seen Balthazar in good health and knows he is comfortably housed with the King’s

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<sup>51</sup> The second definition of “wretch is “One who is sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty; a miserable, unhappy, or unfortunate person; a poor or hapless being.” The Viceroy obviously sees himself as one who is filled with sorrow, as it is unlikely he is concerned with economics at this point in the play.

<sup>52</sup> See G.K. Hunter, “Ironies of Justice in *The Spanish Tragedy*,” *Shakespeare’s Contemporaries*, eds. Max Bluestone and Norman Rabkin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pg. 66.

nephew, the Viceroy of Portugal's grief becomes almost farcical. Yet this display is not wholly comedic—Villuppo's false accusation of Alexandro's treachery guarantees we view this exchange cautiously and so the premature lamentation reveals the inherent danger of allowing grief to become excessive. Commenting on the similarities between the grief of the Viceroy and what we'll encounter later with Hieronimo, Scott McMillin notes, "Both bereaved fathers express their grief in the language of formal lament, and in their outspoken sorrow both seem helpless before the dishonesty of manipulators like Lorenzo and Villuppo."<sup>53</sup> While the Viceroy claims to feel better in allowing himself to vent his grief, he becomes so consumed in his elaborate performance that his ability to discern Villuppo's betrayal is corrupted, a particularly disturbing proposition considering what follows in the remainder of the play.

While the exchange in the Portuguese court certainly reflects the danger of excessive grief, we are offered another representation of the masculine lament in the following scene. In many ways, Kyd uses the first act of his play to juxtapose a number of different responses to loss against one another, as if the multiplicity of perspective will prepare the audience for what will eventually appear before them in the figure of Hieronimo. Following immediately on the heels of the Viceroy's lament, Horatio takes the stage with Bel-Imperia and begins to relate the details of their late friend's death, though he confesses, "Yet tears and sighs, I fear, will hinder me" (1.4.8). Recognizing that his grief may overcome his ability to tell her the story of Don Andrea's last moments, Horatio tells Bel-Imperia of Balthazar's attack, prompting her to exclaim, "Would thou hadst slain him that so slew my love! / But then was Don Andrea's carcass

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<sup>53</sup> See Scott McMillin "The Figure of Silence in *The Spanish Tragedy*." *English Literary History*. 39.1 (1972): 34.



lost?" (1.4.30-31). Bel-Imperia's response highlights the fear regarding women's laments as having the ability to intensify grief as a way to spur on revenge. In an already emotionally charged moment where Horatio has acknowledged his grief, the suggestion of revenge and discussion of the deceased Andrea's body intensifies the exchange, and as Horatio continues on to answer her question, we are provided with a detailed account of masculine lamentation,

No, that was it for which I chiefly strove,  
Nor stepped I back till I recovered him.  
I took him up and wound him in mine arms,  
And, wielding him unto my private tent,  
There laid him down and dewed him with my tears,  
And sighed and sorrowed as became a friend.  
But neither friendly sorrow, sighs, nor tears  
Could win pale Death from his usurped right.  
Yet this I did, and less I could not do:  
I saw him honored with due funeral.

(1.4.32-41)

While the Viceroy of Portugal's lament takes place in court, in the full view of his advisors and other courtiers, Horatio is quick to note that after he obtains Andrea's body, he moves him into his "private tent" where he then laments over the corpse. The juxtaposition of these two responses to loss allows us to see how and what Kyd was thinking about the performance of grief. In the Viceroy's case, his behavior is viewed as a pointless affectation, largely due to the fact that he has no reason to lament in the first

place. It is in his grief that he is hoodwinked into believing that his son is dead and a loyal courtier is to blame, and because this is played out in full view of the Portuguese court, the display is all the more disturbing and bizarre.

Horatio's grief, on the other hand, is represented in such a way as to appear acceptable. He has lost a friend and so weeps, sighs, and sorrows over the body before performing burial rites fitting for a man of Andrea's station. While Protestant reformers like Martyr and Cranmer would have seen this ritual as problematic, especially considering the role the body plays in facilitating Horatio's lamentation, the fact that the body is brought into a private setting contrasts sharply with the very public performance of the Viceroy. Horatio's grief is personal, and as such he keeps it distanced from everyone except Bel-Imperia who has explicitly asked him to relate these very details. At this point in the play, Horatio is the only man who has actually experienced a loss, but his grief is unlike the outburst we have from the Viceroy. All we know of his lamentation are the details he chooses to disclose to Bel-Imperia—there is no performance, just a narrative that recounts actions that will never see the stage. Despite the seemingly innocuousness of this exchange, in asking Horatio to relate these details, Bel-Imperia attempts to manipulate Horatio into a position from which she hopes he will seek revenge. We have already seen the extent of his grief in the lines "But neither friendly sorrow, sighs, nor tears / Could win pale Death from his usurped right," with their suggestion that in his intense grief Horatio bargains with Death for Andrea. In asking Horatio to remember the details, Bel-Imperia attempts to harness the power of masculine grief, a notion that reappears a few lines later when she tells him to keep the scarf she had given to Andrea, "For after him thou hast deserved it best" (1.4.49). In this moment, the

scarf becomes not just a token of affection, but a stand-in for the corpse of Andrea, something that is by no means foreign to Horatio, who had just confessed, “This scarf I plucked from off his lifeless arm, / And wear it in remembrance of my friend” (1.4.43-43). While the physical body of the deceased precipitated Horatio’s lament, Bel-Imperia seems to hope the scarf, a physical reminder of Andrea’s death and as potentially potent as his physical corpse, will precipitate revenge.

In the first four scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd begins to tease out the varying implications of revenge as an appropriate reaction to death. Revenge becomes the divinely sanctioned response to Andrea’s death, and it is important to remember it is a female god, Proserpine, who makes the decision after it has been passed over by four men. In scene two, revenge is hinted at in Horatio’s response to Balthazar’s “proud vaunts” over the body of the dead Andrea, though Horatio nobly follows the protocol of war and abstains from killing the prince out of vengeance, thus earning the respect of the Spanish court. In the following scene, the Viceroy’s grief over his mistaken belief that his son is dead springs from his belief that the Spanish do not subscribe to the “common law of arms,” proclaiming, “They reckon no laws that meditate revenge” (1.3.47-48). Revenge is thus temporarily painted as barbaric and lawless, though the Viceroy’s proclamation is thrown into doubt as the Spanish clearly follow the rules of war and do not seek to take revenge on the Viceroy’s son. In scene four, revenge is once again couched as an act controlled by women, as Bel-Imperia, distraught over the death of Andrea decides “Yes, second love shall further my revenge. / I’ll love Horatio, my Andrea’s friend, / The more to spite the Prince that wrought his end” (1.4.66-68). Bel-Imperia recognizes her inability to become a female revenger and violently take matters into her own hands, and so she

employs the only weapon she possesses in order to temporarily assuage the grief she feels over the loss of Andrea. In the opening moments of the play, where men are performing lamentations, women are plotting and carrying out revenge, something that is highlighted in the final exchange between Andrea and Revenge. While Andrea despairs at the lack of immediate results, claiming, “These pleasant sights are sorrow to my soul,” Revenge clearly has Proserpine’s whispered words in mind, as he hauntingly promises that he will turn “Their hope into despair, their peace to war, / Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery” (1.5.3,8-9). Though we never learn the Queen of the Underworld’s words except through the actions of the play, the presence of Revenge on the stage constantly reminds us that this theatre of lamentation and revenge is of her own creation.

Though women appear to dictate the terms of revenge at the beginning of the play, the murder of Horatio in the second act prompts the first extended masculine lamentation of the popular English stage. Stirred from his sleep by Bel-Imperia’s cries for help, Hieronimo appears in his nightshirt, wondering who called out for his aid. After cutting down the body that hangs murdered in his arbor, he recognizes the clothes and exclaims,

Alas, it is Horatio, my sweet son!

Oh, no but he that whilom was my son.

Oh, was it thou that calld’st me from my bed?

Oh, speak if any spark of life remain.

(2.5.14-17)

In the span of four lines it is evident that Hieronimo’s grief takes part in the lament, as scholars have noted that lamentations often rely upon the repetition of exclamations to

both intensify the lamenter's grief, as well as express distress at the loss they have just experienced. As Austin notes, "Sighs, repetition, and onomatopoeia discharge the momentary effects of the survivors' terror before the prospect of death."<sup>54</sup> In this moment it is clear Hieronimo is in shock at finding his son dead and phrases such "Alas" and "Oh", which almost always mark the beginning of a lament, serve to articulate the father's spontaneous outburst of grief.<sup>55</sup> Yet Hieronimo's sorrow goes well beyond a surface expression of the lament. As Goodland has suggested, "A statement of [the] relationship to the deceased usually opens the lament, addressed directly to the one being mourned."<sup>56</sup> In his sorrowful cries, Hieronimo calls out to the slain Horatio, his "sweet son" and proclaims, "I am thy father" (2.5.18). Though Hieronimo notes that Horatio is gone and that his corpse is merely a symbol of "whilom was my son," this opening reveals just how deeply Hieronimo's reaction partakes in the tradition of the lament. Wolfgang Clemen, in arguing that this soliloquy "is not only spoken, but acted," points to this very fact, as he continues, "the soliloquy is not a mere passage of emotional rhetoric unaccompanied by action; it is a speech which accurately reflects what Hieronimo is experiencing."<sup>57</sup> Kyd's portrayal of the grieving father therefore reveals not only the lament's rhetorical elements, but gestures to its physical aspects.

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<sup>54</sup> See Austin, pg. 288.

<sup>55</sup> See Ajuwon, pg. 277. As I noted in the chapter on Marlowe, the lament has been defined both as a spontaneous outpouring of emotion as well as a carefully scripted response. While the later is certainly true in Greek literature, the English playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth century clearly understood the performance of grief as spontaneous, though they borrowed elements such as antiphony from the ritualistic aspects.

<sup>56</sup> See Goodland, pg. 18. In writing this, Goodland is referring specifically to the laments of women from Greek and medieval English drama—an important distinction considering that scholarship is insistent that the lament was a response born solely of women.

<sup>57</sup> See Clemen, pg. 55.

As we witnessed earlier in Horatio's account of his mourning over Andrea's body, tears play a significant role in expressing grief, as well as representing the lament. Weeping is a recurrent act in women's laments in both ancient Greek and medieval English literature, and serves a variety of purposes. One scholar has suggested that tears often "convey the dissolution of identity that is a pre-condition for empathetic participation in the suffering of the dead" and this seems to be the case in Hieronimo's interaction with his dead son.<sup>58</sup> In his initial lament, Hieronimo remarks that his grief is so significant that he will "drown thee with an ocean of my tears" (2.5.23). Later, when Isabella joins him on stage, the grieving husband begs, "Here, Isabella, help me to lament, / For sighs are stopped, and all my tears are spent" (2.5.36-37). Hieronimo clearly understands his behavior as partaking in the tradition of the lamenting woman, admitting that he has been crying and asking for someone to continue the outpouring of tears because his are "spent." When he next returns to the stage, Hieronimo's tears are once again prevalent, as his first words since his the initial lament are, "O eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears!" (3.2.1). Scott McMillin views this particular exclamation from Hieronimo as "seek[ing] to become a highly-wrought ceremony in itself, [a] kind of eloquent gesture," language that recognizes, at least obliquely, that the grieving father's language is partaking in the ritual lamentation.<sup>59</sup> Despite claiming he used up all of his tears in lamenting Horatio's death, Hieronimo proceeds to weep excessively, turning his eyes to fountains from which his tears pour out incessantly, thereby continuing his lamentation indefinitely.

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<sup>58</sup> See Goodland, pg. 16.

<sup>59</sup> See McMillin, *The Figure of Silence*, pg. 41.

While repeated exclamations of “Alas” and “Oh” and the appearance of weeping, tears, and sighing mark the beginning of the lament, rhetorical questions frequently appear as a part of this outpouring of sorrow. Emotional outbursts and physical displays of grief relate the survivor’s inability or unwillingness to understand the death, but the asking of rhetorical questions signals an attempt to come to terms with loss. At the same time, it has been suggested that by posing such questions, “the expression of grief assumes a new dimension and a heightened intensity,” something that is clearly evident when Hieronimo uses this rhetorical device in an attempt to grapple with what has just occurred.<sup>60</sup> Posing a series of questions of that move from the abstract to the concrete, Hieronimo inquires,

O heavens, why made you night to cover sin?

By day this deed of darkness had not been.

O earth, why didst thou not in time devour

The vile profaner of this sacred bower?

O poor Horatio, what hadst thou misdone,

To leese thy life ere life was new begun?

O wicked butcher whatsoe’er thou wert,

How couldst thou strangle virtue and desert?

(2.5.24-31)

Once again the repetition of “O” draws attention to the Knight Marshall’s escalating grief, but the questions also relate, with increasing specificity, an awareness that Horatio’s death was wrongfully committed and that something must be done in response.

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<sup>60</sup> See Ajuwon, pg. 277.

At first, the questions Hieronimo poses to the heavens and earth reflect a man consumed with grief. There is nothing either body could have done to prevent the death of his son and the hyperbolic qualities of such inquiries further display the intensity of his sorrow. But as Hieronimo turns his line of questioning to his dead son and the “wicked butcher” who took his life, it is apparent that he is becoming increasingly aware that his lament must do more than simply mourn the loss. As he moves between questioning his son and the murderer, Hieronimo finishes this portion of lament by crying out, “Ay me, most wretched, that have lost my joy, / In leeing my Horatio, my sweet boy!” (2.5.32-33). As Goodland has noted, “Nearly all laments include juxtapositions of past joy and present grief,” and such antithetical thought creates “a sense of tragic paradox and dramatic irony.”<sup>61</sup> The murder of Horatio represents a fissure in time, a fracture that plays out within the very character of Hieronimo. While the past was a period of happiness and joy, a time when Horatio was completing martial feats and winning renown in the Spanish court, the present is a period of grief that requires attention. This split is made obvious through the language of the theatre. While the past was a time for court entertainments and “pompous jests” (1.4.37), the present is ripe for acting out lamentations and, in time, revenge, a notion Hieronimo clearly understands when he tells Isabella, “To know the author were some ease of grief, / For in revenge my heart would find relief” (2.5.40). Hieronimo laments, but he recognizes that even this performance will not alleviate his pain. Only by acting out his revenge can he relieve his grief over his lost joy.

As we saw in the proverbs with which this essay began and in the discussion of the feminine lament, concern over this response to loss existed in part because it could

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<sup>61</sup> Goodland 14-15.



easily be parlayed into a call for revenge. In the course of mourning, it is not unusual for the lamenter to express anger at the recently deceased or family members, but in the case of wrongful death, ire is focused on enemies or the specific perpetrator. After asking “Who has slain my son?” Hieronimo’s fury partakes in this tradition, as he rages,

What savage monster, not of human kind,  
Hath here been glutted with thy harmless blood,  
And left thy bloody corpse dishonored here,  
For me amidst this dark and deathful shades.

(2.5.18-22)

Hieronimo’s response certainly conveys anger at whoever killed his son, partly because he believes his son is guiltless. What we have seen of Horatio suggests this to be the case, but Hieronimo’s anger takes an interesting turn as he focuses on how the body of his son was left discarded and “dishonored” in the dark for him to find. In her examination of the connection between the Elizabethan taste for public executions and the spectacle of violence in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Molly Smith argues that in this moment Kyd “exploits thoroughly the audience’s voyeuristic interest in the hanged and mutilated corpse.”<sup>62</sup> In doing so, Kyd provokes this interest to encourage a response—not only is he interested in how Hieronimo responds to the dead body of his son, but the playwright appears equally interested in the response of the audience. *The Spanish Tragedy* is profoundly interested in exposing multiple perspectives of grief and as I argued earlier, the subject of tragedy was the lament, something contemporary definitions of the genre made abundantly clear. The play reveals an intense interest in how the bodies of the dead are treated and

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<sup>62</sup> See Smith, 222.

responded to, and Hieronimo's anger at this aspect of his son's murder hints at the importance the corpse plays in his lament. Just as Bel-Imperia's scarf stands in as a reminder of the dead Andrea, Horatio's body, left murdered in the dark, will play a monumental role in prompting revenge, as he later notes,

See'st thou this handkercher besmeared with blood?

It shall not from me till I take revenge.

See'st thou those wounds that yet are bleeding fresh?

I'll not entomb them till I have revenged.

(2.5.51-54)

Like Bel-Imperia's scarf, the handkerchief serves as a token of memory. This reminder of Horatio's death will prompt Hieronimo's revenge, much in the same way the scarf served as a token of revenge for Bel-Imperia. Yet the handkerchief is not enough. Hieronimo will defer the burial of his son until he has vengeance, revealing just how much revenge becomes part of the lament.<sup>63</sup>

In 1552, Protestant reformers had exhumed the corpse from the burial rite, moving the body from inside the church to outside by the grave, revealing a fear over the "communicative possibilities between the dead and the living."<sup>64</sup> While the 1549 rite had included prayers for the dearly departed, the new version, which appeared only three years later, reflected how significantly they had been removed from the world of the living. As Eamon Duffy reveals, "in the world of the 1552 book the dead were no longer with us. They could neither be spoken to nor even about, in any way that affected their well-being. The dead had gone beyond the reach of human contact, even of human

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<sup>63</sup> For more on the role of the bloody scarves and their relationship to public executions, see Smith, pg. 225.

<sup>64</sup> See Goodland, pg. 4.

prayer.”<sup>65</sup> The dislocation of the body is also evident in the movements of the priest who, at the moment of committal, would no longer turn towards the corpse, but to the congregation. Even the Eucharist was removed from the service, “in order to destroy the sense of continuing communion between the living and the dead which had been such a striking feature of late medieval religion.”<sup>66</sup> Hieronimo enters precisely into this discussion of the relationship between the dead and the living. In leaving Horatio unburied, Hieronimo intends to maintain communication with his son—to use the sight of his dead child to spur him to revenge, a troubling decision that challenges Protestant doctrine on multiple levels. Indeed, as C.L. Barber notes, “Kyd also exhibits the investing of a person with quasi-religious significance as Hieronimo and Isabella make a religion of their lost son” and that “The handkerchief ... recalls[s] Horatio’s suffering in death. So too with the repeated mention of the wounds.”<sup>67</sup> Hieronimo’s lament is troubling not just because it promotes his revenge, but because it also partakes in and promotes a Catholic understanding of the relationship between the quick and the dead, a relationship that had been reformed over thirty years earlier.<sup>68</sup>

When we next encounter Hieronimo in 3.2, he is calling out for divine justice, though this plea is interrupted by Bel-Imperia’s bloody writ. Revealing Lorenzo’s role in the murder of his son, the letter encourages him to “Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him, / For these were they that murdered thy son. / Hieronimo, revenge Horatio’s death.”

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<sup>65</sup> See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1992), pg. 475.

<sup>66</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1996), pg. 509.

<sup>67</sup> See C.L. Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1988), pg. 151.

<sup>68</sup> As Steven Justice notes, it is important to remember that English revenge tragedies were not set in Protestant England, but in Catholic Spain and Italy: “Their audiences learned from the pulpit, pamphlet, and ballad that Spain was bad because of the Roman Church, and that the Roman Church was bad because it had rejected Christ’s new dispensation.” (287). See also Erne, *Beyond The Spanish Tragedy*, pg. 89-92.

(3.2.28-30). Hieronimo's appearance in 3.7 reflects the conflict between relying on the gods for justice and seeking private revenge, as he continues his lament in an emotional frenzy:

Where shall I run to breathe abroad my woes—  
My woes, whose weight hath wearied the earth—  
Or mine exclams, that have surcharged the air  
With ceaseless plaints for my deceased son?

(3.7.1-4)

Despite appearing to have found a temporary solace in his appeal to the heavens, Hieronimo spends his time openly grieving his murdered son. Strikingly, he sees his lamentations as affecting the natural world, both weighing down the earth and filling the air with his exclamations of anguish. He then builds upon this imagery, claiming that the natural world isn't simply impacted by what he says, but that it partakes in his lament, as if his excessive grief is natural:

The blust'ring winds, conspiring with my words,  
At my lament have moved the leafless tress,  
Disrobed the meadows of their flowered green,  
Made mountains marsh with spring tides of my tears,  
And broken through the brazen gates of hell.

(3.7.5-9)

Hieronimo's lamenting soul even flies up to the heavens "Soliciting for justice and revenge," but he ultimately finds them "countermured with walls of diamond, / I find the place impregnable, and they / Resist my woes, and give my words no way" (3.7.14, 16-

18). Despite his lament, what G.K. Hunter called the “frantic poetry of loss,” Hieronimo’s quest for divine justice falls on deaf ears, prompting him to turn to earthly authorities.<sup>69</sup> Yet just prior to bringing his case before the King of Spain, Hieronimo takes the stage with a dagger and a piece of rope, implements for suicide as well as revenge. While he contemplates the former, he ultimately decides against such an act, as it would leave the death of his son unrevenge. However, in imagining his descent to Hell, Hieronimo envisions bringing his suit before Pluto, and exclaims, “To him be gone! / He’ll do thee justice for Horatio’s death.” (3.12.12-13). The irony here is thick, for as we have already seen, it is Proserpine who appears to pass judgments in such situations and her choice would most likely be revenge, the very conclusion Hieronimo is about to reach for himself. When the King finally enters the scene, Hieronimo cries out for justice three different times, “Justice, oh, justice to Hieronimo!” (3.12.27), “Justice, oh, justice, justice, gentle King!” (3.12.63), and “Justice, oh justice! Oh, my son, my son, / My son whom naught can ransom, or redeem!” (3.12.65-66). The exclamatory use of “Oh” coupled with the constant repetition, not just within the lines themselves, but amongst the lines as a whole, reveals how close Hieronimo’s plea for justice is to a lamentation. And when Hieronimo realizes that Lorenzo will block any chance he will have of finding justice in the court of Spain, he gives up his marshalship and therewith any tie to earthly law and exclaims, “For I’ll go marshal up the fiends in hell / To be avenged on you all for this” (3.12.77-78).

When we next see Hieronimo, it is clear that the lament and revenge have coalesced into a very dangerous hybrid. Taking the stage with a book of Seneca’s plays in

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<sup>69</sup> See Hunter, *Ironies of Justice*, pg. 66.

hand, the first words from the distraught father's mouth are "Vindicta mihi!" (3.13.1). As he moves throughout the extended soliloquy, quoting passages from *Agamemnon*, *Troas*, and *Oedipus*, it is clear that he has resigned himself to the act of revenge, proclaiming, "And to conclude, I will revenge his death!" (3.12.20).<sup>70</sup> Though he claims he must put on an act to make Lorenzo and others believe that he has let everything go, Hieronimo prepares himself for what Francis Bacon called "a kind of wild justice", echoing what scholars have noted about the lament. As Goodland has suggested, "In the event of murder or death in battle, the lament poet will seek justice. This is why the incitement to revenge is such a common feature of lamentation."<sup>71</sup> This link between the lament, justice, and vengeance is brought into sharper focus as the citizens make their appeals to the former Knight Marshal. While three of the citizens are concerned with issues such as debt and ejection, Balzuto's cause is altogether different, as he claims it "May move the hearts of warlike Myrmidons, / And melt the Corsic rocks with ruthful tears" (3.13.71-72). The lamentable nature of Balzuto's case is evident not simply in the tears it can cause, but in the response it provokes in Hieronimo. Just as Hieronimo's lament has revealed that there will be no divine or earthly justice, Hieronimo refuses to grant any type of justice for others, tearing their papers to shreds. Focusing instead on the mirror image of grief in Balzuto, Hieronimo continues to lament, and in the process brings his escalating his grief to a point of resolution—a point from which he will not return.

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<sup>70</sup> As Scott McMillin has argued, the passages from Seneca that Hieronimo quotes have nothing to do with revenge per se, but are "examples of action turning to destruction" thus suggesting that Hieronimo "finds significance in the situations of language rather than in the literalism of words." See *The Book of Seneca*, pg. 207.

<sup>71</sup> See Goodland, pg. 20.

In this famous “Vengeance is mine!” soliloquy, as Hieronimo determines revenge to be the appropriate course of action, he wonders how that might best be obtained. Though the lament is typically marked by great outbursts of emotion, the grieving father insists his revenge will be performed, “Not as the vulgar wits of men, / With open, but inevitable ills” (3.13.21-22). Hieronimo concludes he will become an actor, putting on a guise of simplicity wherein he “may make them think / That ignorantly I will let all slip” (3.12.32-33). This is, of course, a fitting decision for one of the most thoroughly theatrically aware passages in the entire play. Not only is a book of Seneca’s plays present, but Hieronimo draws on constant quotations from the plays themselves. While this relationship between lamenting, acting, and revenge comes to a head at the end of the play, the theme is present throughout. As Lorenzo voyeuristically watches Bel-Imperia and Horatio make plans to meet in Hieronimo’s bower, he remarks, “Watch still, mine eyes, to see this love disjoined; / Hear still, mine ears, to hear them both lament;” (2.2.21-22). This moment of intense theatricality, where Balthazar and Lorenzo enter from above to watch the exchange between lovers, is infiltrated with a sense of impending lamentation as Lorenzo makes it clear that just as he watches the two lovers in the moment, so will he see and hear their laments. Later, when Hieronimo reads the letter intended for Lorenzo and learns that Pedringano was a part of Horatio’s murder, he exclaims, “An actor in th-accursed tragedy / Wast thou, Lorenzo—Balthazar, and thou” (3.7.41-42). These lines, appearing after multiple lamentations by Hieronimo, also highlight the relationship between the subject of tragedy and the performance of the lament, as Hieronimo views Horatio’s death as a tragedy, one that has prompted both an outpouring of grief, as well as plans for revenge.

If we return to the passage with which this essay began, we can see how Kyd understood tragedy, the lament, and revenge to be tied together. As we have just seen, Hieronimo notes that his revenge will be performed “Not as the vulgar wits of men,” a haunting line that echoes loudly in his dismissal of comedy as “fit for common wits” (4.1.157). As he prepares for the performance of his tragedy with Balthazar, Lorenzo, and Bel-Imperia, Hieronimo clearly sees his lament-inspired revenge in terms of acting in a tragedy. As he works to put up the curtain, an act that once again draws attention to the theatricality of the moment, Balthazar enters with his beard partly on, prompting Hieronimo, director of tragedies, to chastise his actor. As he is left alone on the stage, we witness Hieronimo’s final soliloquy where tragedy and the lament come together before they are acted out:

Bethink thyself, Hieronimo;  
Recall thy wits, recount thy former wrongs  
Thou hast received by murder of thy son,  
And lastly, not least, how Isabel,  
Once his mother and thy dearest wife,  
All woebegone for him, hath slain herself.

(4.3.21-26)

Like an actor rehearsing lines and preparing for his grand entrance, Hieronimo works to finish dressing the stage and reminds himself of the wrongs that have been performed against him. In remembering deaths of his son and wife, Hieronimo is, in essence, fulfilling the role of the lament, much in the same way he did earlier with Horatio’s blood soaked handkerchief and his pledge to leave his son’s body unburied. We are reminded of



that pledge a few lines later, after the bloody tragedy has been acted, as the stage directions note that Hieronimo pulls aside the curtain to reveal the corpse of Horatio. With these developments in mind, this last soliloquy is particularly ripe with meaning, as we can assume that as Hieronimo laments and reminds himself of the lines of his tragedy, he is doing so over the corpse of his son, or where the corpse of his son will be. It is then not surprising that his lamentation increases in intensity, as he finishes with a vengeance soaked flourish,

Behooves thee, then, Hieronimo, to be revenged!

The plot is laid of dire revenge.

On, then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,

For nothing wants but acting of revenge.

(4.3.27-30)

The repetition of the word “revenge” once again highlights the lament and points to the direction Hieronimo’s grief is headed—as Gordon Braden has suggested, Hieronimo’s “grief is now his weapon.”<sup>72</sup> And that grief, which has been in the form of the lament, takes the shape of another performance, the theatre, something Hieronimo clearly understands in his use of “plot” and “acting.”

Once the curtain falls on his bloody revenge play, Hieronimo refers to himself as “Author and actor in this tragedy” and we see how wide his machinations reached, as the doors have been locked to prevent people from following him. Indeed, despite the fact that the tragedy is over, Kyd returns again and again to this notion that Hieronimo is both author and actor in this lamentable tragedy. The King, furious over the betrayal, sees

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<sup>72</sup> See Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985) pg. 211.

Hieronimo in a similar way, commanding him to speak as though he is directing the revenger's action. Distraught over the multiple deaths and clearly grieving their own losses, the King, Castille, and the Viceroy, all demand the actor to speak. In his response, Hieronimo recognizes the theatricality of this exchange and responds, "And therefore in despite of all thy threats, / Pleased with their deaths and eased with the revenge, / First take my tongue and afterwards my heart" (4.4.190-92). Hieronimo language here is interesting. He no longer speaks of grief, but claims that he is "eased with revenge." The lamentation we have traced throughout the play has been swallowed by vengeance. In biting out his tongue, the very thing that allows him to speak both his lines and his lamentations, Hieronimo guarantees the cycle of revenge ends with the actor, thereby ensuring that his audience's laments continue indefinitely. This moment of intense theatricality reveals Kyd working within the nexus of tragedy, lamenting, and revenge, something he continues in Castile's suggestions that while Hieronimo is no longer an actor without his tongue, he is still the author of the tragedy and so may write out the details.<sup>73</sup> When Hieronimo motions for a knife to sharpen his pen, and then proceeds to stab the Duke and himself, the human tragedy of revenge may be complete, but the lament still lingers as the stage directions call for a dead march wherein the King of Spain is "mourning after his brother's body" and the Viceroy of Portugal leaves with his son's body in his arms.

If the relationship between tragedy, the lament, and revenge was not clear in the closing scenes of the play, it becomes obvious in the last appearance of Andrea and Revenge. Andrea explains that he will return to the underworld where he will ask

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<sup>73</sup> For more on the theatrics involved in staging Hieronimo's act of removing his own tongue, see Philip Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2005), pg. 172-73.

Proserpine “That by virtue of her princely doom / I may consort my friends in pleasing sort, / And on my foes work just and sharp revenge” (4.5.14-16). He then proceeds to detail the rewards and punishments of the various characters, clearly paralleling the notion that there is a specific response for each death with which the play began. Revenge agrees to the plan and in the closing words of the play, remarks, “For here, though death hath end their misery, / I’ll there begin their endless tragedy” (4.5.47-48). While the possibility for revenge ended the moment Hieronimo plunged the knife into himself, killing any chance the grieving Kings might have at assuaging their rage at the deaths of their families, Revenge’s final couplet suggests that tragedy, and in turn, the lament will last for eternity.

Over the last four hundred years, critics have found fault with Kyd and his *Spanish Tragedy*. One of the most recent and certainly most wrong-headed assessments comes from Harold Bloom, who called it “a dreadful play, hideously written and silly.”<sup>74</sup> While it is certainly true there are problems with the play, a more accurate appraisal is William Hamlin’s claim that, “*The Spanish Tragedy* reveals a self-conscious, imaginative, and highly perceptive mind at work on issues of pressing importance to the surrounding culture.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, not only does Kyd interrogate contemporary understandings of justice and private revenge, but he is also profoundly interested in teasing out their connection to the genre and tradition of tragedy and, in turn, the performance of masculine grief. As we have already seen with regards to Marlowe and looking ahead to what we will see in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, there were

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<sup>74</sup> See Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), pg. 398.

<sup>75</sup> See William Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare’s England* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pg. 157.

few issues of such importance to the culture of Renaissance England than the performance of the masculine lament.

## Chapter Four: “Remember Me”: Hamlet’s Ghostly Lament

The violence of either grief or joy  
Their own enatures with themselves destroy.  
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;  
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.  
-- Player King (3.2.178-81)

In his audacious essay on *Hamlet* and the supposed problems of its central character, T.S. Eliot infamously remarks, “So far from being Shakespeare’s masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure.” The poet continues on to note a variety of flaws, eventually claiming, “Both workmanship and thought are in an unstable position,” something he attributes to “a period of crisis.”<sup>1</sup> Believing the prince’s repulsion over Gertrude’s guilt is the most significant underlying emotion of the play, Eliot claims, “Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear.” And so this apparent dramatic deficiency serves to explain the *objective correlative*, “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”<sup>2</sup> Despite the influence of this literary term, Eliot is, it suffices to say, misled in his reading of the play. The most significant and pervasive emotion in *Hamlet* is not the son’s disgust at his mother, but his grief over the death of his father, a feeling that is repeatedly

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<sup>1</sup> See T.S. Eliot “Hamlet and His Problems” *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), pg. 123-24. It is worth noting that Eliot’s language in describing *Hamlet* as reflecting an “unstable position” and “period of crisis” hints at the very emotion he is unable to articulate. The later quotation appears to hint at Shakespeare’s own personal loss with the death of Hamnet in 1596, a connection that has proven irresistible to a number of modern scholars. Recently and perhaps most publicly, Stephen Greenblatt has succumbed to this tantalizing siren call in a piece titled “The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet” in *The New York Review of Books* 51.16 (2004)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pg. 125.

represented and evoked throughout the play. Indeed, the terminating sensory experience of the ghost, Hamlet's "madness" and extended soliloquies, and the insistence on depicting scenes of death and burial, is one of profound grief. By tracing the development of the masculine lament within the play, it is possible to see that the prince is dominated by an emotion that is most certainly expressible, though that expression manifests itself in a haunting performance that echoes and amplifies the profoundly de-centering experience of loss and the equally troubling attempt to understand it.

There is no work in the corpus of Renaissance drama more obsessed with interrogating the masculine performance of grief and teasing out its religious, political, and social implications than Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The play occupies an important place within this particular examination, because it engages each of the preceding tragedies in some fundamentally similar ways and yet departs from the past to forge new ground in the representation of lamenting men. Without Marlowe's *Faustus* and its depiction of the spiritual lament, we might not have the intensely interior soliloquies wherein the melancholy prince calls out for self-slaughter to end the severe physical and spiritual torment of his grief. And without Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and the *Hamlet* that is now lost, it is unlikely we would have as complete and nuanced understanding of vengeance as a type of lamentation as we do in Shakespeare's play.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, while Marlowe and Kyd employ the masculine lament to challenge early constructions of gender, as well as

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of what we know about Kyd's version of *Hamlet*, see Lukas Erne, *Beyond "The Spanish Tragedy": A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester and New York: Manchester U P, 2001), pgs. 146-56. It is news to no one that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy and while innumerable scholars have traced the impetus of vengeance within the play, this particular discussion can only nod in that direction. For more on Hamlet as revenge tragedy, see Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1966) and John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

deeply religious issues such as despair and personal revenge, without Shakespeare's careful contemplation and crafting of Hamlet's grief, we would not have the complex and chilling performances that follow in later plays such as *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. In this way, *Hamlet* marks a watershed moment in the depiction of masculine grief, not just for this study, but for Renaissance drama and literature as a whole.

As we have already seen, lamentations by men were problematic, largely because of the deep religious strains and contradictions running through such a display. With recent increased interest in Shakespeare's religious leanings, it might be tempting to see the prevalence of this ritualistic act as indicative of the playwright's Roman roots, yet in his recent biography of the playwright, Jonathan Bate persuasively argues, "Shakespeare's plays use history, but they subsume geopolitics into interpersonal encounters. They are not overtly polemical: they present questions and debates, not propaganda and positions."<sup>4</sup> In *Hamlet* we encounter the questions and debates that had consumed England for over fifty years concerning what constituted an appropriate response to loss, as well as suitable masculine behavior. Through exploring grief via the characters of Hamlet and Laertes, Shakespeare repeatedly draws attention to and explores the innately human emotions that correspond with responses for the dead, forcing Catholic and Protestant views on loss and death to exist in the purgatory of the play, where neither side is redeemed or condemned. Juxtaposing the lamentations of Hamlet and Laertes against Claudius' recurring attempts to curtail such ritualistic and disruptive

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<sup>4</sup> See Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare* (New York: Random House, 2009), pg. 278. I believe the impulse behind Bate's argument is quite right, though he seems to have fallen prey to the same the trap so many biographers of Shakespeare succumb, that is to read one's own life, desires, proclivities, and values into the playwright. While it would be nice to see Shakespeare as a beacon of rational, objective thought amidst a religio-political sea of troubles, I do not believe we can go so far as to claim that he doesn't present positions.

performances, Shakespeare ultimately valorizes the masculine lament, showing how an act thought of as effeminate, barbaric, and even blasphemous can prompt honorable action in the face of extreme villainy and political corruption.

Throughout the years of the English Reformation, Protestant reformers sought to divorce the relationship between the living and the dead through a number of revisions to church doctrine. While Catholic conceptions of purgatory, “a formalized system of memory by which the living carried the dead forward with them throughout their lives” and transubstantiation had originally played significant roles in maintaining an intimate relationship between the quick and the dead, reformers attempted to emphasize their distance with the complete exhumation of the body and the Eucharist from the burial rite.<sup>5</sup> Where the 1549 Order for the Burial of the Dead in England’s *Book of Common Prayer* maintained communication between the priest and the dead body and its soul, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer’s new liturgy stressed a profound disconnect from the corpse, with the service addressing only the living congregation.<sup>6</sup> In the 1552 edition, the corpse was moved from inside the church to outside by the grave, revealing a fear over the “communicative possibilities between the dead and the living.”<sup>7</sup> The 1549 rite also included prayers for the departed, but the new version, which appeared only three years later, reflected the exorcism of the deceased from the world of the living. As Eamon Duffy reveals, “in the world of the 1552 book the dead were no longer with us. They could neither be spoken to nor even about, in any way that affected their well-being. The

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<sup>5</sup> See Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pg. 3. For a provocative and sustained discussion of the importance of purgatory and the Eucharist in *Hamlet* as well as medieval and Renaissance culture, see also Stephen Greenblatt *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton U P, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 577.

<sup>7</sup> See Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 4.



dead had gone beyond the reach of human contact, even of human prayer.”<sup>8</sup> The dislocation of the body is also evident in the movements of the priest who, at the moment of committal, would no longer turn towards the corpse, but to the congregation. Such reforms emphasized a focus on the present and the living, instead of dwelling on the past and remembering dead. Even the Eucharist, a service whose very purpose was a ritualistic commemoration of the dead commanded by Christ, was removed from the service, “in order to destroy the sense of continuing communion between the living and the dead which had been such a striking feature of late medieval religion.”<sup>9</sup> In his discussion of the *Book of Common Prayer*, C.S. Lewis notes, “Of all things, the Prayer Book dreads excess. It has almost an Augustan shrinking, not from passion, but from what came to be called enthusiasm.” Lewis continues on to postulate that the difference between “Roman and Anglican piety” was due, in part, to “the difference between the freely emotional Middle Ages with their ready tears and boyish ardours and the graver, more deliberative period that was coming in.”<sup>10</sup> Not only did the Prayer Book attempt to remove the dead from the world of the living, but it also worked to limit overly emotional responses within the ritual itself—a provocative revision when one considers the lament’s function as extremely passionate and oftentimes effusive display of grief.

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<sup>8</sup> See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1992), pg. 475. For more on the differences between the 1549 and 1552 prayer books in their relationships with the dead, see Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2002), pgs. 109-12 and David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 1997), pgs. 396-416.

<sup>9</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1996), pg. 509.

<sup>10</sup> See C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pgs. 220-21. In this discussion Lewis also notes how exclamations have been removed from the prayers, revealing the degree to which reformers attempted to control passionate or “enthusiastic” responses. See also Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2001), pgs. 28-34.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* occupies a remarkable place within the Reformation debates and discussions as there is no fracture in the bond between the living and the dead in the world of the play. Even before we are presented with the disquieting performance of masculine grief, the two worlds are forced together, though their relationship is one of concentrated unease. The play's fundamentally unsettling nature is made clear in the opening lines, as Barnardo asks "Who's there?" only to be told by Francisco, "Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself" (1.1.1-2).<sup>11</sup> As the two sentinels stand in the dark on the cold battlements of Elsinore Castle, demanding that the other reveal himself, their questioning mimics the unnerving lack of certainty attendant in dealing with the dead. This uncertainty is amplified as Marcellus and Horatio arrive, asking, "What, has this thing appeared again tonight?" (1.1.19). The tentative and ambiguous language employed by each of these characters suggests an inability or an unwillingness to articulate what they may or may not have seen. Remarking on these two, specifically unspecific words, Stephen Greenblatt has noted, "'This thing': the words assume nothing, admit nothing."<sup>12</sup> Initially, Horatio will not entertain the possibility of a ghost, even as an abstraction. He refuses to give it a name, instead forcing the spirit to continue to exist in a purgatory-like state where recognition, belief, and existence are deferred indefinitely. In repeating Horatio's initial response to the sentinels' claims, Marcellus develops the extent to which the scholar wishes to keep a distance, stating, "Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy / And will not let belief take hold of him / Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us" (1.1.21-23). A term such as "fantasy," with its implied

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<sup>11</sup> All citations of Shakespeare, unless otherwise noted, are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pg. 208.

denial that the guards have indeed seen a ghost, reflects an attempt to maintain a necessary distance between the living and the dead. There is even a sense in the rather brusque dismissal, “Tush, tush, ‘twill not appear” (1.1.28), that Horatio finds the likelihood of a ghost to be utterly preposterous. For the learned student of Wittenberg, the birthplace of Protestantism, any lingering connection and potential interaction between the living and the dead is problematic to the point of disbelief.

Horatio’s skepticism is patently challenged only a few lines later when the Ghost enters at the same time as previous nights, “In the same figure like the King that’s dead” (1.1.39). The men are careful to distinguish between claiming the apparition *is* the King and that it looks *like* the King, yet they struggle to find the appropriate response to this figure of the dead whose timely repetition suggests a ritualistic desire to be reencountered. Indeed, the (re)appearance of the ghost reflects a demand to be interacted with and accounted for, revealing the degree to which responses to and for the dead occupied Shakespeare’s mind as he composed the play. As a matter of fact, ghosts were on the minds of Renaissance playwrights and audiences alike, as fifty-one ghosts appeared in twenty-six plays from 1560-1610. Despite this frequency, Peter Marshall insists that the meaning behind these representations was as spectral as the ghosts themselves, “Most dramatists who placed ghosts on the stage did not unduly agonize over their precise ontological status, or they evaded sensitive theological issues by rationalizing them as spirits from Hades in the Senecan tradition.”<sup>13</sup> As we have already seen in the discussion on Kyd, a ghost in the “Senecan tradition” would hardly have

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<sup>13</sup> See Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2002), pgs. 257-58. For more on the role of the ghosts on the Renaissance stage, see Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pgs. 151-204.

constituted an evasion of sensitive theological issues, as these specters were bound up in notions of the lament and revenge—subjects fraught with major theological tensions. With ghosts swirling around playhouses and inns, it is telling that the characters of *Hamlet* have difficulty comprehending the increasingly disruptive image of the King, though as Marshall insists, “Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is highly unusual among Elizabethan and Jacobean plays in explicitly addressing the question of whether the apparition is really the spirit of Hamlet, or a demonic illusion.”<sup>14</sup> Critics have made much of this anxiety, and Greenblatt has pointed out the great concern over “distinguishing the weird, exceptional, and deeply unsettling visitations of tormented souls pleading for help from the weird, exceptional, and deeply unsettling visitations of demons bent on spreading corruption, lies, blasphemy, and heresy.”<sup>15</sup> It is the importance of this distinction that appears to motivate the guards to involve Horatio and the reason why they wait for the Ghost to appear twice before telling anyone what they have seen. And yet what is important for Barnardo and Marcellus is not necessarily discerning whether or not this is the appearance of the ghostly King or an infernal demon, but how they should interact with it, if they should do anything at all. In other words, the guards are not so much concerned with defining the appearance as with appropriately responding to it.

The two guards have carefully thought out every step of their response and their justification for involving Horatio is made evident in Marcellus’ statement, “Thou art a scholar—speak to it Horatio” (1.1.40). As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor point out, “Marcellus makes the conventional assumptions that (a) a ghost cannot speak unless spoken to, and (b) an educated man—perhaps one who speaks Latin—will be better

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<sup>14</sup> Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pg. 258.

<sup>15</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pg. 209.

equipped to make this attempt.”<sup>16</sup> The distinction that Horatio is a scholar and is therefore able to speak to the Ghost is provocative in that it suggests that neither Marcellus nor Barnardo have attempted to speak with the apparition during the previous two encounters. Instead, they have waited for someone who might possess the necessary skills for communicating with the ghostly being and the implied suggestion that Latin, the language of the Roman Mass, is required in such an attempt exposes a lingering connection to the ritualistic Catholic responses to the death and burial. Their excitement at the possibility of being able to reply to the ghost’s presence is blatant in the cascade of stichomythic commands for Horatio to speak directly to the vision:

Marcellus:

Looks it not like the King?—Mark it, Horatio.

Horatio:

Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

Barnardo:

It would be spoke to.

Marcellus:

Question it, Horatio.

(1.1.41-43)

Despite initially presenting himself as a Protestant who refuses to believe in purgatory and walking spirits, Horatio’s response is that of a man grappling with the explosion of his disbelief. At first he is far too shocked to say anything directly to apparition, but after repeated prompting from the guards he questions the spectral image, thereby recognizing and interacting with the dead. When he speaks, it is not in Latin, and unlike Barnardo and Marcellus who were concerned with how they should react to such an appearance, Horatio is consumed with defining this “thing,” as he questions, “What are thou that usurp’st this time of night, / Together with that fair and warlike form / In which the

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<sup>16</sup> See Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds. *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), pg. 152.

majesty of buried Denmark / Didst sometimes march?" (1.1.45-48). In his first words to the spirit, Horatio accuses it of wrongfully possessing the night and the form of the King, and demands the being to account for itself. What bothers Horatio most about this haunting is the Ghost's emergence in the image of the dead King Hamlet, an image everyone in Denmark knows to have been mourned and buried. In appearing in this manner, the very presence of the Ghost suggests that the past can impinge upon the present, the dead can commingle with the living, and for Horatio the Protestant scholar, this is a major theological problem.

When the Ghost reappears, it is only after Horatio and the guards have discussed, in extraordinary detail, the former King and his war-like attributes. After regaining his composure, Horatio notes how the Ghost looks like the dead King Hamlet "As thou art to thyself" and that the armor it wears is identical to that worn by the king, "When he th'ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.58, 60). He then provides a detailed political history of Denmark's relationship with Norway, praising King Hamlet's martial valor in killing Fortinbras and thereby expanding the kingdom. As Horatio begins to turn his attention away from the former King and his past accomplishments to the present situation involving the two countries, the Ghost makes its second entrance, returning the focus of the scene to responding to the dead. In remembering King Hamlet through the relation of his military successes, the spirit contentedly watches from the shadows. But when the focus shifts from the past to the present, the dead to the living, the Ghost re-emerges, his very presence a demand to be remembered. Once the cock crows, the phantom disappears for the night and Marcellus and Barnardo attempt to retain it by swinging their partisans—a futile physical act that further exposes their difficulty in

discerning an appropriate response. Marcellus expresses a feeling of impotence in such an act, noting, “For it is as the air invulnerable, / And our vain blows malicious mockery,” though Barnardo insists, “It was about to speak when the cock crew” (1.1.126-28). Regardless of whether or not the Ghost was actually going to speak, the opening of the play reveals a sustained interest in examining the possibilities and difficulties of appropriately responding to the dead. In one of the last things Horatio says before the scene ends, he suggests, “Let us impart what we have seen tonight / Unto young Hamlet; for upon my life, / This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him” (1.1.150-52). Though neither the guards nor the scholar were able to interact with the Ghost, Horatio believes there is something about Hamlet’s nature that will allow him to successfully communicate with the specter. And when Hamlet is finally introduced, we witness the accuracy of Horatio’s suspicion.

In a striking about-face from the cold, dark battlements at night, where the dead appear and demand a response, the following scene begins with a flourish of court life and an attempt to draw attention away from the recent death of the King. As virtually every major character stands before him, the newly crowned Claudius begins what is in essence a state-of-the-kingdom address by attempting to preemptively regulate grief and mourning. Acknowledging that the memory of “our dear brother’s death” is still fresh, Claudius claims that it *might* have been appropriate, “To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom / To be contracted in one brow of woe,” (1.2.3-4). Claudius has permitted a brief moment of national mourning, but now brings it to a quick and sudden close. Even when discussing how the country might have mourned if an extended grieving process were allowed, he is careful to discourage the possibility of individual displays of

sorrow. Initially using the royal “we” to describe his brother’s death, Claudius quickly moves the grieving process from the individual to the communal in a synecdoche that portrays the country as joining together in a collective expression of sadness.<sup>17</sup>

Importantly, this expression is silent; the hypothetical grief exists first within the heart of Denmark and then appears as a frowning brow. There is no loud outburst of emotion, no wailing. Rather, Claudius prescribes unspoken reflection, sorrow so calm and dispersed throughout the kingdom it is difficult to tell it is mourning at all.

After telling the court what their grief might have looked like if they had chosen such a path, Claudius makes another rhetorical step, this time into the realm of abstraction, “Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature / That we with wisest sorrow think on him / Together with the remembrance of ourselves” (1.2.5-7).<sup>18</sup> A master rhetorician, Claudius moves from describing the physical manifestation of grief to encouraging an internal response, insisting that although Denmark’s collective sorrow over Hamlet’s death was natural, “discretion” or rational judgment won out. There is no need for tears or even a knitted brow, because instead of dwelling on death and the corresponding emotions, the country necessarily turned their thoughts to themselves in an act that reveals careful restraint and self-control. In drawing attention to the country’s

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<sup>17</sup> Numerous editors of the play have noted, Claudius’ opening speech reveals his skill in managing the political minefield that is Denmark at this particular moment. As Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor have remarked, Claudius “is masterly in his deployment of second person pronouns—*our*, *us*, *we*—which slide from the royal ‘we’ to include the whole Court in his discourse” and the fact that he employs this rhetorical move during his discussion of mourning speaks volumes of his fear over the potential for excessive grief to prompt challenges to his reign. See *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*, pg. 165. For an extended discussion of Claudius’ opening speech and the multitude of ways it has been read, see Harold Jenkins, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet* (London: Thomson, 1982), pgs. 433-35.

<sup>18</sup> As we will see in the remainder of the essay, the act of remembering becomes, in essence, the act of lamenting and this is deeply problematic, not simply because of the intense disruption caused by lamentations, but also because both acts are tied to the past. In asking his subjects to remember themselves, Claudius attempts to recast memory as something that can and should focus on the present.



precarious position as a “warlike state,” Claudius attempts to rein in any act that might challenge his already tenuous position as King, and the fact that his initial concern centers on the performance of grief is telling. Though he began his speech insisting that mourning the dead would have been appropriate and takes great pains to detail what such a response would look like, in the very next breath he condemns any such expression. Arguing it is with “wisest sorrow” that Denmark look to the current state of affairs, Claudius insists that the court think only of the past in so far as they remember the present. In attempting to subsume mourning for the dead King Hamlet with the urgency of their current political situation, Claudius subtly deflects the mourning process, thereby exhibiting fear regarding the power of the performance of grief to operate as a profoundly disruptive and destabilizing force.

It is this fear over excessive grief that leads Claudius to distance himself and the kingdom even further from the death of the King. Transitioning from a description of how the country should respond to loss to a reminder of their status on the brink of war, Claudius muddies the waters of grief further by inserting marriage into the discussion. Returning to the notion that the country needs to think of itself in the present, he claims to have taken Gertrude as his wife, “With one auspicious and one dropping eye, / With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, / In equal scale weighing delight and dole” (1.2.11-13). In conflating the two ceremonies, Claudius forces any lingering grief over the King to compete with the joy and stability his marriage to Gertrude brings to the state. Grief is no longer the country’s sole defining emotion, or even an important one, as sorrow over death is now colored by the fact of marriage. In mixing displays of grief with those of joy, the new King furtively works to remind his subjects, “When shared, joy is

doubled and sorrow halved” a notion that was proverbial in Renaissance England.<sup>19</sup>

Playing once again with the ambiguity present in the royal “we,” Claudius is insistent in reminding the court that they are bound up together in their emotional responses, either to death or marriage. And though he claims both emotions are held in “equal scale,” it is clear Claudius shifts attention from the funeral, to the wedding, and finally to the threat knocking at Denmark’s door in a carefully scripted and unemotional progression meant to devalue and ultimately erase the existence of grief. The extent to which he is successful in achieving this goal is evident in his exchange with Laertes, who, in asking permission to return to France, remarks, “willingly I came to Denmark / To show my duty in your coronation” (1.2.52-53). According to Laertes, he has not returned from abroad to grieve at the death and funeral of King Hamlet, nor has he been summoned for the marriage of Claudius to Gertrude. Instead, his homecoming was prompted by the coronation, a ceremony once removed from the funeral by the wedding. Through the movements of the first lines of the scene, Claudius manages to convince his subjects that they need not think on grief or the inherently religious ceremony with which it corresponds. Laertes’ response reflects the precise effect Claudius hopes to encourage—a complete disregard of grief and its focus on the past, with a focus on the present and the future erected in its place.

Like Claudius, Protestant reformers worked tirelessly to break whatever lingering connection existed between the living and the dead. As we have already seen, this

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<sup>19</sup> See Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1950), pg. 350. Closely tied to this belief is the proverb “Grief is lessened when imparted to others” 275-76) a notion that props up much of Claudius’ speech. Indeed, as Harold Jenkins has noted, Claudius’ opening address is full of proverbial sayings, though his success in using them is questionable. See Jenkins, “Longer Notes,” pg. 434.

included some fundamental revisions of the English Prayer Book, rewritings that worked to dissolve the power of Catholic concepts like purgatory and transubstantiation, while at the same time focused on reforming the behavior of those who grieved. This is, presumably, the impetus behind moving the body from inside the church to outside by the grave, as well as carefully re-scripting the motions of the clergy. By refusing to acknowledge the corpse for the majority of the ceremony, reformers endorsed an “out of sight, out of mind” relationship with the dead in an attempt to blunt the grief of mourners. While Archbishop Cranmer played a significant role in modifying the 1552 Prayer Book to reflect these attempts at reforming the place of the dead amongst the living, he was not alone in expressing concern over the dead’s power to affect passionate and excessive displays of grief.<sup>20</sup> The theologian Peter Martyr aided Cranmer in the production of the volume and it is clear from the first edition of Martyr’s own *Loci Communes*, printed in London by the French minister Robert Masson in 1576, that performances of grief were at the forefront of his mind. Modeled after Calvin’s *Institutes*, the *Common Places* went through a number of editions in the seventy-five years following its initial publication and was particularly popular amongst the English, both at home and abroad. Martyr’s commonplace “On wine and drunkenness” appeared in the Elizabethan *Book of Homilies*, pointing to the significant role his writings played in shaping the religious landscape of Renaissance England. It is perhaps not surprising then, that the book also contains two lengthy sections on mourning and burial, revealing the extent to which discussions concerning the dead were still occurring almost twenty-five years after he and Cranmer

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<sup>20</sup>See MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, pg. 258.

made their decisive cuts in the *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>21</sup>

In the chapter titled “Of Death, of Consolation, of Moorning and Buriall; & in what state the soules of the godlie are before the resurrection,” Martyr undertakes an in-depth analysis of grief and dying. Devoting an entire sub-section to a discussion of mourning, Martyr insists, “It is lawfull to mourne for the dead” and lists a number of biblical figures, including Abraham and Christ, who performed such acts. In fact, Martyr even goes so far as to condone the emotional aspects inherent in mourning the dead, claiming, “It is not for Christians to have that mind void of affections, as the Stoicks would have it.” Explaining that this allowance for emotional responses is due, in part, to God’s desire, Martyr contends, “bicause God, by whom death is inflicted, would have the nature thereof to be such, that it should bring teares and sorrowe; not onelie unto them which die, but unto those also, of whom they that die are beloved, and are so neere friendship.”<sup>22</sup> Death should provoke tears and sorrow, especially when one grieves the death of a loved one. According to the reformer, these reactions are acceptable because God allows for death to occur in the first place, something Martyr returns to as he explains, “For we saie, that death is to be counted not good, but evill, seeing God laid the same upon mankind as a punishment: wherefore he would have us moorne and lament for the same.”<sup>23</sup> Grieving is important, not only because God requires us to do so, but because death is a punishment for our sin, a fact we should never forget to lament. Importantly, the grief Martyr endorses rapidly moves away from mourning over the

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<sup>21</sup> See Mark Taplin’s *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Pietro Martire Vermigli. According to Taplin, the *Loci communes* went through fourteen editions between 1576 and 1656.

<sup>22</sup> See Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Common Places of the most famous and renowned Divine Doctor Peter Martyr*, pg. 315.

<sup>23</sup> See Martyr’s *Common Places*, pg. 317.

corpse and his discussion of a profoundly physical response barely registers on a bodily, emotional level at all. Despite his initial claim that it is acceptable to have “teares and sorrowe” when confronted by death, Martyr’s discussion attempts to resituate the performance of grief not on a physical level, but on mankind’s spiritual condition, a state so depraved and fallen that it necessitates God’s punishment via death.

Though responses to and for the dead underwent extensive revision in the years during and after the Protestant Reformation, it is clear Martyr understood grief as a fundamental human emotion. Despite the fact that it could not be completely eliminated, even with the promise of the resurrection, it could be tempered and restructured in some significant ways. As Martyr attempts to clear up any residual ambiguity regarding restrictions on mourning, he notes,

If Tertullian in his booke *De patientia*, and other fathers, at anie time saie, that the dead ought not to be moorned for: this understand thou, not of moorning at all, but moorning immoderatelie, according as Paule saith in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the fourth chapter: I would have have you sorrowe concerning them that sleepe, as others sorrowe, which have no hope.<sup>24</sup>

Martyr and reformers like him knew that grief and sorrow were an important part of the Christian tradition, and as Gary Kuchar has noted, “Christianity is nothing if not a vast technology of mourning.”<sup>25</sup> Yet as Martyr argues, one’s mourning must always return to the promise of God’s salvation, “Two things therefore are to be considered in these

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<sup>24</sup> See Martyr’s *Common Places*, pg. 315.

<sup>25</sup> See Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U P, 2008), pg. 1.

mornings; one is, the present losse we have when as a man that is deere unto us dieth; and the other is the counsell of Gods providence, which we believe by faith to be good and profitable unto us: but in what sort the same is, we do not now perceive.”<sup>26</sup> Though it may be difficult to understand what good can come from the loss of a loved one, Martyr insists that because God controls death and encourages the process of mourning, grief should reflect a similar sort of control, remaining always mindful of the hope and promise of his death and resurrection.

While Martyr attempts to cast mourning as an appropriate and acceptable response to death, he also expresses a prolonged concern over “moorning immoderatellie.” As the chapter develops, Martyr’s writing begins to display an engrained polemical edge, and his focus moves from the dead to the living. Delineating between biblical mourners who grieved appropriately and those who did not, Martyr details for his reader what constitutes inappropriate mourning, writing:

Faults they be if thou moorne immoderatellie, that is, over-much. After which manner we read that Samuel was reproved, when he lamented over-much for Saule, being now cast out of his kingdom. Over this, if indecent things be done; as the renting of the bodie, and such like: or else, if it be done feinedlie.<sup>27</sup>

Martyr’s language tells us a great deal about Protestant attempts to reform and moderate responses to loss. First, there is the suggestion that grief is something one can and should control, echoing Claudius’ remark that Denmark’s “discretion fought with nature” and that it is “with wisest sorrow” the country think of themselves and their present situation.

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<sup>26</sup> See Martyr’s *Common Places*, pg. 315.

<sup>27</sup> Martyr, *Common Places*, p. 315.

To “mourne immoderatelie” is to lose control, an act for which Samuel was reprovved by God.<sup>28</sup> There is no allowance for mourning “over-much,” a direct admonishment against lingering over the body, a clear continuation of the work Martyr had completed in his alterations of the burial service. Yet despite the sustained anti-Catholic strain of the *Common Places*, the previous quotation reveals a more significant concern regarding grief. We have already seen why mourning “over-much” maintains a connection with the dead, a bond that must be severed in order to diminish the Catholic cultural force of purgatory. This is continued in the section *Of buriall*, as Martyr further promulgates a division between this world and that, stating, “Those things which be done at funerals, and in burieng of dead bodies, belong unto them which be alive; they be their consolations, they nothing profit the dead.”<sup>29</sup> The forced shift in focus from the body of the mourned to the body of the mourning is significant, for as Martyr warns in the above quoted section, “if indecent things be done; as the renting of the bodie, and such like: or else, if it be done feinedlie” then one is guilty of mourning immoderately. This concern over the living body is curious. Though Martyr goes to great lengths to speak against self-slaughter in other passages, he is not condemning suicide here. Rather, he is outlining the deeply troubling and often violent behavior of the lament.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the lament is a versatile and complex response to loss, but one that is traditionally performed by women. Yet in the dramatic

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<sup>28</sup> See 1 Samuel 16:1. Martyr’s decision to draw on this verse in particular is puzzling, as the interaction between God and Samuel is hardly an example of a divine reprimand. Though God does ask Samuel how long he will mourn for Saul, it is hardly any sort of direct condemnation, especially since the issue seems to be one of length, not that he lamented in the first place. Goodland has noted that the lament was “a practice that was always tentative under the Christian dispensation” (3) and evidence like this may have played a role in keeping lamentation in a liminal space between an acceptable and inappropriate response to loss.

<sup>29</sup> See Martyr, p. 319.

literature of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance in England, lamentations are performed by men to convey spiritual distress and prompt revenge. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* draws on these traditions and builds upon them, though it is worth revisiting what we mean when we identify a certain set of actions as a lament, as the play features one of the rare instances in Renaissance drama of an explicit stage direction for such a display.<sup>30</sup> On the surface, any number of expressions can be classified as a lament, though at its core, lamentations over the dead are a fundamentally disruptive force. Often featuring loud wailing, crying, tears, sighing, repeated exclamations of sorrow, and rhetorical questions, the lament conveys, "as much as a linguistic medium can, the noise of trauma."<sup>31</sup> As such, lamentations and expressions of grief more broadly are typically viewed with trepidation, as they provide an outlet for impassioned emotion, which, in turn, can prompt violent and frenzied behavior. Indeed, the lament is ultimately an intensely physical performance of grief, one that can manifest in a wide array of behavior, from innocuous hand wringing to the more troubling acts of vengeance. In her work on women's grief, Gail Holst-Warhaft has shown how these explosive displays of sorrow develop "a bridge between the living and the dead that is recognized by the community" and as we have

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<sup>30</sup> In their dictionary of stage directions in English drama, Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson note that instructions for the lament, "a seldom called for demonstration of sorrow," appear, with only one exception, in dumb shows. The fact that this specific expression of grief is relegated to a silent role hints at the concern regarding the staging of such a performance as well as a recognition of the potentially extraordinary impact of such a display. It also reveals that lamentations could be successfully conveyed through mimed action, without the use of loud wailing or crying. That lamentations were understood without an audible articulation of grief tells us that the corresponding physical elements of the lament, hair pulling, rending of flesh, rolling on the ground, were recognizable to a Renaissance audience. It is perhaps not surprising that *Hamlet* is one of the few instances where a lamentation is called for, as the play is fundamentally concerned with the multiplicities of responses to loss. See Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge U P, 2000), pg. 127. It is worth noting that the other time a stage direction calls for the lament in a Shakespeare play it is in *Pericles*, where the eponymous character "makes lamentation."

<sup>31</sup> See Linda M. Austin, "The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 53.3 (1998), p. 279.



seen, it is this element of grief about which Claudius is most worried.<sup>32</sup> And when the mourning prince takes the stage, the new King's fears appear well founded.

As Claudius ends his discussion with Laertes, there is a clear sense that Hamlet's very presence causes a disturbance, a fissure in the new King's attempt at a seamless transition from grief to joy, past to present. After confirming Polonius' acceptance of his son's wish to return to France, Claudius responds, "Take thy fair hour, Laertes, time be thine / And thy best graces spend it at thy will. / But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—" (1.2.62-64). The hyphen after "son" allows for a pause, not only for Hamlet's first line, a snide aside wherein he plays on the words "kind" and "kin," but the break also suggests that the grieving prince's linguistic and physical presence is a disruption. The stage directions have already made it clear that Hamlet is offset from the rest of the players by his black mourning garments, a telling observation, considering that "Mourning gear helped to distinguish funeral participants from mere onlookers, and the quality and amount of black cloth served further to identify those most intimately associated with the deceased."<sup>33</sup> Even before Hamlet has opened his mouth or been acknowledged in the court, his appearance reiterates the intensity he feels regarding the loss of his father and marks his presence as a clear contradiction to Claudius' initial attempt to skim over the performance of grief. As the scene progresses, Hamlet's behavior expands upon this initial disruption, as Claudius asks "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" to which the prince replies, "not so, my lord, I am too much i'th' sun" (1.2.66-67). With its punning on sun/son, this line conveys the extent of Hamlet's grief. While Claudius and the rest of the court assume Hamlet is making a weak pass at flattery,

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<sup>32</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 9.

<sup>33</sup> See Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, pg. 440.

in actuality the prince claims that he is literally soaking in grief over the death of his father. Gertrude's response appears to recognize her son's meaning, insisting he "cast thy nightly color off, / And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark" (1.2.68-69).

Perpetuating the anti-grief rhetoric with which the scene began, the Queen discourages Hamlet's displays of sorrow, demanding, "Do not for ever with thy vailed lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust" (1.2.70-71). While Claudius made an exception for one eye "dropping" in sorrow so long as the other looked up with hope, Gertrude notices that Hamlet's grief consumes his entire being, leaving both eyes, literally and metaphorically, downcast.

In this way, Hamlet's grief stands in adamant opposition to Claudius. Not only does he persist in his mourning, but he takes what little allowance Claudius makes for such displays, and multiplies it in an increasingly disruptive escalation of grief. Gertrude attempts to combat this intensification by reminding her son "'tis common—all that lives must die" (1.2.72). When Hamlet agrees with her, the exasperated Queen asks why it "seems" that her son is taking this earthly commonplace so personally. In his blistering response, Hamlet describes his behavior as a lament, insisting that his outward actions are only the tip of the emotional iceberg:

Seems, madam? Nay, it *is*. I know not 'seems'.

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good-mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black,

Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,

Nor the dejected havior of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief  
That can denote me truly.

(1.2.77-83)

Revealing an understanding of the various physical elements of lamentation, Hamlet details each act, from wearing black, to sighs, tears, and a sorrowful countenance. The repetition of “nor/no” furthers an awareness of literary elements of the form, while the use of the negative in discussing the inefficacy of these acts to fully capture his grief restates his opposition to Claudius’ attempt to dictate the terms of mourning. In his article on the grief of Hamlet, Arthur Kirsch argues that this passage depicts “the early stages of grief, of its shock, of its inner and still hidden sense of loss, and trying to describe what is not fully describable.”<sup>34</sup> This difficulty is at the heart of Hamlet’s claims, as he notes these physical expressions are ineffectual in fully conveying his sorrow, and so he expands his repertoire to include “all forms, moods, shows of grief.” Though he is insistent that none of these can accurately capture the intensity of his emotional distress, Hamlet recognizes the potential for such physical displays to be manipulated. Beginning the description of his grief with “inky cloaks” and “suits of solemn black,” Hamlet is aware of the lament as a type of performance, complete with lines, scripted actions, as well as corresponding costumes. Even the behavior he has just claimed as inadequate in expressing the full extent of his own grief is not exempt from manipulation as he continues,

These indeed ‘seem’.

For they are actions that a man might play;

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<sup>34</sup> See Arthur Kirsch, “Hamlet’s Grief” *English Literary History* 48.1 (Spring, 1981), pg. 19.

But I have that within which passeth show—

These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(1.2.83-86)

According to Hamlet, the physical markers of grief, the sighing, tears, and melancholy expressions are easily adopted and employed by man for any number of purposes—they are nothing but the vestments of sorrow. Hamlet's grief, however, exists not solely in outward performances, but inwardly in expressions that move beyond the superficial, making these physical displays nothing more than prelude to the great storm of emotion that brews within.<sup>35</sup> His claim that his sorrow is thereby more profound is deeply troubling, especially when we consider the effort the new King expended in trying to shift his subjects away from easily identifiable demonstrations of grief.

In his response to Hamlet's vaunts about the extensiveness of his sorrow, the concern of the King is palpable. Conveying a newly tempered understanding of performances of grief, Claudius attempts to flatter the vehement young prince, stating, "'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, / To give these mourning duties to your father" (1.2.87-88). While he initially asserted there was no need for such displays, the intensity with which Hamlet describes his grief gives Claudius pause. Continuing the line of reasoning with which Gertrude began, he notes that everyone will, at some point, lose their father. In response to such a loss, it is necessary "for some term / To do obsequious sorrow" (1.2.91-92). In other words, it is acceptable to mourn within the moderate precincts of the funeral, especially Cranmer and Martyr's revised service where

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<sup>35</sup> For a provocative discussion of this passage and its relationship to inwardness, see Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance*. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1995), pgs. 1-6.

the dead have been removed from the living, thus limiting any provocation to excessive displays of grief. When mourning extends beyond the scripted and accepted confines of the church, however, it becomes immoderate and a major problem, as Claudius remarks, “But to persever / In obstinate condolement is a course / Of impious stubbornness” (1.2.92-94). Abandoning any attempt to rhetorically skim over the mourning process, the king attacks the prince’s behavior head-on. In a moment that echoes Feste’s mocking Olivia for mourning her brother’s death in *Twelfth Night*, Claudius continues, “It shows a will most incorrect to heaven, / A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschooled;” (1.2.95-97).<sup>36</sup> Claudius’ description of Hamlet’s mind as “impatient” simultaneously marks an awareness of Hamlet’s interior grief, and draws attention to the deathbed temptation of impatience in the *Ars Moriendi*—a temptation we have already seen as tied to the lament.

If we return once again to Martyr’s *Common Places*, the basis for and power behind Claudius’ increasingly strong-worded reprimand of Hamlet is clear. In discussing the difference between moderate and immoderate grief, Martyr writes, “Now then, to sorrowe moderatelie, we attribute the same unto nature and unto charitie: and not to sorrowe over-much we attribute unto faith; seeing we have the comfort of the resurrection, the which with over-much lamenting we seeme to denie.”<sup>37</sup> The lament is not only a disruptive performance that undermines political authority, but an act that reveals a weakened spiritual condition. As Martyr continues, he returns to Christ’s resurrection, explaining that there is no need for excessive displays when Christ has

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<sup>36</sup> See *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.51-73. Feste memorably attempts to catechize Olivia by suggesting she is a fool for mourning over her brother who she believes is in heaven.

<sup>37</sup> See Martyr, *Common Places*, pgs. 315-16.

already defeated death, “But what can more ease us of sorrowe, than to acknowledge, that Christ took the same death upon him: Wherefore, for that which he hath suffered, why should we so sorrowe and lament, if it happen unto us.” Ben Jonson articulates precisely this sentiment in “Of Death” writing, “He that fears death, or mourns it, in the just, / Shows of the resurrection little trust.”<sup>38</sup> After taking multiple courses to assuage the prince’s grief, Claudius turns to reformed thinking, perhaps hoping such arguments will resonate with his nephew who attends school in the hotbed of Protestant thought.<sup>39</sup> Even Claudius’ attempted flattery of the prince’s “sweet” nature in grieving his father echoes the lessons of the *Common Places*, as Martyr writes, “But let them not marvell, if that all sorrowe be not utterlie taken from them: for the Lord will that death shall be grievous. Neither did Christ indure the same without sorrowe and tears; yet nevertheless they shall do these things in such sort, as the limits and prescribed bonds shall not be exceeded.” Although some grief is natural and expected, the Christian must always remember that God controls death and that Christ, the model to which all should aspire, experienced similar emotions. There are, however, limits within which one should mourn, and in the final statement of the chapter, a very thick line in the sand is drawn. Moving away from his earlier articulation of grief as a common human emotion, Martyr insists, “death must in no wise be lamented: bicause there is no remedie for the same. For we believe the resurrection, according as Christ and the holie scriptures have taught us.”<sup>40</sup> This shift in

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<sup>38</sup> George Parfitt, Ed. *Ben Jonson: The Complete Poems* (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), pg. 45.

<sup>39</sup> See Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theatre in Early Modern England*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 1997), pg 82. Diehl speaks specifically about the connection between *Hamlet* and Wittenberg as it relates to the stage, though her argument about the theatre can be extended to the performance of grief.

<sup>40</sup> See Martyr, *Common Places*, pg. 319.

the Italian theologian's discussion of grief is indicative of his belief in the difference between the emotion of sorrow and the ritual of lament. What Martyr condemns is not the early impulse to feel anguish over the loss of a loved one. Rather, his concern is focused on ritualistic displays replete with Catholic undertones that can follow the initial outpouring of sorrow. In other words, when grief moves from an artless, visceral expression to a crafted performance, then one is guilty of the very act Martyr condemns. Similarly, Claudius' attempted correction of Hamlet and his grief reasserts that the prince's behavior is not the proper way to mourn within the theological framework of the play. In *The Huntynge of Purgatory to Death*, a treatise published at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, John Vernon claims that Scripture allows for only two ways of mourning the dead: "decent burial, and the succouring of children, friends and kin."<sup>41</sup> Hamlet's mourning moves well beyond this biblical allowance, further supporting Claudius' claim that such prolonged grief is impious. As Arnold Stein has pointed out, the king's rhetoric "turns us into strong and unwilling listeners. The use of personal prerogative, the exhibition before a public audience, and the motives—are all lightly concealed under the thin veil of power administrating benevolent correction."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it is this "benevolent correction," a re-schooling in grief that inevitably prompts the King to command Hamlet to remain in Denmark instead of returning to Wittenburg, where the school's Protestant lessons have clearly failed to take hold.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, pg. 266. For more on sixteenth-century treatises regarding mourning, see G.W. Pigman, *Grief and the Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1985) who argues that reformers attempted to eliminate grief entirely from the Christian mindset.

<sup>42</sup> See Arnold Stein, *The House of Death: Messages from the English Renaissance* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins U P, 1986), pg. 228.

Despite his claims that Hamlet's performance is "impious" and reflects "a will most incorrect to heaven," an equally intriguing element of Claudius' condemnation of Hamlet's behavior is the assertion "'tis unmanly grief" (1.2.94). As we saw in the chapter on Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, fear over the performance of grief, particularly when broadcast from the stage, was inflected with concerns over effeminization. In his 1582 tract, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, Stephen Gosson argues, "The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in tragedies drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude."<sup>43</sup> Gosson's concern regarding the potential of tragedy to effeminate the mind not only echoes the language Claudius uses in his exchange with Hamlet, "A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschooled;" (1.2.96-97), but exposes an anxiety concerning the link between reason and emotion. In *The Education of a Christian Prince* Erasmus details the appropriate relationship between the mind and body, proclaiming, "You will not be able to be a king unless reason is king over you; that is, unless you follow good sense and balanced judgment rather than personal desires in all things. ... It is the mark of a tyrant, *and indeed of a woman*, to follow an emotional impulse" (my emphasis).<sup>44</sup> Claudius draws on this type of sentiment in his initial address to the court, claiming it is necessary for Denmark to be ruled by discretion and rational judgment, and he returns to it here in an attempt to reason with Hamlet. By claiming excessive grief is "a fault to heaven, / A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, / To reason most absurd" (1.2.101-03), Claudius

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<sup>43</sup> See Stephen Gosson, "Plays Confuted in Five Actions" *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), p. 95.

<sup>44</sup> Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince*, ed. Lisa Jardine (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U P, 2007), pg. 52.



accuses the prince, in full view of the assembled court, of behaving like a woman in lamenting over his father. And in so doing, the usurper-king reaffirms the swift political maneuvering that secured his place on the throne.

The lament has long been associated with women's grief, largely because in most cultures men are required to grieve privately in the belief that it is somehow disgraceful for them to publicly weep over the dead. As Gail Holst-Warhaft has noted, "Men and women may both weep for their dead, but it is women who tend to weep longer, louder, and it is they who are thought to communicate directly with the dead through their wailing songs."<sup>45</sup> Drawing on one of the largest comparative studies of mourning rituals, Holst-Warhaft notes that women express grief with more frequency than men and this may be due to a number of factors, including the emotional ties women feel to the dead are stronger, that displays of grief are cries for help and women are more likely to request assistance in the face of loss, and finally, and most provocatively, the self-flagellation that often accompanies the lament is indicative of woman's lower social standing—women can react in such a way because they are not held to the same standard as men.<sup>46</sup> These explanations as to why the lament is typically a feminine response point to a belief that women are more emotional than men, a notion that was by no means foreign to

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<sup>45</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1-2. See also Bade Ajuwon, "Lament for the Dead as a Universal Folk Tradition." *Journal of Folklore Studies* 22 (1981), p. 274. This notion gains further traction when one considers that in some cultures, women can act as professional mourners. See Ajuwon, pp. 275-77 and Holst-Warhaft pp. 6-8.

<sup>46</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, pp. 20-27. This begs the question, which Holst-Warhaft notes, of which comes first—do women lament because their lower social standing allows this freedom, or are they in this position because they engage in the disruptive behavior of the lament? While this chicken or egg problem is provocative and worth thinking about, the important issue, at least for this chapter, is the gender/class issue inherent in excessive grief. See P.C. Rosenblatt, R. Walsh, and A. Jackson, *Grief and Mourning in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1976) for the data Holst-Warhaft draws on for her argument regarding the lament and gender.

Renaissance Europe.<sup>47</sup> In his *Essays*, Michel de Montaigne noted women's proclivity for such excessive displays, revealing the degree to which concern over the lament was not unique to England. In describing the laments of women, Montaigne highlights many of the same fears we just witnessed in Claudius, as he remarks, "They may long enough scratch and dishevell themselves; ... They keepe a howling with most ostentation, who are lesse sorrowfull at heart. Hir lowring and pouting is hatefull to the living, and vaine to the dead."<sup>48</sup> The French essayist sees such performances, with their extreme physical displays and over-the-top wailing, as disruptive and deeply problematic. What is so troubling is how the spectacle of the outward show of emotion oftentimes masks a less than sincere motivation. Montaigne reiterates this anxiety in the essay "On diverting and diversion," a piece that looks specifically at managing the grief of others. In the very first lines, he notes women's tendency towards excessive grief, "I was once employed in comforting of a trulie-afflicted Ladie: the greatest part of their discourses artificiall and cerimonious." According to Montaigne, the laments of women are affected and ritualistic, confirming many of the Protestant fears concerning mourning. With this in mind, Claudius' admonition that Hamlet give up his "unmanly grief" reflects multiple levels of understanding regarding the prince's behavior. Not only does Claudius see Hamlet's sorrow as impious, reflecting the many concerns of Cranmer and Martyr, but he also sees it as partaking in the tradition of the lament. And though Montaigne warns his readers, "Men doe but ill in opposing themselves against this passion; for opposition doth but

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<sup>47</sup> For more on the emotional nature of women in the Renaissance, see Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993) and Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1980).

<sup>48</sup> Montaigne "On Three Good Wives" 2:35 Trans. John Florio London, 1603.

incense and engage them more to sorrowe and disquietnesse,” Claudius is insistent in his attempt to reform Hamlet’s response.<sup>49</sup>

As we have just seen, Hamlet’s “unprevailing woe” (1.2.107) causes those around him to view his behavior as effeminate—a serious threat in Renaissance England, considering that “Early Modern moralists continually reminded their charges that manhood was not a natural condition but a quality to be striven for and maintained only through constant vigilance, and even then with the utmost difficulty.”<sup>50</sup> In the other plays discussed in this study, the performance of the masculine lament has not come under direct attack. Although Dido tells Aeneas to act like himself, neither he, nor Faustus or Hieronimo, are explicitly condemned for their grief. In fact, their behavior is viewed, often by other men, as the appropriate response given the situation. When the court finally empties, we witness the fruits of Claudius’ sustained labor to persuade Hamlet to give up his emotional displays, a soliloquy from the prince that is strikingly similar to Montaigne’s description of what happens when one opposes outpourings of sorrow. Though Hamlet has described the physical aspects of his mourning in detail, claiming such actions are unable to convey the extent of his emotional torment, we have not yet seen Hamlet lament. Once he is alone, however, his thoughts return to grief,

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God,

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<sup>49</sup> Montaigne “Of diverting or diversion.” 3:4 Trans. John Florio, 1603.

<sup>50</sup> See Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996), pg. 19.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie, fie!

(1.2.129-35)

Many of the literary elements of the lament appear in this moment, from multiple repetitions to exclamations. Remarking on the lament in English drama, Katharine Goodland notes, "The most common poetic images express the melting or softening effects of tears, metaphors that convey the dissolution of identity that is a pre-condition for empathetic participation in the suffering of the dead."<sup>51</sup> Hamlet has already confessed to crying, though he insists such an expression was ineffective in conveying the degree of his distress. In the opening line of his lament, however, we are provided with a clear sense of just how much Hamlet has wept, as he confesses to having soaked his flesh in salty tears, an admission that emphasizes the fullness of his sorrow.<sup>52</sup> Much like the declaration that he is literally soaking in the emotions precipitated by his father's death, Hamlet continues to see himself as marinating in grief. In wishing his flesh would melt into dew, we are similarly reminded of Faustus' desire, articulated in his final lament, "O soul, be changed into little waterdrops, / And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found" (5.2.118-19). The laments of Faustus and Hamlet both communicate a desire for nothingness in response to their intense spiritual and physical anguish. While Faustus' longing also served a practical purpose in that dissolving his soul into drops of water

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<sup>51</sup> Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg.16.

<sup>52</sup> Editors and scholars alike have debated whether the sixth word of Hamlet's first soliloquy is "solid," "sallied," or "sullied." I believe Q2's "sallied," to be salty or tear-soaked, is the appropriate reading. Considering the imagery of tears and weeping present in the play and Hamlet's previous insistence that he is soaking in grief, it only makes sense that the prince see his flesh as saturated with salt. For more, see Jenkins, "Longer Notes," pg. 436-438 and Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet*, pg. 175-76.

would make it impossible for the devil to find, Hamlet's focus on his body, especially within a larger discussion regarding suicide, points to another, disturbing element of the lament.

Explaining the potential for a visceral, physical reaction in the classical lament, Holst-Warhaft notes, "The self-mutilation which is a common feature of mourning in numerous cultures, the obvious connection with possession and mourning in the mourner's dialogue with the dead, and the inversion of common male/female roles in ritual mourning may all contribute to the perception of lamenting women as both mad and dangerous."<sup>53</sup> Though there is never any indication that he knowingly mutilates himself, Hamlet's grief is in many ways just as violent as any physical act. Indeed, it is here that Shakespeare transforms the lamentation from a uniquely feminine reaction to loss, one dependant upon physical displays of anguish, to an interior response that occupies the mind. In his discussion of masculinity, Bruce R. Smith notes the early modern distinction made between the upper and lower parts of male bodies. While the lower half of the body was the seat of passion, "contaminated with the flesh, closer to the Devil" the upper part of the body was concerned with reason and intelligence, "closer to God and the angels."<sup>54</sup> The division was then gendered, with the upper part of the body considered masculine, and the lower, feminine. This dynamic informs much of the language of grief and indeed much of Shakespeare's play—while women will lament and engage in passionate behavior that manifests itself in physical ways, men will engage in

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<sup>53</sup> Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 28.

<sup>54</sup> See Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000), p. 1.

thoughtful recollection, remembering the promise of salvation.<sup>55</sup> We have seen this emphasized not only in Claudius' criticism of the prince, but also in the excerpts from Martyr, Montaigne, and Erasmus. Yet what is striking about the development of Hamlet's grief is the degree to which it fails to register in the feminine seat of passion, instead existing within the mind, a place presumably focused on reason, or to use the language of the King, "discretion."

In the first four lines of his initial soliloquy, Hamlet's thoughts move towards self-mutilation—so far in fact, that he wishes for either his body to dissipate into nothingness or that God had not disallowed suicide. And as the inward reflection progresses, we see for the first time what it is that is causing Hamlet to mourn to such a degree:

So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,  
Must I remember?

(1.2.139-43)

Remarking on this particular passage, Stephen Greenblatt suggests, "Hamlet is driven to thoughts of suicide by comparably unbidden, repeated inward recollections. He cannot

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<sup>55</sup> For other discussions of man's bifurcated nature, see Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997), pgs. 50-59, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare* (Durham: Duke U P, 2004). Despite the reiterated importance of thinking and not acting on grief, the prevalence of dead male bodies in the play is striking. As Carol Rutter has noted, Hamlet is "crowded with male bodies presented in all stages of post-mortem recuperation, from ghost-walking Hamlet to fresh-bleeding Polonius to mouldering Yorick to Priam of deathless memory." See *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pg. 28.

get his dead father out of his mind.”<sup>56</sup> Unlike the physical violence which manifested on the bodies of women from classical antiquity, Hamlet’s self-mutilation is mental, but the ultimate objective is the same. In asking “Must I remember?” the prince reveals the intense psychic trauma precipitated by the death of his father and the apparent lack of grief displayed by his mother and uncle. Hamlet has already revealed the extent to which his grief occupies his mind, noting just before Claudius’ attempt at correction that “I have that within which passeth show— / These but the trappings and the suits of woe” (1.2.85-86). The internal grief he experiences is even more confounding than the outward expressions that disrupt the court. Claudius also recognizes this to be the case, later remarking, “This something-settled matter in his heart, / Whereon *his brain still beating* puts him thus / From fashion of himself” (3.1.172-74, emphasis added). The interior reverberations caused by remembering his father’s life and death act as a kind of self-flagellation, with each memory causing the anguish to multiply. Though Greenblatt argues for a helpless prince who “cannot get his dead father out of his mind,” Hamlet is entirely the opposite—he cannot get enough of his dead father *into* his mind. The act of remembering, though physically painful, serves the dual function of compensating for what Hamlet’s sees as Denmark’s lack of extended grief for his father, as well as a type of preparation for the task he will soon be asked to complete. Though he has yet to encounter his ghostly father or fully conceive of his uncle’s murderous act, Hamlet’s grief is clearly a harkening back to and revision of the classical form of the lamentation, an act that amplifies what Gail Kern Paster must have in mind when she discusses

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<sup>56</sup> Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pg. 213.

“Hamlet’s emotional violence.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it is no coincidence that the ghost of King Hamlet repeatedly encourages the act of remembering as a prelude to the act of revenge.

What is striking about Hamlet’s interior lament is the degree to which it suddenly turns from a reflection of personal suffering to a violent lashing out at his mother.<sup>58</sup> In many ways, Hamlet and Claudius do the same thing: they police responses to loss. While Claudius publicly attempts to dissuade his subjects and his nephew/son from excessive displays of emotion, what makes Hamlet so angry and prompts his own lament is his mother’s complete lack of lamentation. Describing the moments immediately following his father’s death, Hamlet notes, “Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she— / O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer!” (1.2.149-51).

Gertrude’s grief is not enough for her son, despite the fact that he situates her weeping within the tradition of Niobe’s effusive tears.<sup>59</sup> As he continues to reflect on his mother’s lack of outward performance, his anger becomes more precise and focused. Not only is he dismayed at the brevity of his mother’s mourning, but he is also disturbed by her quick

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<sup>57</sup> See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2004), pg. 40.

<sup>58</sup> In his article on mourning and misogyny in *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Stephen Mullaney suggests that Hamlet’s melancholy is “produced as much by Gertrude’s sexual vitality as by his father’s death, it is the result not of an interminable or encrypted mourning, but of a “prevented” mourning in the rhetorical sense of the term—a mourning before the fact, over a vitality that one wants to be or imagines or finally produces as past and dead.” Drawing on Eliot’s reading of the play, Mullaney suggests that Hamlet is, in essence, mourning the fact that his mother still possesses a sexual drive. Though this reading is not necessarily mutually exclusive of the one I suggest here, it seems to me that Hamlet’s grief is not *that* complicated—his grief and its manifestation in the lament is the product of intense shock at the death of his father and his subsequent competitive display partakes in the tradition of the lament—something we have seen in each of the other plays in this study. “Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 45.2 (Summer 1994) pg. 153.

<sup>59</sup> Niobe also appears in Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, in a strikingly similar moment. As Aeneas details his lament, he proclaims, “O my Achates, Theban Niobe, / Who for her sonnes death wept out life and breath, / And drie with grieve was turnd into stone, / Had not such passions in her head as I” (2.1.3-6). This competitive display of anguish is echoes this moment in *Hamlet*, as Niobe serves as a way to measure one’s grief, or in Hamlet’s case, the lack thereof in his mother. All quotations from *Dido, Queen of Carthage* are taken from *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).



succession from mourning to marriage, “Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears / Had left the flushing of her galled eyes, / She married” (1.2.154-56). Though Gertrude did, in fact, exhibit elements of grief, Hamlet finds them insufficient. Scholars have noted that a number of elements typically combine in the composition of a lamentation, and one of the most powerful, not to mention frightening, is the competitive display of grief, which “unites the community of mourners, for it gives each individual the public opportunity to testify to his or her loss as a means of memorializing the collective community of the dead.”<sup>60</sup> This is precisely what Hamlet does in his opening soliloquy. In lamenting his dead father, the prince attempts to keep his memory alive. Because Gertrude has failed to partake in such a communal display, Hamlet uses her lack of visible sorrow to stimulate his own outrage, thereby inciting a cycle of memory and grief where King Hamlet is never forgotten. In the process, Hamlet’s grief intensifies, something that is made abundantly clear as he finishes his soliloquy, begging, “But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue” (1.2.159). Hamlet recognizes that his grief must exist within himself; the time for personal outward displays has passed. The violence of the image he selects to convey this understanding—a heart breaking—reiterates the interior nature of his grief and the climactic level it has reached.

The intensity of this inward lamentation becomes apparent when Hamlet confesses to Horatio, “My father—methinks I see my father” and when asked where, he replies, “In my mind’s eye, Horatio” (1.2.183-84). Hamlet’s internal lament continually brings the image of his dead father to mind. Though his sorrow does manifest itself outwardly, Hamlet’s true exploration of grief exists within, and the numerous soliloquies

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<sup>60</sup> Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pg. 21.

of the play remind us that Hamlet (the prince and the poem) is fundamentally concerned with how grief works on the mind. As Kirsch has noted, “Hamlet’s mind comprehends a universe of ideas, and he astonishes us with the copiousness and eloquence and luminousness of his thoughts. But I think we should remember, as Hamlet is compelled to remember, that behind these thoughts, and usually their occasion, is a continuous and tremendous experience of pain and suffering.”<sup>61</sup> This becomes increasingly developed when the Ghost appears to his son. After detailing the events of his death and commanding Hamlet to “Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (1.5.25), the Ghost is insistent that Hamlet keep his father’s image in mind, repeating in his final words, “Adieu, adieu, Hamlet. Remember me” (1.5.91). The Ghost’s appeal clearly makes an impression on the young prince, who reiterates the command, “Remember thee? / Yea, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe” (1.5.95-97). In combining the prince’s grief with this command to remember, Shakespeare continues to take the lament in a new direction, placing it not on the body of a man, but inside of him. As Hamlet repeats the ghost’s commands, he vows,

Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of my memory

I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,

That youth and observation copied there,

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain

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<sup>61</sup> See Kirsch, “Hamlet’s Grief,” pg. 17.

Unmixed with baser matter.

(1.5.97-104)

In asking his son to remember him and seek revenge for his death, the Ghost is, in essence, asking Hamlet to continue his interior lament. Stanley Cavell has remarked that “the father’s dictation of the way he wishes to be remembered—by having his revenge taken for him—exactly deprives his son, with his powers of mourning, of the right to mourn *him*, to let him pass,” but this fails to consider virtually everything we know about Hamlet’s grief.<sup>62</sup> Though the Ghost understands he would be forgotten without such displays of remembrance, the prince shows no desire to end either his physical or mental grief. And so Hamlet must lament because he must remember, for “lamenters are also responsible for inscribing or, perhaps one could more accurately say, keeping the memory of the deceased alive.”<sup>63</sup> As Greenblatt has suggested, Hamlet “dwells obsessively” on this command to remember, and “This *corrosive inwardness* ... is glimpsed even in his first frantic response to the Ghost, and it is reinforced by the Ghost’s command, ‘Remember me.’ From this perspective, what is at stake in the shift of emphasis from vengeance to remembrance is nothing less than the whole play” (my emphasis).<sup>64</sup> While Greenblatt and other scholars have focused on this imperative to remember in terms of purgatory and Renaissance understandings of memory, what is important to note is how the act of remembering at once facilitates the lament, and gives it the necessary fuel to move forward, either to the act of vengeance or to the eventual

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<sup>62</sup> See Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987), pg. 188.

<sup>63</sup> Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> See Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pgs. 206-08

dissolution of the emotions surrounding grief.<sup>65</sup> In this way, the “corrosive inwardness” that Greenblatt notes is problematic in that it will eventually prompt some type of action—that is, after all, the purpose of the lamentation whether it exists with one’s mind or appears in one’s actions.

Anxiety over the performance of the lament is evident from the very beginning of the play. In describing himself as a lamenting man, Hamlet is aware that such displays have the potential to become excessive external demonstrations of an inward emotion that does not correspond with its outward manifestation. The vehemence of Hamlet’s reaction to his mother’s use of the word “seems” and its implication that his grief is solely conveyed through physical appearance and ritualistic behavior highlights the prevailing concerns regarding extreme grief in Renaissance England. As we saw in Montaigne’s *Essays*, the theatrics of lamentation, the fact that it could be acted out and manipulated, was as troubling as the theological implications of such displays. This tension between outward/inward and public/private performances of grief is presented with incredible force during the arrival of the players to Elsinore. Though Hamlet has been consumed with reflecting on and attempting to articulate the interior nature of his grief, he is nevertheless fascinated by outward shows and their dramatic potential in prompting an inward response. In welcoming the travelling players to court, he requests the recital of a “passionate speech” (2.2.414) he remembers from a past performance, and after praising the virtues of the oration for some time, Hamlet finally provides the details, “One speech

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<sup>65</sup> See Peter Stallybrass, “Hauntings: The Materiality of Memory on The Renaissance Stage” in *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through Early Modern Europe*. Eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2001), Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*. (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

in it I chiefly loved, 'twas Aeneas' tale to Dido, and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter" (2.2.426-28). The "passionate speech" Hamlet remembers and wishes to hear is, tellingly, the lament of a man.<sup>66</sup>

As scholars have noted, the passage to which Hamlet refers is adapted from Virgil's *Aeneid*, possibly via Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.<sup>67</sup> We have already seen how the character of Aeneas and his retelling of the events of Troy provided Marlowe with fertile material to begin teasing out the implications of placing the lamentation on men. Indeed, it is in fulfilling Dido's persistent desire to hear the story of Troy that Aeneas' lament reaches its fevered pitch, prompting the Queen to ask the Trojan warrior, "What fainst *Aeneas* to remember *Troy*? / In whose defence he fought so valiantly: / Looke up and speake" (2.1.118-20). Shakespeare draws on this early dramatic depiction of masculine grief and significantly complicates it as he has Hamlet begin the speech, before seeking an antiphonal response from the player. As Philippa Berry has suggested, in encouraging the player to take up Aeneas' lines, the prince effectively places himself in Dido's position.<sup>68</sup> Hamlet's recasting himself as the Queen is a particularly intriguing development considering that in Marlowe's version of the scene,

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<sup>66</sup> In the course of describing the speech for the player and praising its many virtues, Hamlet remarks, "I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted, or, if it was, not above once; for the play, I remember, pleased not the million. 'Twas caviare to the general" (2.2.416-18). It is striking that one of the most famous stories of antiquity, a story from which England traced its own roots, would be described in such a way. It is tempting to read the lack of popular interest in Aeneas' tale as confusion and distaste over the performance of masculine grief. If we remember back to Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, this certainly seems to be the case for Dido. Aeneas' lamentation continually impedes his ability to relate of the narrative of Troy, an incredible frustrating occurrence that garners repeated strongly worded encouragements to finish his tale in a timely and manly fashion.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it seems likely that Shakespeare has Marlowe's play in mind during this scene, as Rosencrantz explains the arrival of the acting troupe, "But there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—" (2.2.325-29)

<sup>68</sup> See Philippa Berry *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 60.

Aeneas' lament prompts a nearly identical response from Dido. Shakespeare develops and expands upon the material Marlowe found so fitting for interrogating the gendering of grief. Not only is the player re-enacting the masculine lament, but Hamlet, who has already described his behavior and thoughts in those terms, places himself in the position of the lamenting Queen. Hamlet appears cognizant that his behavior is partaking in this distinctly feminine tradition, as he encourages the player, "Say on, come to Hecuba" (2.2.481). The desire to hear this particular portion of the speech becomes evident in the final lines, as the player recites,

The instant burst of clamour that she made—  
Unless things mortal move them not at all—  
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,  
And passion in the gods.'

(2.2.495-98)

The personal grief Hamlet feels over the death of his father prompts the memory of and desire to hear these lines, not only for their brief description of Hecuba's lament, but also for Aeneas' sustained lamentation in retelling the calamitous events of Troy. Deriving intense stimulation from this community of grief, Hamlet continually inserts himself into the lives of Aeneas, Dido, and Hecuba at the precise moment these characters perform or entertain the lament. Such displays have an immediate psychic and physical impact on Hamlet, as Polonius stops the recital and notes, "Look whe'er he has not turned his colour, and has tears in's eyes" (2.2.499-500). Not only do these lines speak to the recent experience of the grief-stricken prince, but they serve to provoke the memory of his grief, furthering both his lamentation and thoughts of revenge.

In the moments following the intense antiphonal re-enactment of Aeneas' lament, we see the extent to which the player's performance has deeply moved the prince.

Delivering a passionate speech of his own, Hamlet berates himself, stating,

Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his whole conceit  
That from her working all his visage wanned  
Tears in his eyes, distraction in 's aspect.  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing.  
For Hecuba!

(2.2.528-35)

Claudius' initial concern over excessive grief and its power to ignite emotional outbursts is confirmed, as the rendition of the lamenting Aeneas significantly touches Hamlet. Despite being nothing more than a well performed act, complete with many of the physical markers of grief that Hamlet has already admitted to possessing, the actor stirs up the prince's anger and self-loathing. The lament has functioned precisely according to its purpose. Though the actor's sorrow is a mere fiction, a restating of lines at the request of his royal host, the power of the performance of grief is evident in the violent reaction it prompts from Hamlet. As Thomas Rist has noted, the "extravagant performances of remembrance ... are here reaffirmed, the strictly measured mourning of Reformers being

implicitly but forcefully rejected.”<sup>69</sup> Continuing to reflect on the staged grief he has just witnessed, Hamlet remarks,

What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do  
Had he the motive and cue for passion  
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

(2.2.536-40)

Simultaneously embarrassed and enthralled by the actor’s ability to turn an imaginary grief into such an intense portrayal, Hamlet wonders what grief would look like if it had his “motive and cue for passion.” As Kirsch has noted, “the player’s imitation of grief nonetheless moves him internally, as nothing else can, in fact to take action, as he conceives of the idea of staging a play to test both the ghost and the conscience of the King.”<sup>70</sup> Combining the language of grief with the stage, he envisions a lament so terrible and hyperbolic that an audience would be unable to entertain the visual and audible shock. As he continues to dwell on the potential of such a display, he eventually makes his way to the lament’s purpose, exclaiming “O, vengeance!—” though thoughts of immediate revenge fail to take hold. Rather, he returns once again to the theatre, noting that the actions of the stage have the power to prompt confessions from its audience, resolving himself to another performance of grief.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration*, pg. 65.

<sup>70</sup> See Kirsch, “Hamlet’s Grief,” pg. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Hamlet’s belief is strikingly similar to that of Sidney’s, which we saw in the previous chapter, though provocatively, Sidney’s example drew on the lamentation.



Despite expressing distaste at his mother's use of "seems" and its implicit suggestion that his grief is merely an act, Hamlet displays a profound interest in what a lamentation might look like to those who witness such a display. Having already vowed "To put an antic disposition on—" (1.5.173) following his encounter with the ghost of his father, Hamlet also claims that a performance of grief backed by his motive would "Make mad the guilty and appal the free, / Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed / The very faculty of eyes and ears" (2.2.541-43). In other words, his lamentation would astound all who might witness it. In the above quoted passage, Gail Holst-Warhaft discusses the link between madness and the performance of grief, noting the way in which lamentations can cause the lamenter to appear "both mad and dangerous."<sup>72</sup> Hamlet clearly exploits this connection immediately following his encounter with the Ghost, and his first interaction with Polonius marks a protracted link between responses to death and madness. In reply to Polonius' question if he will walk out of doors, the prince retorts with "Into my grave" (2.2.205). A few lines later, as Polonius states he will take his leave, Hamlet responds, "You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal—except my life, my life, my life" (2.2.212-13). While Polonius densely assumes these remarks are nothing more than the fancies of lovesickness, the audience knows better and is constantly forced to confront the unsettling symptoms of Hamlet's "antic disposition," symptoms that return again and again to dwell on death and responses to loss.

The confusion over Hamlet's behavior continues as the King and Polonius prepare to spy on the prince. Though he fails to register Hamlet's actions as a lamentation, the manner in which Claudius describes this behavior unknowingly

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<sup>72</sup> Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 29.

recognizes the connection between the act of the lament and madness. In asking Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “Get from him why he puts on this confusion, / Grating so harshly all his days of quiet / With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?” (3.1.2-4), Claudius understands Hamlet’s disruptive “madness” in much the same way as the excessive grief with which the play began. This can hardly be surprising given that Hamlet’s feigned madness follows quickly on the heels of his incessant claims of unending and inexpressible grief. Indeed, it is remarkable that Claudius does not see Hamlet’s actions as a mere continuation of that grief, as little time has passed since Claudius’ “benevolent correction” in front of the court. Despite Polonius’s conviction that Hamlet’s behavior is merely the product of spurned love, after the encounter with Ophelia (only the second time Claudius has seen Hamlet’s behavior first hand), the King is certain this is not the case. Unable to deduce anything further, Claudius remarks, “This something-settled matter in his heart, / Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus / From fashion of himself” (3.1.172-74). As Hamlet’s grief intensifies and his lamentation develops, any attempt to comprehend his behavior is confounded. Although Claudius is unable to precisely articulate what is going on with the prince, he nevertheless understands it as occurring within Hamlet, in his heart and in his mind. While Hamlet’s outward trappings of grief (the tears, sighs, black mourning garments), were easy to pinpoint and condemn, Hamlet’s revised lament with its intense interiority is deeply troubling and profoundly disruptive because it is impossible to denounce what you cannot know or see.

Though Hamlet’s lamentation occupies the vast majority of the play, Laertes’ grief over the death of Polonius and Claudius’ subsequent attempt to harness his violent

emotion reflects the double-edged sword of the lament and its role in revenge. From the beginning of the play, we witness the manipulation of sorrow as a method of political maneuvering. Claudius condemns expressions of grief as running contrary to the interests of the kingdom and its inhabitants as a way to ensure stability for his tenuous grasp on the throne. Conversely, the lament is prompted from beyond the grave, as the Ghost constantly encourages Hamlet to remember to lament as a way to fulfill his personal desire for vengeance. When Laertes returns from abroad, threatening treason, Claudius once again recognizes the danger of excessive, visible expressions of grief. After Laertes bursts into the court, demanding to know what has happened in his absence, Claudius explains, “I am guiltless of your father’s death, / And am most sensibly in grief for it” (4.5.147-48). Much like his initial policing of Denmark’s grief, Claudius claims to sympathize with Laertes, though once again he insists on “discretion,” confessing that he is “sensibly in grief” over Polonius’ murder. The King continues this strain of reasoning even after the grievous appearance of Ophelia, whose madness prompts further expressions of sorrow from her brother.<sup>73</sup> Insisting once again that he empathizes with the young man’s anguish, Claudius remarks, “Laertes, I must commune with your grief, / Or you deny me right” (4.5.197-98). Much like depicting Denmark with one brow of woe, the King works to disperse the young man’s grief by claiming that he too partakes in the emotions of loss. Claudius has seen this type of threat before, but unlike the Hamlet’s inward melancholy, a grief that appears to have only consumed the mind of the prince,

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<sup>73</sup> When laments have been discussed with regards to Hamlet, they often focus on Ophelia’s grief. The most recent examination is Katharine Goodland’s in *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, pgs.171-199, but see also Sandra K. Fischer “Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*” *Renaissance and Reformation* 26.1 (1990), pgs. 1-10; Jacquelyn A. Fox-Good, “Ophelia’s Mad Songs: Music, Gender, Power” *Subjects on the World’s Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Eds. David C. Allen and Robert A. White. (Newark: U of Delaware, 1995)

Laertes' rage has prompted the beginnings of an insurrection, as a messenger relates, "The rabble call him lord," and "They cry 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king.'" (4.5.98, 102). All of Claudius' fears regarding the performance of grief have been confirmed, as Laertes' visible distress has managed to stir up a challenge to the throne, though the King nevertheless believes he can harness such emotions for his own purposes.

When news arrives that Hamlet has managed to return to Denmark, thus evading an assassination attempt, the King's thoughts turn to darker machinations. Carefully plotting his course, Claudius recognizes what the Ghost has known from the beginning of the play. Asking the young man to remember, he asks, "Laertes, was your father dear to you? / Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart?" (4.7.89-91). Returning once again the tension between inner and outer expressions of grief, Claudius asks if Laertes' outward display reflects a true, interior state. He then proceeds to further plumb the depths of Laertes' grief, wondering, "What would you undertake / To show yourself your father's son in deed / More than in words?" (4.7.96-98). For the deeply thoughtful Hamlet, the answer to this question is intense remembering and, in turn, lamenting, a process that will eventually manifest in an act of vengeance. Laertes, whose rash temperament contrasts with that of the prince, chillingly responds, "To cut his throat I' th' church" (4.7.98). The young man's grief does not require the same degree of prompting as Hamlet, though the death of Ophelia certainly provokes further grief in Laertes, as the stage directions reveal that he weeps at the news of his sister's death, and remarks, "When these are gone, / The woman will be out" (4.7.160-61).<sup>74</sup> Unlike the

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<sup>74</sup> For more on the staging of weeping, see Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatre* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007). The use of stage directions in *Hamlet* to direct excessive displays of emotion, particularly lamenting and weeping are provocative, not only because they

extended lamentation of Hamlet, Laertes insists that once he weeps over his sister—once he indulges in the outward performance of grief—he will turn his immediate attention to the process of revenge. Claudius’ provocation of memory and the lament has served its purpose. Though excessive grief is a problem when directed at the crown, Claudius recognizes the extraordinary power of capitalizing on grief and directing it towards a mutual goal.

In the final masculine lament of the play, two grieving men erupt in a flurry of emotion and violence in the graveyard of Castle Elsinore. It can hardly be a coincidence that this dual lament is situated in a space of intense awareness of death, consecrated by the Protestant reformers as the one location where mourners beheld the corpse.<sup>75</sup> Yet Shakespeare uses this moment to exploit fears regarding the mingling of the quick and the dead as well as masculine grief, as the burial service for Ophelia prompts Laertes’ lamentation. After quarreling with the Priest over the lack of ceremony for Ophelia, Laertes throws himself into the grave and embraces his dead sister, exclaiming, “Hold off the earth a while, / Till I have caught her once more in mine arms. / Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead” (5.1.233-35). All at once, concerns regarding immoderate grief are realized as the order for burial precipitates not only a lamentation, but a ritualistic display of grief that unites the living and the dead in a haunting spectacle. Indeed, this spectacle of sorrow is so disturbing that it prompts a response, not from any of the gathered mourners, but from Hamlet, who steps forward from the shadows and exclaims,

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reflect the degree to which Shakespeare was returning to these physical markers of grief, but also because they highlight the intense theatricality of mourning.

<sup>75</sup> For an intriguing discussion of the role of the corpse in *Hamlet*, see Pascale Aebischer’s “‘Not dead? not yet quite dead?’: *Hamlet*’s unruly corpses” in *Shakespeare’s Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U P, 2003), pgs. 64-101.

What is he whose grief  
Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow  
Conjures the wand'ring stars and makes them stand  
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,  
Hamlet the Dane.

(5.1.238-42)

As a man who has lamented for the vast majority of the play, Hamlet immediately recognizes Laertes' act as participating in the same tradition and notes the power of such displays of grief to affect both those on the earth as well as those in the heavens.<sup>76</sup> Though he recognizes Laertes' behavior as a lament, Hamlet's lines nevertheless reveal a sense of shock and amazement at such an expression, undoubtedly the product of the physical nature of this response. For the entirety of the play, Hamlet's lamentation has been interior, manifesting itself in the distracted bits of feigned madness Hamlet lets slip to further disturb Claudius. In proclaiming his name, Hamlet attempts to stake a claim in this masculine performance of grief, an impression that is confirmed when the prince follows Laertes into the open grave.

As we have already seen, Hamlet is deeply interested in the laments of others. From the fictional lamentations of Aeneas, Dido, and Hecuba, to the staged lament in the dumb show preceding *The Mousetrap*, to the insufficient performance of his mother, nothing captures Hamlet's imagination quite like the dwelling on and responding to loss. As the men grapple in the grave over the body of Ophelia, it becomes increasingly obvious they fight not only over the death of loved ones, but in who can perform the

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<sup>76</sup> This appears to be a recurring theme of lamentations. See Venus' response to Aeneas in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, 1.1.140-41, as well as Hamlet's reflection on Hecuba's lament in 2.2.497-98, quoted above.

greatest display of grief. At first, Hamlet insists this competition is all a matter of love, claiming, “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum.—What wilt thou do for her?” (5.1.254-56). Yet as he repeats this question, it is clear that Hamlet believes they are, in actuality, fighting over the performance of grief,

Woot weep, woot fight, woot fast, woot tear thyself,

Woot drink up easel, eat a crocodile?

I'll do't. Dost thou come here to whine,

To outface me with leaping in her grave?

Be buried quick with her, and so will I.

...

Nay, an thou'lt mouth,

I'll rant as well as thou.

(5.1.260-64, 68-69)

Hamlet details all of the elements of the lament, from weeping to self-flagellation in his escalating display of sorrow over Ophelia. Michael Neill has argued that in this scene, Hamlet recognizes that “there is nothing to be *done* for the dead: we can no more sate their importunate desire for love than they can answer our impertinent questions about death.”<sup>77</sup> However, it appears as though the opposite is true. This violent and profoundly competitive lamentation is *for* Ophelia and ultimately King Hamlet and Polonius, and unlike his competitive display of anguish with Gertrude, Hamlet believes he has found his equal in Laertes’ masculine lament. Instead of simply remembering, of keeping his

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<sup>77</sup> See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997) pg. 256.

lamentation within himself, Hamlet erupts in an explosive display of grief that not only calls for a response, but blatantly challenges the attempts of Claudius and the Priest to reform the grieving process, to remove any ritualistic or ceremonious lingering over the dead. As his claims to grief increase to a level of absurdity in boasts about eating reptiles and drinking vinegar, so too do his attempts to engage a response from Laertes. Yet strikingly, Laertes remains silent in this exchange, undoubtedly restraining his grief as Claudius commanded, his thoughts trained on the preconceived act of revenge he will soon perform. In this moment, Shakespeare stages the masculine lament, not to condemn it, but to reveal the unbridled power of such performances, as Jennifer Vaught has suggested, “Weeping and wailing and other demonstrations of excessive emotion often function as sources of power for men in early modern English literature.”<sup>78</sup> As Hamlet calls out to Laertes, he insists that one must act on such displays of grief. It is one thing to cry out in anguish (or inwardly lament), but you must be willing to act on such emotion in order for it to be legitimate. Though both men have been told or recognize that such behavior is typically viewed as effeminate, their competition transforms this traditionally feminine display of grief into an acceptable masculine response, a notion that is furthered in the following scene, as their competition is transferred to the court and takes the form of a fencing match. Indeed, it is here that Laertes’ claim to grief finally answers the prince, and his lamentation finds finality and resolution in murderous revenge.

Hamlet’s lament also finds its end and though his grief has been questioned and called effeminate, he is ultimately held as an example of masculinity. As Fortinbras takes the stage he proclaims, in the words that end the play,

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<sup>78</sup> See Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pg. 1.



Let four captains  
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have proved most royally; and for his passage,  
The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
Speak loudly for him.  
Take up the body. Such a sight as this  
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.  
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

(5.2.339-347)

In the end, Hamlet's masculine lament is valorized, as the prince is praised in the same manner that accompanied his father's military achievements. If we remember back to the beginning of the play, on the dark, cold battlements of castle Elsinore in the early morning hours, the soldiers performed a type of lament of their own, remembering the King through his martial successes. Indeed, it was their communal act of remembering, of keeping the King at the forefront of their minds, that appeased his spirit and set the stage for the grief and remembering of prince Hamlet. Here, at the end of the play, after much lamenting, Hamlet is treated in a near identical manner. The rites performed for the prince are the rites of war, and while Protestant reformers had attempted to revise the burial service, to divorce the living and the dead as a way to combat excessive displays of emotion, the prince is treated to a ritualistic ceremony that confirms not only his masculinity, but his lament.

## Chapter Five: *King Lear* and the Interiority of Masculine Grief

The grief of the head is the grief of griefs.

- English Renaissance proverb

For I have heard my grandsire say full oft,  
Extremity of griefs would make men mad,  
And I have read that Hecuba of Troy  
Ran mad for sorrow.

- *Titus Andronicus* 4.1.18-21<sup>1</sup>

In his poem “On my first sonne,” Ben Jonson articulates and attempts to come to terms with the profound grief occasioned by the death of his seven year old boy. Addressing the child directly, Jonson’s response is focused and precise as he explains, “My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy. / Seven years thou wert lent to me, and thee I pay, / Exacted by thy fate, on the just day” (2-4).<sup>2</sup> The poem’s language of grief is logical and rational, with words such as “lent,” “pay,” “exacted,” and “just” conveying a sense of monetary exchange, as if the child was a piece of property leased according to clearly defined terms. We might expect such a calculated response from the man who, in the poem “Of death,” writes, “He that fears death, or mourns it, in the just, / Shows of the resurrection little trust.” Jonson takes solace in the fact that the death of his son occurred according to fate, “on the just day.” He then shifts focus and wonders why “Will man lament the state he should envy? / To have so soon ‘scaped world’s and flesh’s rage, / And, if no other misery, yet age?” (6-8). By tempering sadness with hopeful happiness,

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<sup>1</sup> Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1950), pg. 279 and *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: Norton, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations of Ben Jonson’s poems are taken from *The Complete Poems*, Ed. George Parfitt (New York and London: Penguin, 1996)

death becomes not only a predetermined fate, but a reprieve from the torments of the world and the indignities of aging.

Despite the apparent logic of Jonson's reasoning, these claims ultimately rest uneasily within the poem. For buried between the two major arguments—that death is inevitable and that it is a consummation devoutly to be wished—is a single exclamation. Though he takes great pains to detail his cerebral consolations and reveal the degree to which excessive emotion can be divorced from the grieving process, the poet's own response turns emotional, if only briefly. Belying his carefully constructed stoic exterior, Jonson exclaims, "O, could I lose all father now!" (5). Sorrow over his son's death is so powerful that it nearly causes him to relinquish any thought of fatherhood so as to avoid the future agony of losing another child. At the same time, the exclamation hints at Renaissance anxieties regarding appropriate responses to loss and masculine behavior, for as Jonson contemplates forsaking fatherhood he also considers abandoning the masculinity inherent in such a role.<sup>3</sup> And so the poem that endeavors to negotiate the unspeakable loss of a child by situating itself in the masculine world of commerce rests precariously on the edge, tipping towards the outpouring of emotion Jonson so thoroughly denounces. The poet quickly rights himself, returning to the masculine act of writing by claiming the deceased child as "Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry," but the intense, if momentary outburst undermines any attempt to rationalize the emotional

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<sup>3</sup> The key to this passage exists in the ambiguity of the word "lose" which can be understood both in the modern sense of failing to maintain or keep, as well as to abandon. Editors have attempted to draw attention to this important discrepancy in a variety of ways. In the collections edited by George Parfitt and John P. Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin, a footnote is provided to point to the multiplicity of meanings, while H.R. Woudhuysen renders the line with "loose" instead of "lose." See *Seventeenth-Century British Poetry, 1603-1660* Eds. John P. Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin (New York and London: Norton, 2006) and *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse, 1509-1659* Ed. H.R. Woudhuysen (London and New York: Penguin, 2005)

impact of death, and suggests that grief always exists just below the surface, looking to emerge.

It is fitting to begin a discussion of masculine performances of grief in Shakespeare's *King Lear* with "On my first sonne" as the works are roughly contemporary and reflect the simultaneous contemplation of fatherhood and grief by rival playwrights. While away from London in 1603, Jonson's son Benjamin died of the plague and the resultant poem's suggestion that grief can shake a father's hold on masculinity is especially germane to *King Lear*, a play that has recently received an abundance of critical attention with regards to its depiction of gender. Bruce Smith begins his study *Shakespeare and Masculinity* with a discussion of the figure of Lear and a number of other scholars have found the play full of the many Renaissance concerns regarding the male body.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore necessary to turn to the play, one that might also be called Shakespeare's most profound and mature meditation on grief, to see how the playwright combines and reshapes performances of masculinity and lamentation. Like each of the other works discussed in this study, *King Lear* represents a shift in the performance of the lament on the stage, a shift that builds upon each of the representations that has come before it. While the behavior of characters in the drama of the Middle Ages and the works of Marlowe reflects an awareness of the performance of grief and those in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet* perform actual lamentations, elements of the lament become ingrained within the very structure of *King Lear*,

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<sup>4</sup> See Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 2000), pg. 1. See also Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992) and Coppelia Kahn "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 33-49.

pervading the verbal fabric of the play. Taking his cue from the interior sorrow of Hieronimo and Hamlet, Shakespeare initially fashions Lear's grief as the product of the physical and mental changes experienced by the early modern man as he approached death. These internal changes ultimately contribute to the tragedy of the opening act, which in turn propels Lear into an extended contemplation of his losses. Drawing on Renaissance understandings of grief as a cause of numerous mental disorders, it then becomes clear that Lear's madness is both a product of his age as well as his grief, and his corresponding behavior, which partakes in the tradition of the lament, reflects the playwright's extended contemplation of the power of sorrow on one's mind.

As we have seen throughout this study and most recently from Jonson's poems, the appropriate masculine response to death in medieval and Renaissance England was the careful and thoughtful recollection of Christ's death and resurrection. While women typically give way to emotional outpourings, men are required to observe the loss with rational detachment, always remembering the promise of salvation. In the preceding chapter on *Hamlet*, we witnessed the extent to which this is the case in Claudius' varied attempts to persuade the prince to give up his "obstinate condolment" (1.2.93). Echoing the sentiments of Renaissance writers as diverse as Martyr, Montaigne, and Erasmus, Claudius' encouragement centers on the belief that it is necessary for Hamlet to act and *think* like a man—to grieve excessively was to do just the opposite. *King Lear* takes up these same issues and develops them, as the play is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between one's mental state, grief, and masculinity. The madness into which the king quickly slips is unlike Hieronimo's controlled madness or put on like Hamlet's

“antic disposition.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, Lear’s mental instability is the product of age in combination with sorrow over the loss of Cordelia. While the aforementioned characters are able to manipulate their grief into acts of vengeance, Lear is unable to do more than rage about his losses in a flurry of incoherency. Indeed, the play is profoundly interested in the way grief works upon the mind, and how this inner turmoil ultimately finds its way out, much in the same way that Jonson’s exclamation ruptures any attempt at rationalizing death in “On my first sonne.”

In the lines that open the play, Kent wonders to Gloucester, “I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall” (1.1.1-2), throwing Lear’s mental state into question.<sup>6</sup> Though we know nothing else of the king, these first lines hint at what is to follow and, after Lear banishes the loyal Kent and disowns his favorite daughter in the span of two hundred lines, we are provided with an extended glimpse into his mind. Reflecting on the recent events that have left the kingdom of Britain shaken and divided in half, the king’s eldest daughters attempt to explain this sudden outburst of emotion. Claiming their father’s behavior is a product of his age, Goneril remarks, “You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little:” (1.1.287-88). In response, Regan complicates her sister’s diagnosis by emphasizing that this type of performance is not new, “’Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (1.1.291-92). While age is partly responsible

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously, Hieronimo’s grief is not “controlled” in the sense that it carefully maintained. There is any number of instances within the play where the opposite is true. However, Hieronimo is able to start and stop his expressions of grief in accordance to the situation, something that is certainly not the case with Lear.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations from *King Lear* and other Shakespeare plays are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al, (London and New York: W.W. Norton, 2008). For ease of reading, I have chosen the conflated edition of the play.

for the sudden and violent wrath of the king, Regan's suggestion that Lear's grasp of himself has never been entirely sound adds another dimension to the outburst that dominates the opening scene of the play. Goneril agrees with her sister's assessment, noting, "The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash;" but she returns once again to their father's age, persisting, "then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them" (1.1.293-97). Both daughters note a tendency in their father for impetuous acts, but the repeated foregrounding of age, which they believe will make the "long-engrafted condition" worse, factors prominently in how we must consider Lear's mental stability.

The play's focus on Lear's behavior and the corresponding suggestion it is a result of aging highlights Renaissance England's conception of the male body in the later stages of life. In his aforementioned study, Bruce Smith contends that "Early modern masculinity cannot be considered apart from time," and reveals how Ptolemaic astrology, Aristotelian biology, Galenic medicine, and Christian theology all influenced early modern thinking about the subject, thereby contributing to the conception of man's life as a series of ages.<sup>7</sup> This notion clearly captured Shakespeare's imagination, particularly in the middle of his career, as he engaged with these ideals to great effect in both *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, two plays that immediately precede the tragedies. Jacques' famous observation, for instance, that "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players" with "acts being seven ages" (2.7.138-39, 142) incorporates elements of Ptolemaic astrology, a model wherein the seven planets and their

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<sup>7</sup> See Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, pgs. 67 and 69, emphasis in the original.

corresponding mythical qualities are mapped onto the course of human life.<sup>8</sup> According to this structure, youth is symbolized by the planets closest to the earth. Jupiter, in its position as second furthest from the earth, represents manhood, characterized by anger and ferocity. Saturn, the last planet, represents old age, a point “which both body and soul decline into querulous weakness,” and is therefore characterized by heaviness and gravity.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in *Twelfth Night*, when Feste sings of life in four stages, he displays a fluency with the Galenic model where the body’s four humors correspond to life’s four phases. Old age is linked to the humor phlegm, whose element and season are water and winter, and is characterized by being cold and moist. The combination of the Ptolemaic and Galenic models ultimately influenced Renaissance constructions of manhood and masculinity; as Smith reveals, “it was the two schemes in combination that gave early modern men such an acute sense of the changeableness of their bodies and their dispositions across time.”<sup>10</sup> By attributing their father’s recent actions to age, Goneril and Regan partake in a tradition where aging men are believed to grow progressively less stable, something Regan reiterates when she observes, “Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent’s banishment” (1.1.298-99). What is so troubling about Lear’s recent outburst is that such behavior will not only continue, but increase in frequency and intensity over time as the king continues to age.

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<sup>8</sup> The influence of this idea extends well beyond the Renaissance, as Jonathan Bate’s *Soul of an Age* maps Jacques’ seven stages onto the life of Shakespeare, though Stephen Greenblatt’s subsequent review of the work in the *New York Review of Books* notes how such a formulation is ill-fitting.

<sup>9</sup> See J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pg. 54. See also Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, pg. 72.

<sup>10</sup> See Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, pg. 72. For an extended discussion of the early modern structure of human life, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice*. (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), pgs. 97-114.



In his *History of the World*, Sir Walter Raleigh endeavors to explain the physical and mental changes man undergoes over the course of his life. In a sub-section titled “That man is (as it were) a little world: with a digression touching our mortalitie,” Raleigh displays an acute awareness of both the Ptolemaic and Galenic models and provides a detailed overview of his theory of man’s life, explaining, “In this also is the little world of man compared, and made more like the Vniuersall (man being the measure of all things; *Homo est mensura omnium rerum*, saith *Aristotle* and *Pythagoras*) that the foure complexions resemble the foure Elements, and the seuen Ages of man the seuen Planets.”<sup>11</sup> Most remarkable about Raleigh’s conflation of Ptolemaic and Galenic thought is his “digression”—an extended examination of the effects of aging. After briefly linking each of the early stages of life to their corresponding planets, Raleigh describes the final two ages of man:

the sixth age is ascribed to *Iupiter*, in which we begin to take accompt of our times, iudge our selues, and grow to the same perfection of our vnderstanding; the last and seuenth to *Saturne*, wherein our dayes are sad and ouer-cast, and in which wee finde by deere and lamentable experience, and by the losse which can neuer be repaired, that of all our vaine passions, and affections past, the sorrow onely abideth:<sup>12</sup>

It is telling that in a discussion concerning the entire span of man’s life Raleigh focuses so intently on the end, concluding his examination with a particularly *Lear*-like sentiment, “so is it with the life of man, which is alwaies either encreasing towards

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<sup>11</sup> See Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, Ed. C.A. Patrides (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), pg. 127.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pg. 128

ripeness and perfection, or declining and decreasing towards rottenness and dissolution.”<sup>13</sup> The description of the age of Saturn is deeply pessimistic, characterized by “sad and over-cast” days filled with grief over man’s “lamentable experience” which ultimately lead to the final conclusion that “sorrow only abideth.” While the age of Jupiter is a moment of reflection on the past, where man takes account of his life, his final stage is distinguished by the grief-filled recognition that joy and happiness are lost forever, giving way to bitterness and despair.

The sustained focus on death in the description of old age is reminiscent of Lear’s confession in the opening scene of the play. Revealing the “darker purpose” of his love test, Lear explains he has divided his kingdom in thirds so that he may “shake all cares and business from our age, / Conferring them to younger strengths, while we / Unburthened crawl toward death” (1.2.37-39). Preparation for the end is the impetus behind the act that ultimately causes the unraveling of his family and kingdom. When Kent attempts to reason with him following the disowning of Cordelia, it becomes clear how much death weighs on the king’s mind as he exclaims, “So be my grave my peace, as here I give / Her father’s heart from her” (1.1.125). Lear’s focus on dying permeates his thoughts to such a degree that it infiltrates the mild oath he makes to convey his displeasure with his youngest daughter. With Raleigh’s description of the final age of man’s life in mind, the violence with which Lear reacts to Cordelia’s refusal begins to come into focus. As Raleigh continues to detail the age of Saturn, he further explains the psychic impact of such a time on man:

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<sup>13</sup> See Raleigh, pg. 129. These lines are hauntingly similar to Edgar’s words to his father, “Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither; / Ripeness is all.” (5.2.9-11)

In this time it is when (as aforesaid) we, for the most part, and neuer before, prepare for our eternall habitation, which we passe on vnto, with many sighes, grones, and sad thoughts, and in the end, by the workemanship of death, finish sorrowfull businesse of a wretched life, towards which we always trauaile both sleeping and waking:<sup>14</sup>

Raleigh's belief that it is in this stage that man seriously contemplates his mortality for the first time helps to clarify the belief that Saturn is an age of profound sorrow where man goes to his death expressing "sighes, grones, and sad thoughts." In medieval and Renaissance England, old age was hardly a common occurrence, with most men typically dying in their "prime," between the ages of twenty-five and forty. With this in mind, it is not much wonder why Raleigh sees the period of Saturn as filled with sadness and expressions of grief and sorrow.<sup>15</sup> Despite the prevalence of the late medieval *Dance of Death*, which reminded men that their lives could end at any moment, men of the Renaissance were ill equipped to deal with the slow arrival of their mortality, as death typically struck quickly through illness or some other untimely tragedy. Raleigh's description of death marks a distinct departure from the advice of the English *ars moriendi* and the morality plays, as well as the work of Protestant reformers like Peter Martyr. While these earlier works attempted to portray dying as something one can and should prepare for, Raleigh suggests that man is more likely to experience the moment of death through the sins of impatience and despair, railing against the end in acts of excessive emotion. As we have seen throughout the earlier chapters of this study,

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<sup>14</sup> See Raleigh, pg. 128.

<sup>15</sup> For more on life expectancy in Renaissance England, see Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1989), pg. 69 and Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Longman, 1984) pgs. 202, 217-18.

Renaissance writers were endlessly worried about the maintenance of English masculinity and encouraged men to enter into death with what Faustus terms “manly fortitude.” Yet this description of the final age of man, with its expansion and development of early modern concepts of the male body, suggests that older men like Lear were more apt to become emotional and allow excessive displays of grief to govern their last months and years on earth.

Despite recognizing that age and disposition have coalesced to play a significant role in her father’s erratic behavior, Goneril nevertheless attempts to appeal to his reason. After listening to her numerous complaints regarding his fool and unruly knights, Lear wonders if Goneril really is his daughter, implying that such unkind behavior surely would not come from his own child. Chiding her father for what she sees as the inherent foolishness of such a comment, Goneril encourages the king to:

make use of that good wisdom,  
Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away  
These dispositions, that of late transform you  
From what you rightly are.

(1.4.195-98)

Even after agreeing with Regan that their father’s mind is in a state of decline, Goneril insists that Lear is in possession of “good wisdom” and can, in some way, control the behavior that has of late transformed him. Present in Goneril’s upbraiding of her father is the belief that the recent actions of the king have markedly changed him, moving Lear further away from his proper identity—a claim that has nothing to do with the former role of king. Rather, embedded in this reprimand is a request that Lear act like a man—

rational and reasonable—and put off what she considers foolish affectations and excessively emotional displays. When this request fails to register, prompting instead another question regarding Goneril’s identity, the eldest daughter becomes more explicit, arguing, “As you are old and reverend, you should be wise” (1.4.215). Initially claiming to understand the impact of aging on her father, Goneril’s reliance on appeals to Lear’s wisdom reflect a failure to truly grasp the full extent of the mental and physical strain experienced by early modern men in the later stages of life. When Lear eventually leaves Goneril for Regan, his second daughter makes the same argument, but she comes closer to the issue, stating, “O, sir, you are old; / Nature in you stands on the very verge / Of her confine” (2.4.139-41). Recognizing that Lear is on the very edge of death, Regan suggests he should be ruled “By some discretion” (2.4.142), thus highlighting the tension surrounding the process of aging in Renaissance England. While the various theories concerning the final stages of man’s life suggested the elderly should behave in a certain manner according to their humors, the reality of impending death significantly complicated any neat boundaries or preconceived notions of the end.<sup>16</sup>

Goneril and Albany quickly discover the degree to which Lear has changed as he explodes with a number of insults, ranging from “degenerate bastard” to “detested kite”

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<sup>16</sup> The complexity of this issue is best left for another study, but it is worth noting that Gail Kern Paster has remarked that “In Galenic humoralism, old men were expected to be melancholy because the aging process lowered the body’s heat and evaporated its radical moisture, producing the coldness and dryness associated with the melancholic humor.” This seems to contradict the aforementioned early modern understanding of the four humors and their correspondence to the various stages of man, with old age linked to the humor phlegm, characterized by being moist and cold. Regardless of the exact humoral make up, the important thing to note, for the purposes of this study, is the reality of death and the corresponding emotions both confirm and challenge preconceived notions of old age. See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004), pgs. 138-39. For more on aging in Shakespeare more generally, see Maurice Charney, *Wrinkled Deep in Time: Aging in Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009) and Leo Salinger’s treatment of King Lear and Montaigne in *Dramatic Form in Shakespeare and the Jacobean* (Cambridge, Cambridge U P, 1986)

(1.4.229, 239). Calling for his retinue to make the necessary preparations to leave Goneril's ingratitude behind, Lear's anger begins to escalate as he ignores Albany's pleas for patience and endeavors to defend the quality of his knights.<sup>17</sup> As his defense progresses, however, Lear's thoughts take a strange turn. No longer reacting to the present indignities brought about by Goneril, he focuses instead on the past, remembering the loss of his banished Cordelia and cries out, "O most small fault, / How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!" (1.4.243-44). This exclamation, which marks the beginning of Lear's extended display of grief and subsequent descent into madness, is followed by a disturbing spectacle of physical violence as Lear strikes his head and laments, "O Lear, Lear, Lear! / Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in, (*striking his head*) / And thy dear judgment out!" (1.4.243-49). A number of the lament's characteristics are present in this moment, from the use of "O," what one scholar has termed a "performative phrase that conjures the spectacle of the body in an agony of mourning," to repetition and the act of self-flagellation.<sup>18</sup> It is fitting Lear's self-inflicted violence occurs on his head, especially when we consider the repeated focus on the king's wisdom or apparent lack thereof. While his elder daughters believe his age should have made him wise, Lear begins to recognize the extent of his mistake in banishing Cordelia. Coupled with the treatment he has received at the hands of Goneril, the unsettling act of striking his head signals that the anguish the king feels over his errors resonates within his mind.

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<sup>17</sup> Calls for patience repeatedly appear throughout the course of the play, directed either at the king or espoused by Lear himself. It would be interesting to trace the degree to which this focus serves as reinterpretation of the English *ars moriendi* tradition.

<sup>18</sup> See Linda M. Austin, "The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53.3 (1998), pg. 283.

The beginning of Lear's lamentation and attendant emotion clearly troubles Albany, who professes ignorance "Of what hath moved you" (1.4.251). Albany's inability to comprehend the behavior he witnesses in Lear reiterates the belief common in Renaissance England that men should be governed by rational thought and not emotion. Yet Albany's inquiry hardly slows Lear down, and as his expressions of anger continue, other elements of the lament begin to surface. Turning his attention to his eldest daughter, Lear exclaims,

Hear, Nature, hear! Dear goddess, hear!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend  
To make this creature fruitful!  
Into her womb convey sterility!  
Dry up in her the organs of increase;  
And from her derogate body never spring  
A babe to honor her!

(1.4.252-58)

The repetition and exclamations in this passage continue to draw on the tradition of the lament and the call to "Dear goddess" Nature is not unlike the responses of Aeneas, Faustus, Hieronimo, and Hamlet who similarly call upon the heavens for aid in their moments of grief. In her work on the poetic conventions of laments, Katharine Goodland has noted, "A number of poetic conceits stress the idea that the shrieks of women reach the heavens... In the Greek tradition, the women's cries resound through the natural and supernatural realms. Similarly, in medieval English drama, women's curses and wails

reach the heavens.”<sup>19</sup> While Hieronimo and Hamlet use the act of revenge to assuage the anguish of their grief, Lear employs a curse, calling on Nature to render Goneril unable to perform her role as a woman.<sup>20</sup> In essence, Lear’s curse functions as the call for revenge often invoked by lamenting women. Having given up his crown, Lear is unable to do more than rage at his daughter and so he must look to the heavens for whatever justice he seeks. While the grieving woman uses the lamentation to precipitate vengeance in the case of wrongful death, Lear’s curse functions as a preemptive act of revenge, in that by asking Nature to deprive his daughter of the ability to procreate, the king hopes to erase any possible joy she might derive from being a mother, while simultaneously rendering her empty and useless in her marriage.<sup>21</sup> Despite claiming ignorance of the situation, Albany falls within the range of Lear’s curse, which continues to expand as his lament begins to escalate,

If she must teem,  
  
Create her child of spleen, that it may live  
  
And be a thwart, disnatured torment to her!  
  
Let it tamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;  
  
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;  
  
Turn all her mother’s pains and benefits  
  
To laughter and contempt,

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<sup>19</sup> See Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pg. 17.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the curse as a part of lamentations, see Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1974), pgs. 178-79.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the complicated and somewhat violent relationship between Lear and his daughters, as well as the play’s larger representation of women, see Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare’s Drama* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985)



(1.4.258-64)

As his curse builds in intensity, Lear's perception of his relationship with Goneril comes into focus. The child he wishes upon his daughter will be a cause of profound and extended grief, producing many of the same emotions and physical responses we have just seen from Lear. The "child of spleen" he envisions will be a source of sorrow, causing premature aging and an abundance of tears which will etch deep wrinkles on her face. Perhaps the most striking image in this curse, however, is the reiteration of physical violence. Goneril has just witnessed her father strike his head in a moment of extreme grief and as Lear finishes his curse, he claims to long for his daughter to feel "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child" (1.4.65-66). In this second section of his curse, where Lear wishes for his daughter to have children who give her cause to lament, we are provided with a full range of expressions of grief. The belief that Goneril's ingratitude causes a type of physical pain, which in turn causes a physical reaction, is an important part of a play where images of piercing and self-mutilation abound. Yet what is so remarkable in the initial lament is the how the grief Lear experiences occupies both a physical place as well as a mental space. Indeed, Goneril's treatment of her father clearly causes a physical reaction, but as Lear responds, his emotions begin to play upon his mind, echoing the epigraphs with which this essay began. It is also important to note the degree to which Lear's curse is a profoundly mental exercise. The intense imagery he employs, which visualizes the physical impact of this lamentable child of spleen, situates Lear's lamentation within his mind at the same time it appears in his physical acts.

After the extended expressions of grief over the various wrongs he believes Goneril has committed, Lear sends the disguised Kent off to Gloucester with letters for his second daughter. Alone on the stage, the Fool mocks Lear in a series of jokes that play on the king's lack of wisdom, returning the focus to Lear's mental state. Not only does this scene provide a slight reprieve from the intensity of emotion that preceded it, but the apparent calm in Lear reveals the degree to which his outpouring of emotion has served as a cathartic experience. As we saw in the discussion of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the lament's ability to draw out and release unpleasant emotions is similar to Aristotle's theory of the catharsis, and Angela Bourke has noted the connection between the two, seeing lamenting women as "tragic actors" whose performance of grief "provide[s] a catharsis for everyone who witnessed her performance."<sup>22</sup> The rage Lear directed at his daughter, replete with a variety of elements of the lament, leaves Lear with the mental space to begin reflecting on his current situation, and buried amidst the fool's foolishness we begin to see king's mind at work. Recognizing his mistake, Lear reflects, "I did her wrong—" and a few lines later, he echoes Jonson's expression of grief over the loss of a child, exclaiming, "I will forget my nature. So kind a father! (1.5.20, 27). The connections between masculinity, expressions of grief, and madness come into focus in the king's last lines of the act, as Lear addresses the heavens in much the same way as he did when cursing Goneril. Responding to the Fool's observation that "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise," Lear prays, "O, let me not be mad, not mad sweet heaven! / Keep me in temper; I would not be mad! (1.5.37-39). The exclamation to

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<sup>22</sup> See Angela Bourke "More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women's Lament Poetry" *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture* Ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993), p. 165.

the heavens and repetition situates these lines as participating in the emotional responses that have come before, and Lear's tempestuous mental state, even in moments of quiet, is revealed through such lines. Though we are unable to see or feel what is occurring within the king's mind at this moment, these lines, which follow a reflection on his recent actions and concerns over his manhood, suggest that Lear is contemplating the impact of the recent emotional anguish caused by both Cordelia and Goneril. What is striking about Lear's prayer is the degree to which it challenges his daughters' portrayal of him as a man that "hath ever but slenderly known himself," and yet the pleading desperation inherent in this self-reflection, suggests that it may be too late for the king and his mind.

The opening act of *King Lear* works relentlessly to foreground the connection between the king's mind and the ways in which the instability Goneril and Regan note manifests itself in rash and violent behavior. Medieval and Renaissance theories of the aging male body inevitably contributed to this construction, and Raleigh's revision of the Ptolemaic and Galenic models in his depiction of the later stages of life reflect contemporary views of what occurs within the male body and mind at these times. As the play progresses and Lear makes a number of attempts at self-diagnosis, recognizing that he is moving closer to madness, the depiction of the king takes on new dimensions. In her study on madness and gender in early modern culture, Carol Thomas Neely has persuasively shown how madness operates within Shakespearean drama and Renaissance culture more broadly. Discussing Robert Burton's encyclopedic *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Neely notes, "'melancholy' becomes the umbrella term for all disorders involving the mind" and goes on to carefully delineate between "madness" and "distraction" which "denote excessive and often violent activity and behavior visible to others," while

“melancholy” indicates “torpor, passivity, and the inner emotions of fear and sorrow.”<sup>23</sup>

As Neely herself is quick to point out, these terms begin to overlap and this is nowhere more apparent than in Burton’s discussion of how sorrow can become a cause of melancholy.

At the beginning of his discussion regarding sorrow’s effect on the mind, Burton makes it immediately clear that in the early years of the seventeenth century, grief remained a powerful and deeply threatening emotion. Placing sorrow in a privileged position within his study, Burton claims, “In this Catalogue of Passions, which so much torment the Soule of man, and cause this malady (for I will briefly speak of them all, and in their order) the first place in the Irrascible Appetite, may justly be challenged by *Sorrow*.” The reason for such respect exists partly in Burton’s belief that sorrow is the “inseparable companion” of melancholy, that the two “beget one another and tread in a ring, for Sorrow is both Cause and Symptome of this disease.” Starting with sorrow as a symptom, which as Neely has shown consists of all “disorders involving the mind,” Burton reveals its wide ranging mental and physical impacts, labeling grief “a cause of madnesse, a cause of many other diseases.”<sup>24</sup> He then turns to the sixteenth century physician Felix Platter who argues that if sorrow “take root once it ends in despaire.”<sup>25</sup> In Burton’s study, grief maintains a prominent role in the diagnosis of a number of ailments that impact not only the physical world, but also the spiritual.

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<sup>23</sup> See Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 2004), pg. 4. See also Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholy: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 1992), pg. 35.

<sup>24</sup> See Burton, pg. 256.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pgs. 256-57.

After somewhat vaguely noting that sorrow causes a number of illnesses, Burton turns to early church father Chrysostome for a rather poetic description of man's experience with sorrow:

a cruell torture of the soule, a most inexplicable griefe, a poisoned worme, consuming body and soule, and gnawing the very heart, a perpetuall executioner, continuall night, profound darknesse, a whirlwinde, a tempest, an ague not appearing heating worse then any fyre, and a battle that hath no end: It crucifies worse than any Tyrant, no torture, no strappado, no bodily punishment is like unto it.<sup>26</sup>

The description of grief via the natural world is an important development, one we will return to later in discussing Lear's experience on the heath. Equally intriguing, however, is the continued insistence that grief is a type of emotional and physical torment that has no parallel. In the hyperbolic passage Burton has selected from Chrysostome, the torture methods that pale in comparison to sorrow are intensely physical forms of torment, furthering the link between the emotion and the physical world. Indeed, as Burton develops his exploration of sorrow, it becomes increasingly clear that the scholar is working to situate melancholy, an abstraction that exists within the mind, in the concrete world of its effects on the human body. As the passage develops, the extent to which Burton is grappling with both is evident when he calls grief "a domineering passion: as in old *Rome*, when the *Dictator* was created, all inferiour magistracies ceased; when griefe appears all other passions vanish." Once again, sorrow's status as the chief cause of melancholy is reiterated, and Burton's use of the simile, which ultimately crowns grief

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<sup>26</sup> See Burton, pg. 257.

the dictator of all the other passions, attempts to make the anguish of grief palpable to his readers.

This emphasis is continued throughout the remainder of the passage, as Burton turns his attention to the physical toll grief takes on man. While the first part of the subsection is interested in situating grief within the larger debate concerning the cause and symptoms of melancholy, the last half is interested in how sorrow manifests itself. After quoting Solomon, who notes that sorrow “dries up the bones,” Burton continues to describe the effect on the appearance of the grieving, “makes them hollow-eyed, pale & leane, furrow faced, to have dead looks, wrinkled browes, riveled cheeks, dry bodies, and quite perverts their temperature that are misaffected with it.” The physical attributes of those plagued by sorrow are similar to those we might expect of the aged and in her work on the early modern emotions and the Shakespearean stage, Gail Kern Paster notes, “In Galenic humoralism, old men were expected to be melancholy because the aging process lowered the body’s heat and evaporated its radical moisture, producing the coldness and dryness associated with the melancholic humor.”<sup>27</sup> This link between old age and grief is reminiscent of what we’ve seen in *The History of the World* and as the passage continues, Burton’s description comes eerily close to Raleigh’s portrayal of the final ages of man:

It hinders concoction, refrigerates the heart, takes away stomacke, colour, and sleepe; thickens the blood contaminates the spirits Overthrowes the naturall heat, perverts the good estate of body and minde, and makes them

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<sup>27</sup> See Paster, *Humoring the Body*, pgs. 138-39.

weary of their lives, cry out, howle and roare for very anguish of their  
soules.<sup>28</sup>

Not only are there a number of physical changes that occur to those plagued by sorrow, but these changes ultimately impact one's mind, causing a type of despair that manifests itself in the behavior of the lament. Indeed, as Burton draws his examination of the connection between sorrow and melancholy to a close, he explicitly points to two famous lamenting women of antiquity, claiming, "Why was *Hecuba* said to be turned to a Dogge? *Niobe* into stone? But that for grieffe she was senselesse and stupid."<sup>29</sup> It is remarkable that Burton ends his discussion with an allusion to Niobe and Hecuba, emphasizing how the sorrow of these women turned them mad. Burton clearly saw a connection between grief and madness, as he noted at the onset of his discussion of sorrow and melancholy, and the lamentation often served as a physical marker for intense internal anguish. Later in his study, in a section titled "*Against Sorrow for the Death of Friends or otherwise, vain Fear, &c*" Burton comments on such expressions of grief in much the same way as Protestant reformers like Martyr. Commenting directly on the lament, Burton writes, "at the loss of a dear friend they will cry out, roar, tear their hair, lamenting some months after, howling 'O Hone,' as those Irish women and Greeks at their graves, commit many indecent actions, and almost go beside themselves."<sup>30</sup> Many

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<sup>28</sup> Burton, pg. 257.

<sup>29</sup> Burton, pg. 258. The idea of Hecuba as a dog comes from Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 30, lines 16-21: "Hecuba—mourning, wretched, and a slave— / having seen Polyxena sacrificed, / and Polydorus dead without a grave; / lost and alone, beside an alien sea, / began to bark and growl like a dog / in the mad seizure of her misery." Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, Trans. John Ciardi. (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1956)

<sup>30</sup> See Burton, pg. 306. Throughout *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton discusses the lament and excessive displays of grief at length, often condemning such performances with the same force of the Protestant reformers. G.W. Pigman has argued that "By the first decades of the seventeenth century total condemnation of mourning entirely disappears from the moral and theological tracts, while increasingly

of the fears over the performance of the lament are present, but the suggestion that those who grieve excessively “almost go beside themselves” confirms Burton’s view that excessive grief can lead to madness, which often relayed through the physical act of lamentation.

Throughout his career, Shakespeare was clearly interested in exploring the ramifications of grief on one’s body and mind and how expressions of sorrow are necessary as a type of emotional release. The belief that “Grief pent up will break the heart” was proverbial in Renaissance England and Shakespeare repeatedly employed this sentiment and various iterations in his plays.<sup>31</sup> We see this as early as *Titus Andronicus*, where upon finding his niece raped and mutilated, Marcus cries out, “Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped, / Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is” (2.4.36-37). For Marcus, one must give sorrow expression; otherwise there are negative internal consequences. Much later, after working at length on teasing out the implications of giving voice to one’s grief in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare returns to this notion in *Macbeth*. In a passage that often gets buried beneath the supernatural happenings, Ross informs Macduff that his wife and children have been “savagely slaughtered.” Malcolm turns to the Thane of Fife and vigorously encourages an outward expression of grief,

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more tolerant conceptions of moderation take its place.” This observation is ultimately important for his larger arguments concerning the Renaissance elegy, but as Burton makes clear, concern over the lament continued into the seventeenth century and the fact that *The Anatomy* went through eight editions in the seventeenth century begins to reveal the extent to which attitudes concerning the lament lingered long after the Reformation. See G.W. Pigman III *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pg. 2. See also J.B. Bamforth, “Robert Burton” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009)

<sup>31</sup> See Tilley’s Proverbs pg. 276. While the two quotes mentioned above deal specifically with grief over the loss of life, Shakespeare also uses this sentiment in discussion of love, specifically in *Venus and Adonis* and *Twelfth Night*. As I will argue in a larger study, the lament comes to the Renaissance via the presence of lovesickness in the romances of the Middle Ages and lingering elements appear in the comedies and elsewhere.



commanding, “What, man, ne’er pull your hat upon your brows. / Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak / Whispers the o’erfraught heart and bids it break” (4.3.20-11). For the grieving men of *Titus Andronicus* and *Macbeth*, expressions of sorrow provide an outlet for excessive emotion, which in turn allows for the careful plotting and carrying out of revenge. In *King Lear*, however, Shakespeare takes a different line of inquiry, focusing instead on grief that is unable to find an appropriate end.

The intensity of inward grief becomes most apparent during the arrival at Gloucester’s house. After hearing Kent’s side of the story, wherein Lear’s newly acquired servant confesses to having “more man than wit about me,” the Fool astutely points out that the king “shalt have as many dolours for thy daughters as thou canst tell in a year” (2.4.41, 52-53). This observation, coupled with the humiliation of having his servant stocked, triggers a profoundly physical change within the king. In another moment of self-diagnosis, the king cries out, “O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / *Hysterica passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element’s below!” (2.4.54-56). Scholars have long debated the significance of this passage, with Kaara L. Peterson’s recent essay re-examining these lines within the context of early modern medicine and current editorial practices. Arguing that Lear does not actually suffer from *hysteria passio*, Peterson claims, “Lear’s *hysterica* has thus far escaped historicizing, at least of any rigorous kind” and works to provide an accurate historical definition of the disease.<sup>32</sup> Noting that the disease’s symptoms include impeded breathing, which leads to feelings of suffocation and in turn hysterical fits, she notes, “hysterical ailments were thought to

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<sup>32</sup> See Kaara L. Peterson, “*Historica Passio*: Early Modern Medicine, *King Lear*, and Editorial Practice.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57.1 (Spring 2006), pgs. 1-22 and Alan Walworth, “Cinema *Hysterica Passio*: Voice and Gaze in Jean-Luc Godard’s *King Lear*.” *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, Eds. Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson U P, 2002), pgs. 59-67.

originate in the hystera, or uterus, and could not afflict male subjects, despite the occasional appearance of the term ‘womb’ in descriptions of men’s bodies.” In early modern medical texts the disease is clearly associated with women’s physiology, as Ludovic Mercatus’ *On the common conditions of women* and Nicholas Fontanus’ *The woman’s doctor* make clear.<sup>33</sup> And as Peterson’s argument develops, she posits the confusion is due to the mistranslation of key terms in Hippocratic texts, ultimately arguing, “*Hysteria passio* is one type of many potential hysterical diseases all related to possessing an unhealthy uterus; ‘the mother’ is thus simultaneously slang for this recognized condition and a name for the place where it occurs.”<sup>34</sup> Because Lear is not in possession of a uterus, it is impossible that he experiences *hysterica passio*, though his attempt to define the changes occurring in the moment further reveals the degree of his emotional and mental upheaval.

What is striking about the debate concerning Lear’s self-diagnosis is that he does not exhibit any of the actual symptoms of the disease. While Peterson’s argument is ultimately concerned with editorial practices, concluding that errors in the editing of Harsnett have contributed to an anachronistic reading of Shakespeare and hysteria, the key to this passage exists not in “the mother,” but in the word “sorrow.” The repeated attempts by scholars to link this passage to early modern medicine have divorced the passage from its context, failing to note its position within the play and in the character of the king himself. In the lines prior to the use of this term, Lear has been reminded by his

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<sup>33</sup> For excerpts that examine the *hysterica passio*, or hysteria of the womb, see Ludovic Mercatus “On the common conditions of women” and Nichols Fontanus “The woman’s doctor” in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England*, Ed. Kate Aughterson (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pgs. 53-54, 63-64.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson, “*Historica Passio*” pg. 4.

fool of the intense and prolonged grief caused by his daughters. In response, the king cries out to his “climbing sorrow,” commanding it to return “down” and stating “They element’s below!” Scholars of the play often fail to notice an entire line that follows this outburst, as Lear asks, “Where is this daughter?” returning his attention to the very thing that has caused him to cry out in the first place. Within this scene then, Lear is not commenting on his wandering womb, but expressing concern over the toll his grief, which is caused by his daughters, continues to take on his masculinity and in turn his mind.

In his study on this subject, Smith has noted this passage as being the moment in which the king “loses it,” and he builds an entire discussion of masculinity around this particular episode. Noting the early modern distinction made between the upper and lower parts of the male anatomy, Smith explains that while the lower half of the body was the seat of passion, “contaminated with the flesh, closer to the Devil” the upper part of the body was concerned with reason and intelligence, “closer to God and the angels.”<sup>35</sup> As he continues, Smith remarks, “In Lear’s own view, this division into upper and lower is also gendered: the heart that he calls ‘mine’ is threatened by ‘this mother’ from below. Lear’s loss of reason in the subsequent action can be seen, as the triumph of this female passion within, a loss of both masculine authority and masculine identity.”<sup>36</sup> This must be what is on Lear’s mind in his earlier exchange with Goneril when he exclaims,

Life and death! I am ashamed

That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus;

That these hot tears, which break from me perforce,

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<sup>35</sup> See Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> See Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, pgs. 1-2. See also Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, pg. 104.

Should make thee worth them. Blasts and fogs upon thee!

(1.4.273-76)

Profoundly troubled by his emotional response and what such behavior does to his masculinity, Lear feels shame, not only because of the tears he admits to shedding, but from the recognition that his manhood has been shaken by his daughter's cruelty. Though he ties this rupture to the tears that escape his eyes against his will, the fracture in his masculinity can be traced back through this entire outburst, even to the emotional display with which the play began. As his daughters noted, Lear has long been inclined to excessively emotional outbursts, and as we have seen, such behavior, with its reliance on emotion instead of reason, was typically expected from women. It is only when Lear begins to weep that he understands his behavior as neither appropriate nor manly, something he returns to as he contemplates the effeminating power of sorrow—grief so strong it can shake his manhood, prompting him to envision the visceral physical grief caused by his daughters to move around, like the wandering womb of the cases of *hysterica passio*. In other words, the theory of hysteria of the womb works as a metaphor to explain the inward grief he feels. As we have just seen, the king views expressions of sorrow as womanly, and the interior grief that has begun to work on him in the lower part of his body, the seat of passion, has begun to move upward, infiltrating the region of reason. Lear relates the feeling of the climbing sorrow to the outbursts of *hysterica passio*, though as in his plea to not go mad, the king attempts to control this emotion. In demanding that it remain below, within the realm of passionate emotion, Lear clearly feels the threat of his feminine grief encroaching on his masculinity.

The king's repeated struggle with the overwhelming power of grief is evident throughout the remainder of this scene. After Regan and Cornwall refuse to speak to him, Lear attempts reason, noting, "we are not ourselves / When nature, being oppressed, commands the mind / To suffer with the body. I'll forbear: (2.4.101-03). It is not surprising that Lear makes this observation, for it is the very thing he has been grappling with from the beginning of the play. The grief he feels, the product of his age and actions as well as the ills his daughters have committed against him, has caused a deeply physical emotion that has worked upon his mind. This surfaces once again as Gloucester leaves in an attempt to bring Cornwall and Regan to Lear and the king exclaims, "O me, my heart, my rising heart! but, down!" (2.4.115). Nearly identical to his lines regarding *hysterica passio*, Lear speaks of his grief in broader terms, echoing the proverbial sentiment common in Shakespeare's England regarding the effect of grief on one's heart. When Lear can take no more, he calls upon the heavens, much in the way he did when he first cursed Goneril and exclaims, "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need! / You see me here, you gods, a poor old man, / As full of grief as age; wretched in both!" (2.4.266-68). The linkages between grief and old age are made explicit in this moment, restating the observations made by Goneril and Regan, but this time placing them in the mouth and mind of the king. Lear sees himself as old, subject to dwelling on death, and the claim that both age and grief make him "wretched" situates them as equally contributing to his current mental state.

Despite asking the gods for the endurance to deal with his two daughters and their attempts to decrease his retinue to nothing, Lear's interest turns from patience to action. Once again expressing anxiety over his tears, he cries out, "And let not women's

weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man's cheeks!" (2.4.272-73). Unlike before, however, the king determines that he will not allow his daughters to bring forth an effeminate emotional response, and instead turns his thoughts to vengeance, cursing, "No, you unnatural hags, / I will have such revenges on you both, / That all the world shall—I will do such things—" (2.4.273-75). Though he appears concerned over shedding tears and their ability to dissolve his masculinity, Lear's emotional state begins to reflect the fissures his own daughters traced at the beginning of the play. Grief has consumed his mind to such a degree that he is unable to articulate his plans for vengeance, thus reflecting a deep mental strain that pulls at the center of his consciousness. Recognizing the impotence of his threats, Lear returns his thoughts to the threat his tears pose to his masculinity and, addressing his daughters cries out,

You think I'll weep;

No, I'll not weep.

I have full cause of weeping, but this heart

Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws

Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!

(2.4.277-81)

Before he weeps, Lear claims, his heart will shatter into fragments. Terrified and profoundly threatened by any further outward display of emotion, Lear appears to understand the impact of such a display on his masculinity, going so far as to suggest he will die before he expresses his sorrow in front of the daughters who have insisted on reminding him of his various losses. Ultimately, though, the king understands that his grief has reached its climax, and such threats are meaningless. All that remains for Lear, a

man whose grief has reached the breaking point, is to go mad and when we hear from the king again, his madness, like the grief that caused it, manifests as a lament.

The first two acts of the play reflect a prolonged concern over the performance of grief, as Lear struggles to contain his emotion while maintaining his sanity. After Lear recognizes that he will go mad, he no longer possesses the ability to control his emotions and just prior to exploding in a flurry of emotion, the stage directions call for “Storm and tempest.” When male characters express their grief in Renaissance drama, it is often through the imagery of the tempest. We saw this in chapter two, in the antiphonal lamentations of Aeneas and Illioneus, who describe their shipwreck and the corresponding woe through the language of the stormy sea. The storm serves as a metonymy of the grief experienced at the sack of Troy, the ships an extension of the male body, and the impact of the winds and waves on the wooden hull functioning as the physical and mental impact of their loss. Following Marlowe’s lead, Shakespeare developed this to great effect in *Titus Andronicus*.<sup>37</sup> Attempting to grapple with the grief caused by the attack on their daughter/niece, Titus and Marcus engage in an extended discussion of lamentation. Remarking on his brother’s increasingly disturbing behavior and language, Marcus cautions Titus, “But yet let reason govern thy lament” (3.1.217). Explaining why he must continue his displays of excessive grief, which at this point have included weeping, exclamations of woe, a ritualistic act of self-flagellation and

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<sup>37</sup> Shakespeare further examined these ideas at the beginning of *The Tempest* in the moments following the shipwreck. In a brief note on Shakespeare’s use of Montaigne’s “Of diverting and diversions,” Gail Kern Paster begins to sketch out some of the implications of masculinity in the play, though her focus ultimately rests on the relationship between the playwright and essayist. See “Montaigne, Dido, and *The Tempest*: ‘How Came that Widow in?’” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.1 (Spring 1984), pgs. 91-94.

discussions of further acts of suffering to sympathetically connect with the losses of his daughter, Titus explains,

If there were reason for these miseries,  
Then into limits could I bind my woes:  
When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?  
If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,  
Threatening the welkin with his big-swollen face?  
And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?

(3.1.218-23)

Recognizing the apparent lack of sense in the tragedies that have suddenly enveloped his family, Titus compares his anguish to the cause and effect of the natural world. Because Lavinia laments, Titus must respond, and like the grief of Aeneas and Illioneus, he sees himself embodied in the tempests that shake the natural world, and continues,

I am the sea; hark how her sighs doth blow!  
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth:  
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,  
Then must my earth with her continual tears  
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned,  
For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,  
But like a drunkard I must vomit them.

(3.1.219-25)

According to Titus, Lavinia's expressions of sorrow impact him in profoundly physical ways. Envisioning himself as the sea and the earth, blown about and soaked by the sighs



and tears of his daughter, Titus admits that he finds it impossible to encompass all of her sorrow and explains that he too must partake in the expressions of grief. Madness hauntingly lingers in these lines, as Titus asks, “If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,” and then claims to be the sea blown about by Lavinia’s sighs. Linking himself to the madness of the raging seas, Titus sets the stage for the feigned madness of the final act of the play that ultimately allows him to fool Demetrius and Chiron to their doom. Though he comes close, Titus does not allow himself to fall into an all-encompassing madness in response to the torture of Lavinia. Instead, he uses his grief to propel him to the acts of vengeance that dominate the final scene of the play.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare returns to this imagery, though he inserts the grieving father within the tempest of the natural world. Leaving his daughters behind, the crazed king exits into the storm and we are provided with the details of his grief inspired madness via a conversation between Kent and a Gentleman. Informing Kent of the king’s whereabouts, the Gentleman describes the scene, revealing that Lear is:

Contending with the fretful elements;  
Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,  
Or swell the curled waters ‘bove the main,  
That things might change or cease; tears his white hair,  
Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage,  
Catch in their fury, and make nothing of;  
Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn  
The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain.

(3.1.4-11)

Not only is the king within the storm that characterizes his grief, but he attempts to control and conduct it. Once again enacting violence on his head, Lear pulls at his hair in an act reminiscent of the lament, though this ultimately proves meaningless, as the storm blows his discarded hair about, but “make[s] nothing of” it. When we finally encounter him in the elements, it is evident that he sees his mental torment reflected within the storm, as he commands, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!” (3.2.1-3). The actions he commands of the natural world are the very things we have witnessed in Lear’s extended emotional expressions. The violence of the weather reflects the violence of the king’s grief and the command for the rain to flood the land echoes Lear’s repeated obsession with his own uncontrollable tears. He then attempts to orchestrate the heavens, demanding, “You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, / Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts / Singe my white head!” (3.2.4-6). By asking lightning to strike his head, the king simultaneously seeks to continue his lamentation and bring an end to the storm of madness and agony of grief that exists therein.

When Kent remarks on the king’s grief, noting, “Of how unnatural and bemadding sorrow / The king hath cause to plain. (3.1.38-39), he situates grief and madness next to each other, a notion that is repeated throughout the remainder of the play. Lear himself makes this connection, once again characterizing the grief of the mind as a type of violence, as he remarks “The tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else / Save what beats there” (3.4.13-15). Later, as he begins to think further on what has occurred with his daughters, he reflects, “Your kind old father, whose frank heart gave all— / O, that way madness lies; let me shun that; / No more of that” (3.4.20-

23). Finally, in the most disturbing of reflections, the king confesses, “I am cut to the brains” (4.6.187). Yet these sentiments are not limited to Lear, as Gloucester, who has experienced a similar loss of a child, tells Kent, “I’ll tell thee, friend, / I am almost mad myself” (3.4.153-54) and “True to tell thee, / The grief hath crazed my wits” (3.4.157-58). Perhaps the best articulation of the connection between the mind, madness, and grief comes from Cordelia, who asks, “What can man’s wisdom / In the restoring his bereaved sense?” (4.4.9-10). Cordelia sees her father as deprived of his senses, but the language she chooses to describe Lear’s mind, with its undertone of death, further emphasizes the play’s interest in depicting the close relationship between grief and madness.

As we have seen throughout this study, grief and the performance of the lament are tied closely to madness. Titus, Hieronimo, and Hamlet all put on various aspects of madness as a way to cope with the intense grief occasioned by the death of a loved one. In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault has shown how at the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy, the image of death, disappeared, giving way to the *Narrenschiff* or Ship of Fools in the Renaissance. Foucault’s claim that madness follows closely on the heels of death prompted Gail Holst-Warhaft to remark, “If Foucault has demonstrated that madness and death can succeed one another, from one age to another, as central preoccupations of western imagination, we should not be surprised that the rituals of death can also be confused with or appear to be identical to the manifestations of madness.”<sup>38</sup> As Holst-Warhaft has noted, the links between the rituals of death and

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<sup>38</sup> See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 27 See also chapter one of Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). The suggested connection between the lamenting women and possession also has interesting implications for *King Lear*, as Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out in his chapter “Shakespeare

madness have significant implications for the lamenting woman, as she argues, “The witch and the shaman, the medium and the wailing woman are all seen, at some historical moment or in some particular culture, as being possessed by dangerous powers, but the lamenter, in her ritual dialogue with death, may be viewed as linking madness to death in a unique equivalence”<sup>39</sup> In her work on Irish folk laments, or the *caoineadh*, Angela Bourke has remarked on the extent to which the appearance of the lamenting woman takes on that of the madman, a description that sounds eerily similarly to what we witness in *King Lear*: “she loosens her hair or tears her clothing, baring her breast. In her self-presentation she acts out the disorder brought about by death, and her journey takes her not along roads but across country, through wild nature. She does not notice the stones and briars that cut her feet.”<sup>40</sup> As Bourke goes on to argue, the cloak of “madness” worn by the lamenter serves as a type of protective disguise, thereby allowing the mourner to express her grief without consequences.

The connection between the lamenting woman and the madman is most obvious in the character of Lear, though the disguised Edgar also participates in and demonstrates this connection. Reeling from sudden loss of family, title, and societal role, Edgar finds himself in a liminal state, much like that of the lamenting woman. His subsequent decision to put on the disguise of Poor Tom is a provocative development, especially when one considers his description of assuming the new identity. Explaining he will “take the basest and most poorest shape / That ever penury, in contempt of man, /

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and the Exorcists” in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), pgs. 94-128.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> See Angela Bourke, “More in Anger than in Sorrow” pg. 165. As Bourke notes, the word *caoineadh* is the origin for the English word “keening.”

Brought near to beast” (2.3.7-9), Edgar disguises himself as a madman, and provides a detailed account of his appearance:

My face I'll grime with filth,  
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,  
And with presented nakedness out-face  
The winds and persecutions of the sky.  
The country gives me proof and precedent  
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices  
Strike in their numbed and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;

(2.3.9-16)

Edgar not only recognizes his sudden marginal position, but he seeks to exploit it, to use it as a cloak. Tellingly, many of the physical manifestations of the lament are present in his narrative, but the decision to mortify his flesh is the most provocative. As we have seen throughout this study, the self-flagellation that is a part of lamentations is a deeply troubling aspect of the performance. Not only does the physical violence enacted on the lamenter's body bring them into closer relationship with death and the deceased, but the physical display operates as a visible reminder to both the lamenter and those who watch the performance that something or someone has been lost. While it appears in a number of ways in the earlier plays, such as the self-inflicted violence of remembering in *Hamlet*, we have seen it repeatedly in *Lear*, as the king strikes at his head and pulls out his hair, even asking for the heavens to join in on his act. The play returns over and over to imagery involving piercing and other acts of self-imposed violence, and when Lear

encounters the disguised Edgar in the hovel, he immediately understands the traces of self-flagellation on Poor Tom as sharing in his experience. Seeing his relationship with his daughters made manifest on the naked and abused body of Poor Tom, Lear inquires after the madman's children. When Kent attempts to correct the king, Lear lashes out, exclaiming,

“Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature  
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.  
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers  
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?  
Judicious punishment! ‘t was this flesh begot  
Those pelican daughters.

(3.4.67-72)

In his distressed mental state, Lear sees the very thing that has caused him to go mad, as well as the lament in the figure of the lacerated Poor Tom. Though Edgar has described his appearance as that of the “Bedlam beggars,” Lear recognizes it as the grief-filled response of a man betrayed by his daughters. For Lear, the act of mortification serves as a type of ritual self-flagellation, wherein the body which gave the ungrateful daughters life is punished and reminded of everything that has been lost. Indeed, Lear becomes so wrapped up in this vision of the grieving father that he eventually tears off his own clothes after crying out, “Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies” (3.4.94-95), and once again Lear's thoughts turn to death, his actions continuing to partake in the tradition of the lamentation.

As scholars of the lament repeatedly note, the performance of such an intense outpouring of grief, one that is by its very nature disruptive, challenges virtually every aspect of society. In her discussion of the lament and madness, Holst-Warhaft powerfully articulates the effect of death and mourning on the society within which it occurs:

The self-mutilation which is a common feature of mourning in numerous cultures, the obvious connection with possession in the mourner's dialogue with the dead, and the inversion of common male/female roles in ritual mourning all contribute to the perception of lamenting women as both mad and dangerous. In the carnival-like atmosphere induced by death, the world is turned upside-down. Social organization is temporarily disrupted and new relationships must be formed so that the fabric of society can be re-knit.<sup>41</sup>

Shakespeare clearly understood the role death and loss played in bringing about a "carnival-like atmosphere" where the social fabric is temporarily torn. After Lear has lost Cordelia and Kent in rash acts of banishment, Gloucester remarks on how "Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father" (1.2.99-101). In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare would return to this notion following the murder of Duncan, when Lennox notes "The night has been unruly. Where we lay / Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say, / Lamentings heard i'th' air, strange screams of death," (2.3.50-52). In *Lear*, this type of disorder pervades the entire play, as children hold authority over their fathers, servants rebel against their masters, and the laments of kings and madmen are

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<sup>41</sup> See Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, pg. 28.

indistinguishable. The extent of this disorder is made evident in the final appearance of Lear. Bearing his beloved daughter in his arms, he laments over her corpse, crying, “Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones: / Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so / That heaven’s vault should crack. She’s gone forever” (5.3.256-58).

Despite this long exclamation of anguish and its assertion that Cordelia is gone, Lear lingers over her body, causing all who watch his performance to linger in a purgatory-like state. Reflecting all of the fears of the Protestant reformers, Lear’s lament does not allow for closure and the distinction between life and death is blurred, as the king hopes that his daughter may yet draw breath.

In his last speech, the aged king’s grief is characterized by the disorder that has plagued his thoughts throughout the play. Turning to Cordelia’s body, he exclaims, “And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no life!” (5.3.304). Once again recognizing that his daughter is dead, Lear expresses anger at the apparent injustice of it all, demanding to know “Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more, / Never, never, never, never, never! (5.3.304-07). The finality of the repetition of the word “never” suggests that Lear has come to terms with his intense loss, but his final words contradict the conclusiveness with which he just spoke, as he exclaims, “Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!” (5.3.309-10). In his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton explains that the emotion of grief can cause death from “the gathering of much melancholy blood about the heart, which collection extinguisheth the good spirits, or at least dulleth them, sorrow strikes the heart, makes it tremble and



pine away, with great pain.”<sup>42</sup> While this may very well be what Shakespeare had in mind when he constructed Lear’s death, what is striking about the king’s final moments is the disorder that characterizes his language. Fluctuating between believing Cordelia dead and alive, the spectacle of Lear’s grief perpetuates a disorder that only ends at the moment of his death. As Lear dies, Kent cries out in words reminiscent of those spoken by the late king, exclaiming, “Break, heart; I prithee, break!” (5.3.311), but it is clear that the topsy-turvy world inhabited by lamenting Lear is no more. Indeed, though the play ends by focusing on grief, with Albany’s claim that “Our present business / Is general woe” followed shortly thereafter by Edgar’s “The weight of this sad time we must obey; / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (5.3.317-18, 322-23), it is clear that their grief will not persist in the disorder characterized by Lear’s madness. The rhyming couplet with which the play ends affirms a sense of order and restoration, as Edgar notes, “The oldest hath borne most; we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long” (5.3.324-25). Noting the distinction between youth and old age, Edgar reflects an awareness of the grief attendant upon aging, something he witnessed in his interactions with both his father and the king. And as much as his final words serve as a calm statement of fact meant to reestablish order after the tempest of Lear’s madness, it also lingers like a wish to not have to endure old age and the lamentable stage of Saturn.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare revised the masculine lament in a number of significant ways. Instead of allowing Lear an appropriate end for his grief, like the vengeance sought and achieved by Titus and Hamlet, sorrow weighs upon his mind, building in intensity until it erupts in madness. Though Lear’s lament is, in essence,

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<sup>42</sup> See Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, pg. 258.

ineffectual, the play nevertheless represents, perhaps more than any other considered in this study, the playwright's mind at work on issues regarding masculinity, the mind, and grief. Conveying Renaissance understandings of the aging male mind and body, Shakespeare shows how Lear's age renders him susceptible to grief-filled reflections on his own mortality as well as changes in his humoral composition. These transformations ultimately leave him in a state prone to excessive emotional outbursts, something we witness at the onset of the play during the ill-conceived love test. Once Lear is subjected to the cruel treatment of Goneril and Regan, prompting him to fully conceive of what he has lost, the king descends into a grief-inspired madness that partakes in the tradition of the lament, thus revealing a belief regarding the inevitability of such reactions as one dwells upon and nears the end his life. In his essay on the play, William Hazlitt struggled to articulate what one experiences when reading *King Lear*, noting that "The mind of Lear, staggering between the weight of attachment and the hurried movements of passion, is like a tall ship driven about by the winds, buffeted by the furious waves, but that still rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea; or it is like the sharp rock circled by the eddying whirlpool that foams and beats against it."<sup>43</sup> Much like Shakespeare's description of the grief of the mad king, Hazlitt's essay, with its consideration of the mind of Lear, utilizes the very same imagery employed by Renaissance playwrights to convey the intensity of masculine grief. There is perhaps no better testament to Shakespeare's success in rendering the effect of excessive grief on the mind of man.

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<sup>43</sup> See William Hazlitt, from *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in *King Lear: Critical Essays*, ed. Kenneth Muir. (New York and London: Garland, 1984), pg. 13.

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